World Council of Churches

Communiqué of the Ecumenical Berlin Conference 2025

"Berlin 1884 – 1885 and Anti-Black Racism: In Search of a Shared Anti-Racism Ecumenical Vision"

Preamble

We, the participants representing various member churches and ecumenical bodies with people from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, and North America gathered in Berlin, Germany, from 17-21 May 2025 to 'remember' what happened at the gathering of 13 European states and kingdoms, and the United States of America from 16 November 1884 until 26 February 1885. In this meeting, 140 years ago, these states and kingdoms, divided African lands and peoples among themselves, in what is now popularly known as the "Scramble for Africa." Artificial boundaries were created by these powers dividing Africa into different territories under European control, separating communities and families into citizens of these different colonies under different powers and making them foreigners to each other. African peoples became strangers in their own ancestral lands while African resources were extracted for the development of industrialized economies around the world. Cultural, epistemological, spiritual domination accompanied the colonization of Africa and Africans and smooth relations among these powers were enabled by the outcomes of the Berlin conference.

In this, the ecumenical year 2025, and in the spirit of the pilgrimage for justice, reconciliation, and unity, we gathered to re-member the past, re-appraise the present, and re-imagine the future collectively, as children of God. Meeting as Christians, we celebrated the power of the Gospel that unequivocally speaks to our equality and our membership to the One Body of Christ! We gathered as descendants of the multi-layered history of evangelization, which was presented through the agency of our ancestors who connected with the Christian faith from the early centuries, or the agency of European and North American missionaries, as well as, indigenous propagators of the Gospel whose immense contributions have often been relegated to footnotes if not totally erased! We gathered at a time when the story of Christianity continues to show stagnation and regression of Christianity in Europe, while Christianity continues to see dramatic growth in Africa and Latin America, the two continents that have the largest concentration of Black people globally.

As we gathered in Berlin, in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Hotel, we also remembered that 80 years ago, a dishonorable and heinous political system and organization murdered a young pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer whose strong faith in Christ had made him to recognize the injustice and evil of his time and act against it to ensure that it did not succeed in its sinful plans. We were inspired by the prophetic witness of Bonhoeffer that inspires us and empowers our faith. We are aware of the challenges of our time, and we affirm Bonhoeffer's call and proclamation on "costly discipleship", we stand for love, equality, equity, justice, and fairness in all aspects of our lives and this will not be easy nor cheap in a world that is increasingly promoting hatred and seemingly in the midst of a new arms race.

Remembering the Past

Over three days of critical and dialogical conversations, we have remembered that:

1. Driven by economic interests, a false sense of superiority, and greed of the time, unjust and dishonorable European powers and the United States of America, including other industrialized states in other parts of the world, decided to engage in a selfish and self-serving managed theft and extraction of lands, natural resources, raw materials, and labor for their industries, as well as the exploitation of peoples of the global South.

2. Racism[1] or the 'racial logic' in which Europeans were considered superior to all other peoples informed and justified the enslavement of Indigenous Peoples, Africans, People of African Descent and Asians by both European and Middle Eastern powers. This horrifying, unscientific, and illogical 'racial logic' equally informed and justified the capture, trafficking, and enslavement of African peoples from Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as the colonial[2] and imperial projects of Europe that displaced and dispossessed Africans and was central to the European "scramble for Africa", for which the Berlin Conference sought to sanitize and legitimize without the consent of Africans. We understand that the chattel enslavement of African people and exiling them from their ancestral lands was the first step in European domination of Africa with the Berlin conference sanitizing the second step, that of, colonization hence Africans and People of African Descent[3].

[1] We are using racism in this Communiqué not only to refer to racism but also to refer to xenophobia, in particular Afrophobia, casteism, and discrimination on work and descent. There are instances where these forms of discrimination are explicitly mentioned, and where racism is mentioned and they are not, they are all implied and can be substituted in accordingly. By racism we also acknowledge that centuries of being racially discriminated has created an attitude of self-negation and self-hatred among Africans, People of African Descent, and generally all Black people globally.

[2] Colonial is taken from colonization, which is used to refer to the process and/or action of settling among a community and establishing domination and control over such indigenous community. European colonization in the 18th through the 20th centuries was informed by racism and in turn it legitimized racism.

[3] African is used to refer to persons who belong to a specific post-colonial State on the continent or its surrounding Islands. This includes individuals who might be living outside of their country but who maintain connections with their homeland. People of African Descent is used to refer to persons who are citizens of a country that is not on the African continent but who are descendants of African peoples who were removed from

3. While not actively engaged with the discussions in Berlin in 1884-1885, Christian missionaries and mission agencies were afforded special mention, as strategic colonial instruments by the imperial powers gathered in Berlin, seen in clause 6 of the General Act of the Berlin Conference. Some traditional Christian teachings and Bible texts and interpretations were instrumentalized/weaponized within the context of a racially prejudiced European colonization of the "New World."

4. We acknowledge that most of sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas became Christian due to the actions of European and non-European (North American) missionaries, many of whom started the quest for Manifest Destiny, evangelization of the world before European imperialism. In many places, evangelization preceded colonization and, in some places, strong relationships between missionary sending agencies and local communities have survived. However, in many other instances, missionaries exhibited the qualities of being people of their time, exhibiting serious racial prejudices against the so-called "heathens" or "pagans" embracing inequalities and dehumanizing practices against these communities.

5. There were always indigenous, racialized, and colonized peoples who resisted colonial efforts, people who exercised their agency to resist colonization opting to defend and uphold their independence and freedom. Most of these courageous ancestors were brutally murdered by the colonial forces and systems, and their collective memory was deliberately silenced. In many instances, Christian missionaries focused on converting these ancestors on unjust death-rows instead of seeking justice for them due to the influences of White and Christian supremacist ideologies they espoused.

6. Some European missionaries, despite being considered instruments of the colonial system, were appalled by the degree of inhumane exploitation visited upon colonized peoples and inspired by the gospel truth about the equality of all human beings according to God's design leading them to contribute to the raising of consciousness and resistance among the colonized.

Re-appraising the Present

Over three days of robust discussions and sharing of lived experiences from the different regions represented, we re-appraised the present as follows:

7. More than a century after the Berlin conference, Christianity continues to grow in Africa with many African Christians and Latin America continuing to acknowledge Christianity as God's blessing to the continents. Africa and Latin America remain the continents with the largest concentration of Africans and People of African Descent, suggesting the growth of Christianity in these places is directly linked to Africans and People of African Descent embracing the faith.

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the continent (most of them unwillingly) and are found in the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East. Finally, Black People is used in this communiqué to reference all persons with a higher concentration of melanin found all around the world, some of whom have no recollection of if or how their ancestors left Africa.

8. More than a century since the Berlin conference, its legacies continue to manifest around the world, more so in Africa and among Africans, People of African Descent, and Black people who continue to carry a disproportionate burden of racism, both inter-personal and systemic. Systemic racism continues to create unfavourable conditions for the thriving of Africans, People of African Descent, and Black people, especially Black women and children who are among the most vulnerable to economic inequalities; violent conflicts often fueled by external forces; disease, water and food insecurity; and climate-induced emergencies and disasters.

9. Alongside anti-black racism, we acknowledge that racism, casteism, xenophobia, Afrophobia, toxic anti-migrant nationalisms continue to impact the lived experiences of Africans, People of African Descent, Asians, Black people, People of Asian Descent, Dalits, Haratines, Indigenous Peoples, Quilombolas, Roma People, and many other peoples discriminated on account of ethnicity, work, and descent. We have listened with heavy and bleeding hearts to the discrimination suffered by these communities due to ingrained/systemic prejudices inherent in some of us.

10. Our world is suffering from many fault lines, not least, racial and gender, but there are also the insidious expressions of them all experiencing classism and its intersections. Classism often divides people into workers and rulers and exploits workers irrespective of ethnic or other diversities. However, we acknowledge that the majority (workers) are also fragmented on the basis of racial identities, gender, culture, and religious diversities.
11. The existing asymmetries have not erased the agency of the oppressed, we are emboldened by the acts of resistance by oppressed and racially discriminated communities and deep solidarity allies that offer us hope in the unyielding power of the Gospel and our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity.

12. The climate emergency which is supposed to be affecting all peoples of this planet has consistently exposed the victims of enslavement, colonization, and economic exploitation more than it has exposed the communities that have contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions that have led us to this climate emergency. The responses by the states that have offended nature the most, have betrayed a racially prejudiced commitment without action.

13. Some approaches to mission and development continue to follow the enslavement and colonial asymmetries, perpetuating the white savior syndrome in ecumenical circles. Attempts at localization, decolonization, and/or partnerships have often appeared more as tokenism than a radical reconceptualization of relationships.

14. There are multiple and often layered narratives and experiences of colonization and evangelization among Christians on the African continent and between Christians in

Africa, the Americas, Caribbean, and Europe ranging from very positive to very negative experiences.

15. Strained relations among Christians due to the legacies of centuries of enslavement and colonization remain. We acknowledge the positive shifts that are happening in the ecumenical movement, where some churches and mission agencies are beginning to own the historic harms of the past and taking steps to redress such harms despite geo-political shifts to the contrary. We, however, bemoan the approaches that are not always informed by the principles of justice, equity, and inclusion.

16. There are also states that are beginning to own the legacies of the past and are actively seeking to mitigate these legacies through bilateral engagements with former colonies and descendants of enslaved peoples. We applaud steps taken and bemoan the lack of intentional inclusion of the grassroots and descendants who remain excluded from the table.

17. In solidarity with the New International Financial Economic Architecture (NIFEA) we understand today's inequalities between states to be steeped in unjust financial and economic systems, that are neither moral nor just. Many states are drowning under the burden of colonial and inherited debts.

18. The United Nations continues to provide critical platforms for engaging with other actors in the quest to overcome racism, xenophobia, Afrophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination. We, however, bemoan the continuing threats to the survival of global multi-lateral organizations and the real threat to human rights and human dignity globally.

Re-imagining the Future

Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, we had moments of deep solidarity that allowed us to collectively re-imagine the future of God's creation, the people of God, and of the ecumenical movement. Our re-imaginations invited us to affirm the following:

19. All of creation is by and for God, the Almighty (Genesis 1). We affirm the right to life of every member of creation. The drive towards industrialization and the use of fossil fuels in the industrial expansion driven by states of the global north and other industrialized states has been the single most contribution of humanity to the threat to life of creation on this planet. Our collective future demands remedial actions that will restore the health of God's creation. A healthy and life-giving climate is possible and desirable.

20. The combined effects of the enslavement and colonization of Africans and other peoples around the world has created economic inequalities between states and churches. We are horrified by the cases of systemic poverty, systemic exposure to climate emergencies, systemic challenges in the access to and quality of health care, water and nutritious food for Africans, People of African Descent, Black people, and all other former colonized and racialized peoples. We are aware of how these inequalities have been gendered, exposing

racialized women, especially African women, Women of African Descent, and Black women to disproportionate burdens.

21. There are thriving indigenous theologies, approaches to mission, and Bible readings in non-Euro-North American contexts. These valid insights remain underutilized in most Euro-North American contexts where dominant approaches to theology, mission, and Bible reading have often privileged Western epistemologies and in the process have entrenched and perpetuated systemic racism in our churches and in wider society. We confess collectively for the historic and continuing failures of churches to uphold the equality of all people of God and for undermining the contributions of majority world theologians, missiologists, biblical scholars, and indigenous knowledge systems.

22. Decolonization of churches, ecumenical bodies, mission agencies, specialized ministries, and states' systems and structures is an urgent need to resist and eliminate legacies of colonization, enslavement, and systemic racism. Decolonization is used to refer to the process of undoing, dismantling, unlearning of colonial systems, structures, epistemologies, and cultures leading to the reclamation of and construction of new systems that will replace colonial systems and structures.

23. The continuing growth of extractive economies, the increased investments in militarization by states globally, the gains made by the fourth industrial revolution, especially under Artificial Intelligence have the effect of increasing anxieties and insecurities among racialized peoples who are aware of how these are already showing signs of being racially prejudiced.

24. Africans, People of African Descent, and Black people in general continue to be exposed to systemic racism in the western criminal legal systems (as opposed to criminal justice systems) with these communities consistently being over-represented in prisons and become disproportionately high victims of law enforcement agencies' brutality globally.

25. The epistemological privileging of western secular and Christian education continue to determine outcomes of racialized communities. Education continues to be a vehicle for sustaining and entrenching racism, xenophobia, and Afrophobia where imageries, modes of transmission of knowledge, sources of knowledge, and identities of legitimate knowledge producers continue to privilege western systems and structures.

26. Increased nationalistic campaigns including enforcement of racially discriminatory border protection and visa requirements continue to undermine the dignity of marginalized communities and stifle the economic agency of racialized nations. The waiting time and costs assigned for the processing of visas are often discriminatory, marginalizing some countries, and, in the process, prohibiting participation of those nationals in global events. The lack of direct access between African nations and Africans in diaspora nations prioritizes exclusion over collaboration, furthers otherness and a lack of empathy and cooperation between these parties. Enforced transit through developed countries, with

attendant fees and visa requirements, is also prohibitive. Therefore, the conference calls for mechanisms that underscore dignity, agency and transnational solidarity, instead of current exclusivist, and triangulated transport systems.

27. The exploitation of Africans and People of African Descent, Black peoples, and all other colonized and enslaved peoples, was driven by economic interests and greed and produced economic inequalities. There is an urgent need to repair the historic and continuing harms suffered by Africans, People of African Descent, Black peoples, and all other exploited and racialized peoples, through collectively conceptualized acts of reparations by both churches and states.

Calls to Action for Christian Entities and all People of goodwill

We, as Christians gathered here in Berlin, therefore make the following calls to churches, mission agencies, specialized ministries, ecumenical bodies, and all people of goodwill.

We call upon churches, ecumenical bodies, mission agencies, specialized ministries, theological institutions, and all people of goodwill to;

28. Re-commit or commit to the fundamental conviction of 1975 (from the World Council of Churches (WCC) fifth assembly in Nairobi, Kenya), that "racism is a sin against God and against fellow human beings" and to live this commitment in their activities and structures, including by increasing investments into racial justice work.

29. Promote an anti-racism consciousness in their communities and to consistently and intentionally apply a racial justice lens to review their education, programmes, partnerships, fundraising, communications, especially visuals, and hiring policies.

30. Introduce a racial justice, equity, and inclusion peer review mechanism to hold each other accountable as siblings in/of Christ committed to overcoming racism, xenophobia, Afrophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination. This must be accompanied by mandatory racial justice, equity, and inclusion courses for staff and governing bodies.

31. Speak out against the extractive economies characterized by greed, racism, gender injustice, but most importantly by class exploitation where most of the global population are collectively exploited for the benefit of a minority of the global population. Where necessary, ecumenical actors are called upon to continue thinking about and interrogating their investment partners.

32. Commit to anti-racism and advocates and practitioners of racial justice, equity, and inclusion by carrying out racial justice, equity, and inclusion audits of their systems, structures, and policies, as a first step.

33. Continue rethinking and reappraising the unfinished work of decolonizing mission led by so many of the decolonial movements of the 20th century, to address the distortion to

mission practice through colonial mindsets like Christian nationalisms and White supremacism.

34. Make restitution and reparation by providing trauma transformation that enhances remembering and inclusion of the vulnerable – as defined by racialized peoples – in leadership spaces and decision-making.

35. Address legacies of enslavement and colonization and with the wider global mission movement articulate mission practice which repents, repairs, and recreates relationships and systems steeped in the sins of racism and colonialism to those based on justice, equity, and inclusion.

36. Embrace prophetic theology and prophetic action in the context of disturbing and horrifying instances of injustice and discrimination, often legitimized and promoted by misleading, distorting and distorted theologies, by speaking truth to power and acting truthfully to confront and dismantle unjust systems and misleading theologies.

Calls to Action for Governments and States

We call upon churches, ecumenical bodies, mission agencies, specialized ministries, and all people of goodwill to urge their governments, states, including multi-national corporations to;

37. Implement and enforce all international conventions on overcoming racism that they have signed up to, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and where necessary criminalize racism and racial discrimination and to actively enforce such legislations where they already exist, including revisiting the laws and policies governing the treatment of migrants.

38. Formally acknowledge that enslavement and colonization were and are crimes against humanity that have contributed to the existing power and economic asymmetries in the world today.

39. Embrace the principle and practice of reparatory justice to make right the historic and continuing harms committed and being committed against racialized communities, ranging from economic, epistemological, to climate exploitation, as well as profiteering and cultural and identity theft and erasure.

40. Foster stronger decolonial cross-border sibling relationships among African and African-descent states, governments, people and goods, moving beyond the colonial set borders in line with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063, as well as the Free Movement of Persons Treaty. We applaud the strengthening of relations between Africa, the Caribbean, and Pacific states (OACPS).