

From Debrecen to Accra

The Alliance between the
23rd and 24th general councils

From Debrecen to Accra

1. Break the chains of injustice, so that all may have life in fullness! The themes of our 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) and our 24th general council (Accra 2004) are intimately related, and rooted in the gospel of grace and gratitude to which we owe our life as Christian churches. For it is God who comes in Jesus Christ to our unjust world, offering fullness of life. It is within the framework of these two themes that we review the work of the Alliance from Debrecen to Accra.
2. The world at the beginning of the third millennium presents even greater challenges than when we met in council in 1997. The collapse of the Doha “development round” in the failure at Cancún reveals a world economy still run in the interest of the rich rather than the interests of all.¹ Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere show us global power relations frighteningly out of control. HIV/Aids scythes through Africa. Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam: in many places religion is abused in the service of destructive politics, and in the birthplace of Jesus, the children still bleed.
3. Alliance churches root our engagement with this fallen world in faith and spirituality. Like Augustine, we know our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. We celebrate the rich variety of our worship. In a world where many have nothing to eat, we hunger and thirst for justice. In a deeply materialistic and often secularized world, we recall that one does not live by bread alone. We seek ways to witness to the gospel – “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” – that are faithful to the tradition we have received and respect those who differ from us.

Together in God's mission

4. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you..." (Jn 20.21): mission is the first commandment laid upon us and, in a sense, the name for all that we do as church. We are grateful for the new ways in which our church family is being called to mission, and we begin this report on the years from Debrecen to Accra with what the Alliance has done in (1) mission renewal, (2) mission in unity and (3) interchurch solidarity for the sake of mission.

Mission in our Alliance churches

5. In the three years following Debrecen, the executive committee sought a focus on mission "that will produce fresh missiological thinking and energy in response to the new contexts in which Reformed churches find themselves at the beginning of the 21st century". In 2000, it initiated a study on the current practice and understanding of mission within the Alliance family. The study, which is not yet complete, has paid attention to "the lived missiology of the people of God in the contemporary world", the emerging challenges to mission identified by our churches in their regions and the Alliance family as a whole, the insights gained from the mission in unity project (see below, §§9-20), and recent developments in academic and ecumenical missiology. The ultimate goal, according to the executive committee, is "not just a statement on mission but the renewal of our churches for a fresh understanding and engagement in mission".
6. Five regional consultations took place in São Paulo (Brazil), Beirut (Lebanon), Yaoundé (Cameroon), Bali (Indonesia) and Georgetown (Guyana) between June 2002 and December 2003 with the financial assistance of mission communities and agencies related to the Reformed family. These consultations sought to learn from what is happening in mission in the Alliance family, and to promote mission renewal through historical analysis, Bible study and interregional encounter. As proposed by the planning group that met in Geneva in July 2001, they also focused on the mission implications of the Debrecen call to all member churches to recognize, educate and take faith stands on economic injustice and environmental destruction, and addressed such contemporary mission concerns as interreligious solidarity, mission in unity within the Reformed family and women in mission and missiology.
7. Originally a programme of the department of theology, the mission study became an interdepartmental programme, lodged in the theology department for purposes of reporting. Each of the regional consultations mentioned above was organized by the executive secretary in charge of relations with that region.

8. The results of this first step towards an Alliance contribution to mission renewal within our fellowship were studied, discussed, interpreted, summarized and reflected upon in a meeting held in Geneva in January 2004. A report was published in *Reformed World* in March 2004. It will be submitted to the general council in a plenary session.

Mission in unity

9. In 1999, the Alliance and the John Knox International Reformed Centre, Geneva, set up a joint project on mission in unity – initially for three years, but later extended until 2005. The project sprang from longstanding concerns in both bodies about Reformed witness and Reformed disunity. Division and individualism in Reformed churches directly contradict the vision of the one body of Christ, where each part finds its purpose and is energized for mission only in relation to the other parts (1 Cor 12.12-26; Eph 4.1-16).
10. Already in the 1980s, the Alliance recognized that a new world order and new mission challenges in all six continents demanded a rethink of what it meant to be “called to witness to the gospel today”.² We also noted that, while the Alliance and our churches were actively working for unity in the wider *oikoumene*, there were deep internal divisions in the Reformed family that negatively affected our witness.³ Debrecen therefore committed the Alliance to programmatic action on mission in unity.
11. The aim of the project, as reformulated in 2001, is to assist the witness of Reformed churches as they a) respond to contemporary mission and missiological challenges, including life-oriented initiatives in situations marked by economic, social, political, cultural or religious conflict, b) seek to overcome their historical divisions and c) move forward in common witness. It is a small and modest project, serving as a challenge and catalyst by raising questions, bringing people together and offering a helping hand in the churches’ search for new expressions of mission in unity.

Communicating the vision

12. The Reformed family tends to take its disunity for granted, overlooking the missiological and ecclesiological questions this raises. The project has therefore made strenuous efforts to communicate the vision of mission in unity. Articles in *Reformed World* and elsewhere spelled out the intentions and foci of the project. Meetings with churches, theological colleges, international mission organizations and ecumenical networks allowed these to be explored in more depth. *Occasional Info* news-sheets described developments in different contexts. The Johannes a Lasco Library in Emden, Germany, published *The Reformed Family Worldwide* on its Reformed online website in 2001 and is updating the information. Case studies of unity,

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reconciliation and cooperation in different countries are developed as testimonies and learning tools for use within the Reformed family.

13. The project's primary language is English, but some materials have also appeared in French, German, and Spanish. In 2003, a French reader, *Mission dans l'unité: une invitation aux Églises réformées*, made some of the early mission in unity documents available to francophone churches.

Enabling country initiatives

14. The project's main thrust has been mission in unity initiatives in particular countries – Angola, Korea, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and the Ukraine and Belarus – and in Southern Africa. Project committee members have also shared the mission in unity ethos with Reformed Christians in Bolivia and taken part in roundtables in Mozambique. Common to all initiatives is the churches' desire to move beyond past divisions and find concrete ways of working together in mission. In line with the recommendation of the 22nd general council (Seoul 1989), most initiatives have included churches that do not belong to the Alliance.

Study and networking

15. Debrecen asked for study materials to help Alliance churches to “understand the role of theological schools as a uniting or dividing force in churches, and identify ways for Reformed seminaries and schools to promote unity”. In 2000, the booklet *Keeping the Unity of the Spirit through the Bond of Peace* invited theological staff and students to describe how, in their context, the nature, purpose, unity and mission of the church is understood theologically and lived out practically. A working group is developing ways to challenge theological schools to nurture church leaders committed to cooperation between the different parts of the one body of Christ.
16. A second study focuses on cooperation between mainline churches and immigrant churches in the northern hemisphere. The presence in the north of large numbers of new immigrants, among them many Christians, poses missiological and ecclesiological challenges to the historic churches. How do we understand mission, church and partnership in this new demographic situation? How do we find our identity in interaction with those who are different from us? The mission in unity project has stimulated case studies in Italy, the Netherlands and the United States to explore these questions. It has also encouraged Korean Churches Together in Europe, a movement which aims at closer cooperation between Korean congregations, other ethnic minority churches and the mainline churches in Europe.
17. A third focus is the role of mission boards and international organizations. These agencies can unwittingly maintain a status quo of division by

supporting projects in individual churches or (even where they foster mission in unity in their partner churches) by operating in isolation from one another. In 1992, representatives of various organizations called for a “new discipline of mission”, a set of commitments echoed in 1998 in the John Knox Centre consultation that proposed the mission in unity project.⁴ The project has sought to further this “discipline” as mission boards and agencies restructure the many intersecting circles of witness, support and solidarity. One example is the mission in unity contribution to the Alliance’s team visit to Angola in 2002 and the follow-up.

18. As a catalyst, the project can work effectively only by involving many actors in the different countries and focus areas. Developing a mission in unity network for action, support and cross-fertilization has been an integral part of all programmes.

A fascinating journey

19. The Reformed family is by nature diverse; our variety of confessions, theologies, church orders, liturgies and mission practices is understood not as aberration but as affirmation of the movement of the Spirit in all God’s people. The mission in unity project’s country initiatives and studies show just how contextually individuals and churches in the Reformed family understand and give shape to their Reformed heritage, but also pose sharply the question of unity in our diversity.
20. Identity is at the heart of the question. Does our identity open us to others in our Reformed family, or does it turn us in upon ourselves, confining us to a particular and therefore partial appropriation of our common heritage? Searching for new expressions of mission in unity, whether between six Reformed churches in Sudan or between mainline and immigrant churches in the Netherlands, means finding the courage to let go of something of oneself, accept something from the other and together grow into a larger identity. It is this open Reformed identity that, in modest ways, the mission in unity project has sought to encourage between Debrecen and Accra.

Partnership in mission through the Reformed churches partnership fund

21. The partnership fund is an important aspect of our commitment to mission. It is rooted in the understanding of the Alliance as a fellowship of interdependent churches: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6.2). Its name reflects the ecumenical principle of resource-sharing: “working towards self-reliance and self-determination; committing ourselves to a common discipline of sharing among God’s people; participating in the decision-making process between north and south; and promoting through words and deeds the holistic mission of the church” (“Guidelines for sharing”, El Escorial, Spain, 1987).

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It is a people-centred fund, giving preference to human resource development.

22. The partnership fund was created at the 22nd general council (Seoul 1989). In 1990, after the collapse of communism throughout central and eastern Europe, the executive committee launched a separate fund to help churches in that region strengthen and rebuild their life. In 1997, Debrecen approved the merger of the two funds, so that the partnership fund now serves the four-fifths of our churches that are located in the southern hemisphere and in central, eastern and southern Europe. Half of these churches are not members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), mostly because they are too small to be eligible, and have no access to its interchurch aid programmes.

Donors

23. Churches, parishes and individuals in our worldwide fellowship support the partnership fund. The Church of Lippe, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, and the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Bavaria and Northwest Germany are significant contributors. Since 1990, the *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP), a Geneva-based foundation created to help Protestant churches in their ministry and diaconal work, has approved requests from the partnership fund. The Churches Development Service (KED) of the Evangelical Church in Germany contributed to the fund from its beginning, and this continued after 2000 when the service was incorporated within the Church Development Service – Association of the Protestant Churches in Germany, or *Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst* (EED); its giving is earmarked for development projects.

Criteria

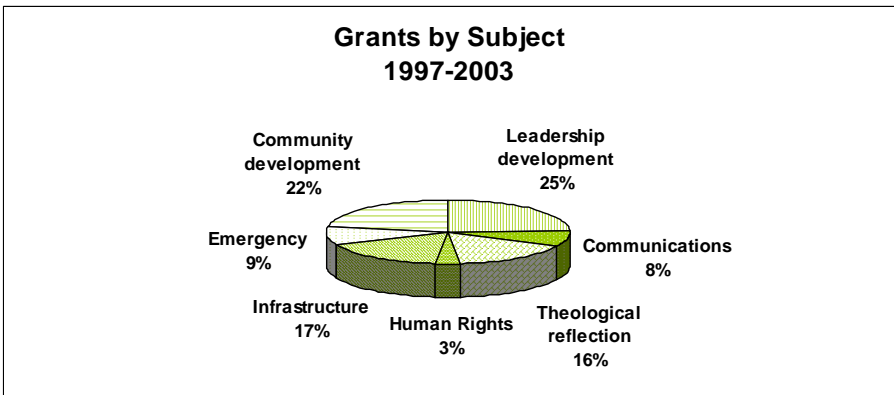
24. In 1999 the criteria were widened to include Alliance area councils and events in the southern hemisphere, member churches in southern Europe, which are minority churches, and emergency appeals. Revised leaflets set out the criteria in English, French, German and Spanish.

Emergency subfund

25. In view of an increase in requests for emergency support, the partnership fund committee set aside CHF100,000 in 2000 in a subfund to support churches overtaken by natural disasters or political conflict; this fund is replenished annually. The fund makes emergency grants of CHF5,000 to help churches respond rapidly. This is neither a substitute for, nor in competition with, other ecumenical funds for relief work.

Some statistics

26. From 1997 to 2003, the fund disbursed CHF3,065,240. It made grants to 76 member churches: 25 in Africa, 24 in Asia, 3 in the Caribbean, 11 in eastern and southern Europe, 10 in Latin America and 3 in the Pacific. It also supported six regional events in Africa, three in Asia, three in Europe, and four in Latin America. In all, the fund supported 197 projects and programmes in 49 countries. When the fund has been unable to help it has connected applicants to other ecumenical partners, such as the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLoF), *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World, Germany), *Überseische Kollegienhilfe* (Overseas Pastoral Solidarity, Switzerland), or various Bible Societies.



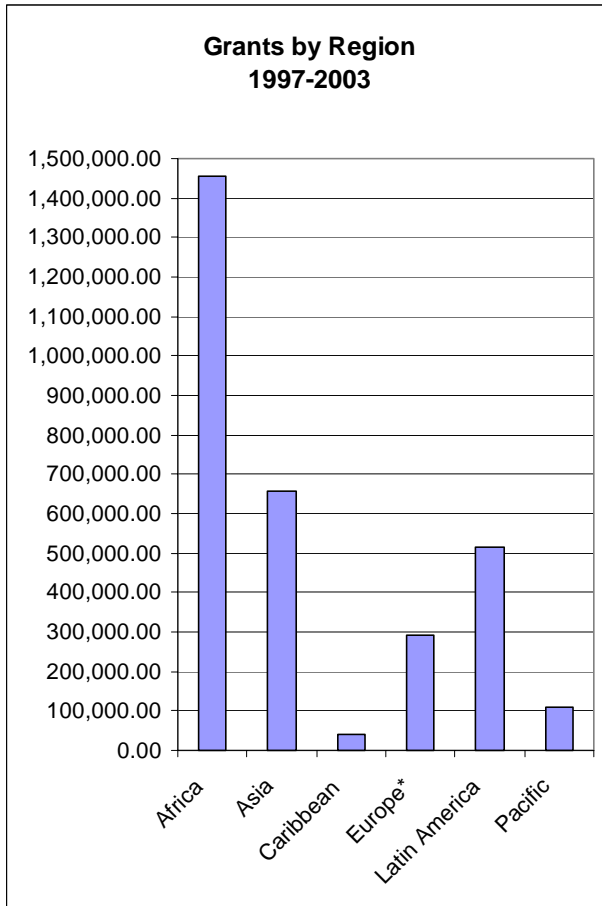
Note:

- Leadership development = training, stewardship, human resource development
 - Communications = publications, public relations
 - Theological reflection = pastoral activities, religious education, ministry, witness
 - Human rights = advocacy, legal assistance
 - Infrastructure = buildings, transport, equipment
 - Community development = vocational, health, agriculture, social service
- (Percentages are based on funds given to each subject)

Evaluation

27. In the years since Debrecen, the partnership fund has connected Alliance churches north and south, and helped many churches in the south to carry out programmes. Some of the projects it has supported promote theological education and leadership development for pastors and lay people of all ages. Others aim at the economic and social development of communities. Others defend human rights. The fund has also supported the construction of multipurpose community centres for educational and diaconal activities.

More women and young people have been involved in these projects. Finance has always played a dominant role in the way mission priorities are set, and if shared bilaterally between churches, can easily distort mission relations and identities. The partnership fund is an expression of Christian solidarity within the Reformed family. It plays an important role in strengthening church structures, development activities and human resources and in promoting mission.



*Europe=Central, eastern and southern Europe

Seeking justice in God's world

28. "Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord." (Jer 22.15f). The book of Jeremiah contrasts king Jehoiakim of Judah unfavourably with his father, Josiah, and it does so on theological grounds. Other gods may offer prosperity, look benignly on exploitation, and smile on the flaunting of wealth. The strange God of scripture demands justice.
29. The quest for justice is central to a Christian family that honours the Bible as the word of God, to a Reformed family that remembers with Calvin that God is sovereign over all creation, to an ecumenical family that knows that the *oikoumene* is the whole inhabited earth. From Debrecen to Accra, the quest for justice has been central to the Alliance.

Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth

A confessing process

30. Delegates to the 23rd general council, "challenged by the cry of the people who suffer and by the groaning of creation", spoke with passion of the "appalling circumstances" in which many people in many parts of the world live and the "ongoing destruction" of the environment. They aligned themselves with those who believe that "the time has come to make a confession of faith which rejects and struggles against these injustices, while affirming our faith in the triune God who in Christ offers a new creation." And they underlined the point: "We consider this affirmation of life, commitment to resistance, and struggle for transformation to be an integral part of Reformed faith and confession today."
31. Debrecen called for "a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) within all Alliance member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction."
32. Three words are important in this call to a church process.
 - *Recognition*: Debrecen invited our churches not to turn their eyes away from injustice and destruction, but to look steadily at what is wrong in the world – and to acknowledge that this matters.
 - *Education*: We cannot leave these matters to the politicians or the "experts". Debrecen invited our churches to help their members to understand economic processes and their consequences for people's lives, and the growing threats to the environment, and to work for constructive change.

- *Confession*: Debrecen invited our churches “to work towards the formulation of a confession of their beliefs about economic life that would express justice in the whole household of God and reflect priority for the poor, and support an ecologically sustainable future”. The quest for economic justice and ecological integrity is not just an ethical imperative. Global economic injustice and environmental devastation challenge our faithfulness as followers of Jesus Christ.
33. In the years immediately after Debrecen, we called this church process by its Latin name: *processus confessionis* [a process of confession]. In a worldwide church family, Latin is not the best means of communication. In 2000, the executive committee adopted a new title: “Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth”. This underscored the Debrecen call to Alliance churches, north and south, to covenant with one another on these questions, but it did more. When Reformed Christians speak of covenant, we mean in the first place God’s covenant – God’s faithfulness to all creation. Our God has an abiding commitment to the earth, and invites us to be partners in the creation, recreation and redemption of God’s world.
 34. Covenanting for justice has engaged the whole Alliance since Debrecen and has been a priority for the work of the department of cooperation and witness with our churches. In this, we have been assisted and advised by a “covenanting taskforce” of economists and theologians. We began by formally communicating the Debrecen call to our church leaders, with an invitation to respond, and published a booklet explaining the process, together with a book of study resources. In 2001 and 2002, Russel Botman of South Africa served as a consultant to stimulate the engagement of churches through visits and discussion; we are grateful to the churches that made this consultancy possible.
 35. Initially, the department of cooperation and witness focused on analysing the consequences of neoliberal economic globalization in different parts of the world. In cooperation with the WCC,⁵ the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), regional ecumenical organizations and other partners, we organized consultations in Asia (Bangkok and Seoul, 1998), central and eastern Europe (Budapest, 2001), the Pacific (Fiji, 2001), western Europe (Soesterberg, 2002), Latin America (Buenos Aires, 2003), and North America (Stony Point, 2004).
 36. In 2001, we organized a consultation in Cape Town on the theological basis of the process, mainly involving theologians from churches with recent confessing experiences (Barmen 1934, Belhar 1982).
 37. In a second stage, the department of cooperation and witness focused on consolidating actions taken by Alliance churches in response to the

Debrecen call. In April 2003, a south-south forum brought 40 participants together in Buenos Aires, including delegates from 22 churches in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific that actively responded to the Debrecen call. The aim was to reflect on the process since Debrecen, and to prepare a declaration. A wider forum of churches from both hemispheres took place in London Colney (UK) in February 2004.

38. The social costs of neoliberal globalization fall most heavily on women. The department of partnership of women and men held a Latin American consultation on gender and economic justice in Cuba in 2001. The consultation, organized in partnership with the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL) and Matanzas Theological Seminary, offered an analytic framework in which to identify economic injustices that have a gender bias, and gave participants an opportunity to explore the way economic and political doctrines affect the lives of women, their families and their communities. Historically, Latin American churches have rarely gone beyond social welfare to look at the root causes of poverty and exclusion or to seek alternative economies. Those who suffer from the effects of neoliberalism are too often reduced to statistics. In recognizing their real faces, gender sensitivity is essential.
39. In 2001 and 2002, the department of theology, in cooperation with the LWF, studied the ways in which Reformation churches are reviewing their structures in response to new religious and spiritual challenges ultimately related to economic globalization.
40. The covenanting taskforce will report in detail in *Reformed World* in March 2004, so that our churches gathered in the 24th general council may take a step forward in covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth.

Gender justice

41. In 1997, Debrecen created the department of partnership of women and men to help build gender awareness in our churches, provide a platform for dialogue, and encourage action for gender justice.

Workshops on gender awareness

42. From 1999 to 2002, the partnership department organized and led eight regional workshops on gender awareness and leadership development: in English-speaking and French-speaking Africa, southeast Asia, the Caribbean, central, eastern and southern Europe, Indonesia, the Middle East, and the Pacific. The aim was to engage the Alliance family in discussing gender relations in church and society, and to work towards a shared goal of partnership between women and men. In developing the workshops, we used a sociological and theological framework that included understanding gender; self-awareness; gender-based domestic violence; gender and

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HIV/Aids; gender and economics; gender, leadership and power; transforming church structures; and overcoming barriers to partnership. The approach adopted in the workshops challenged biblical interpretation, cultural norms and social practices based on power relations, discrimination and exclusion.

A manual on gender awareness

43. In 2003, the Alliance published *Created in God's Image: From hierarchy to partnership*, a church manual to promote gender awareness and leadership development. This embodies the rich experiences of the gender workshops and aims at strengthening efforts within churches to build equal partnerships of women and men. It was again developed with a sociological and theological framework and has a facilitators' guide and eight training modules. A workbook for participants contains activity handouts, fact sheets, conceptual analyses, stories, case studies, and resources for Bible study.

Gender and HIV/Aids

44. In 2003, we ran a consultation in Nigeria on HIV/Aids from a gender perspective. The consultation, organized together with the Reformed Ecumenical Council of Nigeria (RECON) in response to a request from our six Nigerian churches, helped the churches to examine the different impacts of HIV/Aids on women, men, and young people in Nigeria, within the contexts of religion, culture and poverty. For many, the consultation was a good entry point for discussing gender and partnership.
45. Nigerian church leaders give HIV/Aids a high priority. They face the challenge of widespread but mistaken theological assumptions that exclude those who suffer from HIV/Aids. The consultation began to design a common approach to HIV/Aids for Nigerian churches, and this will be continued by RECON.

UN commission on the status of women

46. In March 2002, the partnership secretary presented a paper in New York on "How can churches address the gender and economic inequalities that impoverish women and exacerbate the Aids pandemic?" in a panel organized by Ecumenical Women 2000+ at the 46th session of the UN commission on the status of women.

Human rights and the UN

47. The department of cooperation and witness makes regular interventions at the UN commission on human rights. In 2000, the UN economic and social council granted the Alliance special consultative status. This allowed us

to make written submissions on economic, social and cultural rights, based on the covenanting for justice consultations in Bangkok in 1999 and in Budapest in 2001.

48. The 22nd general council (Seoul 1989) denounced the death penalty as conflicting with the inherent worth of human life and the Christian gospel of grace and forgiveness. It called for the universal abolition of capital punishment. Since 1999, we have made regular interventions and held briefings on the death penalty at the UN commission on human rights, with the help of Melodee Smith (United Church of Christ, USA) and many others.
49. The Alliance has also made regular interventions on human rights in Equatorial Guinea, and has made joint statements with other ecumenical bodies and NGOs on religious freedom and religious intolerance, the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of migrant workers, the rights of the child, and violence against women in armed conflicts.
50. In 2001, the Alliance took part in the UN world conference against racism, in Durban, South Africa.

Human sexuality

Sexual harassment and sexual abuse

51. Before Debrecen, the Alliance published a brochure on sexual harassment and sexual abuse, “Affirming human dignity”, which was widely distributed. The Alliance has publicly condemned harassment and abuse as matters not so much of sex as of the exploitation of power. In 2003, we developed guidelines to guard against sexual harassment at the 24th general council and to respond to any cases that may occur. We are working with our churches to break the silence on all gender-based forms of violence.

Sexual orientation

52. Three reports to the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) raised the question of sexual orientation, with which the Alliance had not previously dealt. They reflected concern about violence and discrimination against gay men and lesbian women and their inclusion in or exclusion from the Christian community, and showed a desire to encourage constructive dialogue in and among our churches.
53. The council referred the question to the executive committee, where a taskforce explored how best to address it. It began with the first Debrecen concern: violence and discrimination against people of homosexual orientation. Faced with many accounts from around the world of discrimination and serious, even murderous, violence against people thought to be homosexual, the taskforce called for respect of the image of God in all people.

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54. In Bangalore in 2000, the executive committee adopted a statement on human rights and sexual orientation. The executive committee limited itself to this statement, recognizing and respecting the variety of theological standpoints on sexual orientation in the Alliance family.
55. Also in Bangalore, the taskforce agreed to survey the state of the discussion of sexual orientation in Alliance churches and to encourage dialogue among them. A letter from the general secretary asking member churches what they had said on the subject produced thirty replies. Some respondents sent us study texts in use in their churches, others asked for materials to assist in study. Some said that sexual orientation was not discussed in their church, and others added that they thought it should be.
56. Sexual orientation in many Alliance churches is a sensitive and potentially destructive issue. Several of our churches seek non-divisive ways to deal with it. The Alliance is committed to helping them compare approaches and experience.

Justice in the nations

57. Alliance churches frequently ask for action on problems in particular countries. Here are some examples of how the Alliance has responded, often through our department of cooperation and witness.

Angola

58. In 2002, the Alliance made a pastoral visit to Angola to support the Reformed churches who are working together to rebuild after 40 years of war.

Austria

59. The neofascist Freedom Party made huge gains in the September 1999 elections and joined a coalition government, a move that met with international outrage. In 2000, we wrote to the Reformed Church in Austria in support of its opposition to fascism and racism.

Colombia

60. In 1998, we wrote to the Colombian government and the UN commission on human rights about more than 1 million people who are internally displaced by violence and threats from the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups.

East Timor

61. In 1999, at the height of the struggle for independence, we sent a delegation to express solidarity with the churches of East Timor.

Indonesia

62. From 1998, we spoke and wrote repeatedly on the communal conflicts in the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi. In 2002, we brought Christians and Muslims from Ambon and Poso together in Jakarta for an interfaith consultation on peace and reconciliation (cf §§98f).

Iraq

63. In February 2003, the general secretary led a delegation to Baghdad to show solidarity with the churches and people of Iraq in the face of the imminent US and UK invasion. Together with many of our churches worldwide, we condemned the war as a breach of international law.

Kenya

64. In 1997, we asked partner churches to help the Kenyan churches in their struggle to prevent communal conflict during the parliamentary and presidential elections and to promote democracy.

Korea

65. The Alliance has a long-standing commitment to peace and reunification in Korea. In 1998 and 2002, the cooperation and witness secretary visited North Korea to show solidarity with the Korean Christians Federation and deliver humanitarian aid. In 2001, we initiated a study on Korean reunification from economic, social and cultural perspectives.

Lesotho

66. As part of our commitment to democracy in Lesotho, we sent a team to monitor elections in May 1998.

Rwanda

67. In 1999, we sent a delegation to support local churches working for reconciliation and reconstruction in the aftermath of the genocide.

Taiwan

68. In 1998 and 1999, we supported the people's desire for self-determination. In 2003, we reiterated this support, recognizing that self-determination may mean independence.

USA

69. In 1997, we supported our US churches in opposing a bill on freedom from religious persecution, arguing instead for a multilateral approach through the UN. In 2001, we criticized decisions and practices that belied the country's democratic traditions: the refusal to sign the Kyoto protocol, the

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decision to deploy a missile defence system, the use of the death penalty, the economic embargo on Cuba, and continuing manifestations of systemic, organized and individual forms of racism.

70. After September 11, we sent pastoral letters to our US churches offering our sympathy, calling for prayer, and warning against reprisal. In October 2001, we opposed the war in Afghanistan.

Other actions

71. Following the Asian economic crisis in 1997, we wrote pastoral letters to our churches in Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand.
72. In 1999, Katsina, Sokoto and other Nigerian states adopted a harsh interpretation of Sharia law. When Safiya Husseini Tungar Tudu and Amina Lawal Kurami were convicted of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning, we wrote in defence of their human rights; both sentences were overturned on appeal. We also wrote letters protesting the violation of human rights in East Timor, Indonesia, Israel/Palestine and elsewhere; and letters to the presidents of Cameroon and Nigeria, encouraging them as they seek a lasting solution to their border dispute.

Justice for young people

73. On Monday August 11 1997, the 23rd general council stood to applaud the report of the Reformed youth forum. A week later, the council elected an executive committee with no one under 30, and the young people in the meeting stood to protest. Children, teenagers and young adults are the church of today. The Alliance regularly affirms their full inclusion in church life. In Debrecen, like David in 2 Samuel 12, we were condemned by our own words.
74. The executive committee did what it could to put things right. It coopted two youth consultants and, when the untimely death of Kim Dong-ik left a seat on the committee vacant, filled it with a young delegate from the council, Kim Young-hoon.
75. The picture in our churches is also mixed. All churches pay lip service to young people and some are open to their gifts, but too often our young people feel neglected and ignored. The Alliance's youth committee has worked hard since Debrecen to see that the voice of young people is heard in our churches and that they are included in our life and work.

Outcomes

76. The Debrecen call moved the whole Alliance forward, and impacted the wider ecumenical movement also. Questionnaire responses indicate that since Debrecen at least 100 Alliance churches have worked on economic injustice and environmental destruction and six have made declarations

or taken faith stances. There may be others of which we are not aware. The Buenos Aires *Faith Stance on the Global Crisis of Life* and the discussions in London Colney are a significant first step in declaring our faith in the face of economic injustice and environmental destruction.

77. The gender workshops were effective in opening up discussions on gender relations within the churches and in building the capacity of churches to transform gender relations within their own life and in the communities they serve. In some cases, churches have already organized follow-up workshops. Alliance churches in Northeast India, Latvia, Tuvalu and Uganda have agreed to accept women as eligible for ordination as ministers. An evaluation of the workshops showed deep appreciation and significant advances.
78. *Created in God's Image* has already begun to build on this work, and the signs are that it will be widely used. The gender manual is a dynamic resource that can be adapted, updated and enriched by churches and facilitators to ensure its relevance to local contexts. It is a tool for collaboration with other Christian traditions, other faiths, and civil society. The women's desks of the WCC, the LWF and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) cooperated in developing the manual, and value it as a resource for their own constituencies.
79. Our human rights work in particular nations and at the UN is never finished. But as we look back over the years since Debrecen, we can see that steady, persistent work – on the death penalty, for example – has an effect.

Promoting a wider ecumenism

80. In the fourth gospel, Jesus speaks of gathering the sheep, so there will be “one flock, one shepherd” (John 10). He prays that his followers may all be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17). Christian unity in the Reformed understanding is a gift, and the gift is already given: “one church, one faith, one Lord”. The ecumenical task is to make our unity visible, by breaking down the walls of hostility that divide Christians and churches one from another, by accepting the communion in which we already stand.
81. The visible unity the Alliance seeks within our own church family we also seek with churches of other traditions. In this chapter, we report on what the Alliance has done since Debrecen to promote this visible Christian unity.

Uniting the Reformation family

Reformed Ecumenical Council

82. Since 1998 we have held regular talks with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to explore how best we can serve our Reformed constituency. REC is smaller and less diverse than the Alliance, but both organizations recognize significant overlaps. REC was founded in 1946 by ethnically Dutch churches in the Netherlands, North America and South Africa. It aims to draw Reformed churches together across cultures, share the heritage of the Reformed faith with the whole church, and proclaim the lordship of Christ throughout the world. Today, 22 of its 39 Reformed and Presbyterian churches also belong to the Alliance. We have worked together in Pentecostal dialogue and the mission in unity project, and expect to cooperate more in the future.
83. REC will send stewards to Accra, and the Alliance will reciprocate at the REC assembly, graciously postponed to next year to avoid a scheduling conflict with Accra. The REC assembly will be held in Utrecht, in the national service centre of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in July 2005, with the theme “I will be with you always”.

Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

84. The Disciples of Christ sprang from Presbyterian roots on the US frontier in the early 19th century. Rejecting inherited divisions, they insisted that the church is essentially one. Their stress on freedom, diversity, simplicity of worship and a reasonable faith led to rapid growth in the USA and beyond. Today, they are a Christian world communion, represented internationally by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC). Many Christian

communities planted by Disciples missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries have since joined with the Reformed in united churches.

85. A 1987 dialogue concluded that nothing in faith or order need divide the Disciples and Reformed church families. Since the 1990s, a DECC consultant has served on our executive committee. In 2002, a new round of meetings began. They suggested sharing information about our history and current situation; working together wherever possible; sharing in governing body meetings; coordinating approaches to dialogue; and taking care to include the perspective of united and uniting churches that belong to both the DECC and the Alliance. They recommended, and the executive committee agreed, that “the goal of relations between WARC and the DECC should now be the development of comprehensive partnership in pursuit of the visible unity of the church”.

Lutheran Word Federation

86. The LWF is our largest sister organization in the Reformation family. The 1989 report, *Toward Church Fellowship*, concluded to no one’s great surprise that the classical differences in our traditions need no longer keep us apart. It urged the Alliance and the LWF to work together wherever possible. It called on Lutheran and Reformed churches to “declare communion” and to “make their unity more real and visible for their members as well as for the world”.
87. Cooperation between the LWF and WARC grew through the 1990s. Since 1999, Alliance executives have met twice-yearly with LWF senior staff to share information and coordinate activities. In the same year, we set up a joint working group to review Lutheran-Reformed relations and explore how the two Christian world communions might cooperate more. The group’s report, *Called to Communion and Common Witness* (2002), recommends the setting up of a Lutheran-Reformed joint commission to
- explore the possibility of common actions and statements and promote joint studies, in particular a study on structures of visible communion and a study to develop a common understanding of Lutheran and Reformed history
 - monitor and advise upon the development of Lutheran-Reformed relations around the world
 - provide guidance on implementing the report, with a view to coordinated decisions by the two organizations
 - consider the ecumenical role and contribution of Christian world communions, and
 - report on the role of membership in the LWF and WARC of united churches combining Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

In 2002, the executive committee received the report with joy and commended it for implementation. The 10th assembly of the LWF (Winnipeg 2003) also agreed to “study and appropriately implement” the recommendations of the report.

United and uniting churches

88. One in seven Alliance churches is the result of a union that goes beyond the Reformed tradition:⁶ we are, in effect, a fellowship of Reformed and united churches, explicitly welcoming united churches into membership. The exception to this rule is the united churches in Germany with Lutheran and Reformed roots, which belong to neither the Alliance nor the LWF.
89. Several of these churches, including the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland and the Evangelical Church in Westphalia, work closely with the Alliance; many help fund the 24th general council; and all now find themselves with our Alliance member churches in a common German home – the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK). Most of their partner churches are Alliance or LWF members or both. In recent years they have sought a closer relationship with the two Christian world communions (and a closer relationship between them). In October 2001, the two organizations invited representatives of united churches in Germany and also in the Czech Republic, Madagascar, the Netherlands, and Zambia to a consultation on “united (Lutheran and Reformed) churches in their relationship to worldwide confessional and ecumenical organizations”. The conversation continues.

The Prague consultations

90. In the 1170s, a rich merchant of Lyon called Peter Valdès (or Waldo) sold all he had and gave to the poor, and set out to preach the gospel in the streets. His example inspired the “Poor of Lyon”, whose descendants today are our Waldensian churches in Italy and Latin America. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*: reform of the Western church did not begin in the 16th century, nor was it confined to such familiar names as Luther, Calvin and Knox. A comprehensive account of the Protestant Reformation cannot ignore the “first reformers” – Valdès, Wyclif or Hus – nor the “radical reformers” to whom the Congregational wing of the Alliance traces its origins. An attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Reformation began in Prague in the 1980s and continues today in consultations co-sponsored by the Alliance with the LWF and including Baptists, Brethren, Hussites, Hutterian Brethren, Mennonites, Methodists, Moravians and Quakers. Three consultations took place between Debrecen and Accra.
91. The quest for unity in the Reformation family is part of our larger commitment to the ecumenical movement. From the beginning, the Alliance

has worked closely with the WCC. We welcome the call for a reconfiguration of the ecumenical “architecture” and in November 2003 took part in the preliminary discussions. We also speak directly to other Christian traditions in bilateral dialogue.

Seeking visible unity through dialogue

92. Bilateral dialogues are conversations between two Christian world communions – eg the Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church – on what prevents them from being in fellowship. Dialogues often deal with doctrine and church order because, officially at least, these explain most historical divisions among Christian churches. Dialogues often summarize their findings in agreed reports that are submitted to governing bodies and constituencies.
93. Between 1997 and 2004 the Alliance engaged in six dialogues: with the Organization of African Instituted Churches, classical Pentecostal leaders and representatives, Orthodox churches in communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Oriental family of Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church. These dialogues mirror many local and regional ecumenical ventures.
94. Between October 2001 and January 2003, four reports – on dialogue with the Pentecostals, the Oriental Orthodox, the Adventists and the African instituted churches – were sent to our churches for study and action. We hope they will help to overcome prejudices, where these exist, and deepen mutual understanding, cooperation and fellowship with other churches.
95. In 2002, we invited all Alliance churches to review our engagement in dialogue. This culminated in a meeting in Beirut, in November 2002, hosted by Alliance churches in the Middle East. The review shows that most churches are active in the ecumenical movement, especially through national and regional councils and the WCC. Most affirmed the importance of our dialogues and hope the Alliance will remain an ecumenical actor internationally.

Ecumenical theological exploration

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

96. In 1999, the LWF and the Roman Catholic church signed a joint declaration on the doctrine of justification, ending almost five centuries of mutual condemnation on this subject. Some Alliance churches asked us to explore the significance of the declaration for Reformed churches and Lutheran-Reformed relations. In 2001, in Columbus, Ohio, the Alliance joined the LWF, the pontifical council for promoting Christian unity, and the World Methodist Council in a consultation on “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in a wider ecumenical context”. Alliance

representatives stated two difficulties with the declaration in its present form: it does not articulate the link between justification and the church, or between justification and justice. In the light of the Reformed commitment to the doctrine of justification and its connections with individual and social life, they proposed a quadrilateral study in which our perspectives could contribute to further understanding. In 2002, the executive committee welcomed the joint declaration and endorsed the study proposal.

Indulgences

97. In 2000, the Vatican's "great jubilee" to mark the beginning of the third millennium awoke dormant Protestant-Catholic differences on indulgences. In February 2001, the Alliance, the LWF and the pontifical council for promoting Christian unity held a joint consultation on indulgences. The Roman Catholic team presented two papers, one historical, the other systematic; Lutheran and Reformed participants responded to these.

Interfaith relations

98. There is a wider perspective still, a perspective that locates the Christian church as the people of God among all God's peoples. Fostering deeper understanding and better relationships with people of other faiths has been on the Alliance agenda for some time. In 1986, we published a book on *Reformed Theology and the Jewish People*; in the 1990s, we produced two volumes on Christian-Muslim relations in Asia and Africa.

99. Communal conflict in Indonesia prompted the Alliance to take a new initiative. In July 2002, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus from Indonesia and beyond sat down with Christians in Jakarta for an interfaith consultation on peace and reconciliation. They talked theology and they talked politics, analysing the causes of conflict, but this was not traditional dialogue. The approach was severely practical: how to help people of different faiths live together without killing each other. Following the consultation, the executive committee created an interfaith taskforce to see what should be done next.

Developing the leadership gifts of all

100. The church *is* people: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18.20). At the heart of the Reformation is a strong antagonism towards hierarchy. We offer no quarter to leadership models based on domination, subjugation or power: “All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone” (Martin Luther, 1520). Within the one people of God there are varieties of gifts and services and activities – all the more reason to help God’s people develop these gifts. This the Alliance has done since Debrecen in various ways.

Gender awareness and leadership development

Challenging current models of leadership

101. The Alliance has been working with our churches not only to narrow the gap between men and women in leadership positions but also to challenge current models of leadership. Leadership based on domination or subjugation must be transformed into a more liberating, empowering and participatory model. Some questions raised: How do we move from current models of human relationships and their limitations? How can leadership be valued and honoured so that it truly serves people?
102. *Created in God’s image: From hierarchy to partnership*, the church manual for gender awareness and leadership development, aims to support the development of church leaders and facilitators at regional, national and local levels to model patterns of ministry that foster partnership of women and men in church and society.
103. This reflects a pedagogical approach that opens the way to work with women and men not only in church leadership but also in congregations. This approach emphasizes contextual frameworks, communication methodologies, and the relevance of people’s needs and life experiences. It seeks to demystify theology, translating its language to include people at the grassroots. It challenges conventional ways of doing theology that confine theology to academic and church elites.
104. The partnership secretary and the European area’s taskforce on the ordination of women made two team visits to European churches that did not ordain women. In 1998, they visited the Reformed Evangelical Church in Poland. They also met the rector of the Christian Academy and the general secretary of the Bible Society. In September 2003, the Polish church ordained Wiera Jelinek as its first woman minister of word and sacrament. In 2002, the team visited the Church of the Brethren in the Czech Republic.

They held a consultation on the ordination of women with our two Czech churches, and also met officials at the faculty of theology at Charles University and the women's commission of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic.

105. In March 1999 *Reformed World* published a survey on the ordination of women in Alliance churches and in 2003 we carried out a follow-up survey to update the statistics. Since 2000, five more Alliance churches have opened the door to women's ordination; women in two of these churches have been awarded scholarships from the theological education scholarship fund for women in the south (§109).

Ecumenical cooperation

106. The department of partnership of women and men worked with the WCC, the LWF and the CEC on the following events: "Transforming theological education: women in leadership" (2001); "Women speak out!" (a global consultation on peace with justice, 2002); "Overcoming violence against women" (2002, 2003); "Women in mission" (2003).

Education scholarships

Postgraduate ministerial study

107. The department of theology helps to put students in touch with theological schools offering scholarships leading to a master's degree, and occasionally to a doctorate. A candidate must be a minister, or training for the ministry, of an Alliance church; and applications must be endorsed by the candidate's church. The scholarship programme involves 23 schools in 11 countries, and the aim is to contribute to ministerial formation.
108. Since 1997, we have facilitated contacts for 178 candidates, mainly from the south: 82 from Africa, 75 from Asia, 5 from Europe, 1 from North America and 15 from the Pacific. Since the ruling in 1998 that only one male and one female candidate from each member church can be considered each year, 51 applications from female candidates were processed. In 2002, for the first time, an equal number of female and male candidates benefited from the scheme.

Theological education scholarship fund for women in the south

109. In 1998, the department of partnership of women and men established this fund, using as seed money a generous donation from Antoinette Richard, a long-serving interpreter with the Alliance, and a gift from the Presbyterian Church (USA) in honour of Jane Dempsey Douglass, Alliance president from 1990 to 1997. A substantial grant in 2001 from the *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland* (Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, EMW) allowed the fund to begin its

work. The aim is to help women in the south to study in their own context for a first theological diploma or degree, thus enabling more women to be ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. The first women to benefit from the fund came from the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, the Reformed Church of East Africa, and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. So far, fourteen women from Brazil, the Republic of Congo, India, Kenya, Latvia, Myanmar (Burma), Rwanda, South Africa, and Togo have been awarded scholarships.

Theological training in Equatorial Guinea

110. Lacking its own seminary, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Equatorial Guinea has had to send its candidates for the ministry abroad for training. In response, Debrecen encouraged its partner churches to explore setting up a pastoral training institute in Equatorial Guinea, but so far this has not been possible. As an interim measure, the Alliance initiated a three-year training course for pastors and lay people on witness to the gospel in church and society, using volunteer faculty from Alliance churches in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the USA. Despite some difficulties and misunderstandings, the first two courses took place in 2000 and 2001 and the final course in 2003.

Developing the gifts of young people

111. Debrecen said that a youth secretary was essential in the work of the Alliance. But for four years, the Alliance struggled to finance this post and, in the end, fell back on a compromise solution, appointing Yueh-wen Lu in May 2002 to work primarily from Taiwan.
112. Wherever the executive committee meets, we invite young people from our host churches to share in the work of the youth committee and to serve as stewards. Area councils have responded positively to requests to include at least two young people in their structures. In preparation for the 24th general council, the committee has also organized youth gatherings to help ensure that the voice of young people is heard in the discussions about what it means to have fullness of life.

Georges Lombard Prize

113. In 2000, the Alliance created an essay prize to honour Georges Lombard, general treasurer of the Alliance from 1948 to 1970, and also treasurer of the international committee to restore the Calvin Auditorium. Lombard, a private banker, was active in the Protestant Church of Geneva and the WCC commission for international affairs. As a Reformed Christian, he believed that banking was not a secular pursuit to maximize profit but, in the proper sense, a calling.

114. The prize aims to encourage theological work in the classical tradition of Reformed thought that deals with a real problem of our time. The Alliance is grateful to Lombard Odier Darier Hentsch & Cie, Geneva's oldest firm of private bankers, for making the prize possible. In 2001, the first prize was awarded to Sifiso Mpofu of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, with S Muthu Raj of the Church of South India as runner-up.

Accra: Reformed youth forum and stewards programme

115. Just before the general council, delegates who are between 18 and 30, together with young Presbyterians from Ghana, will gather in the Reformed youth forum (RYF) to share, exchange and develop their vision for mission in today's world. They will reflect on the theme "That All may have Life in Fullness" in the context of economic globalization, ecological devastation, poverty and inequality. They will consider how young people today can take part in the church's mission. They will learn about the Alliance and prepare for effective participation in the council. RYF will produce a message for the council.
116. Stewards, aged between 18 and 30, will come to Accra from many countries to make friends, gain global ecumenical experience, and help ensure that the general council runs smoothly: 22 from Ghana, 5 from neighbouring Togo, 28 from other Alliance churches worldwide, and 3 appointed by the Reformed Ecumenical Council. They will meet the global Reformed family at a time when we are discussing important questions and making significant decisions. Their three weeks in Ghana in a community of young people from different churches will be a time to learn, share, worship and celebrate.

Global Institute of Theology

- 117 In cooperation with Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, the Alliance will hold its first global institute of theology in conjunction with the 24th general council. The institute is intended for theological students and pastors beginning their ministry, and will offer an academic course in contemporary missiology, articulating the "lived missiology" of Alliance churches, mission-related aspects of the general council theme, and emerging issues in Christian mission.
118. The institute will offer a core course on "Life in fullness: challenge to theology and mission", and four elective courses: "Confessing the faith today"; "New directions in mission in the 21st century"; "Theology and mission in Africa"; and "Explorations in intercultural theology".

The Alliance in the regions

119. The Alliance is a community of churches. Everything that happened in the lives of our churches during the last seven years is part of our common life. Many churches have faithfully witnessed to the gospel in their communities. Many have been salt and light. Some have faced great difficulties and some have been threatened by forces of division. Our area structures and our international office have accompanied many such churches through times of challenge and change.
120. To promote community and cooperation among our churches in particular regions and make the work of the Alliance more effective, the general council may authorize the organization of area structures. Each area offers here a brief report on its activities in response to regional social and political realities, as well as to global Alliance initiatives. In these accounts we may recognize many of Debrecen's deep concerns.

Caribbean and North America

121. The first conference of the Caribbean and North American area council (CANAAC) after Debrecen focused on the debt crisis in the Caribbean and the role played by North America in creating and sustaining it, and linked strongly to the council theme, "Break the chains of injustice".
122. The focus in the council's second meeting remained on injustice. Delegates studied passages from historic Reformed confessions, and reflected on ecumenism and historical realities in the Caribbean. They discussed the relation between religion and economics; the redistribution of wealth; the crisis of sweatshop labour; preserving resources in aboriginal areas; unemployment and workers rights; immigration and deportations; the lack of health care for many; and the fomenting of conflict among Christians, Jews and Muslims.
123. For the last three years, CANAAC has subdivided the Accra theme into four areas of contextual interest touching the lives of people in the region: 1) Violence, 2) Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth, 3) Globalization and the church, and 4) Reconciliation, restoration and recreation. Under these headings, the area has discussed the theology of nature, gender in the New Testament, justice and intercessory prayer, and a comparative religions approach to life in fullness. It has reflected on capital punishment, detention without trial or even charge, disability and chronic illness, gun violence, racial profiling, and regional peace issues.
124. Once or twice each decade, CANAAC goes through self-examination. That was the goal in the 2002 meeting. Visioning the future requires CANAAC to define its purpose; develop a working understanding of partnership

between the Caribbean and North American churches; support the “two-thirds world” intentionally in theological formation; use exchange programmes to promote cultural understanding, mission interpretation and faith celebration; use the internet for Bible study, theological reflection and news sharing; support the youth consultation; and clarify its relationship with the Alliance globally. The aim is a renewed and inclusive CANAAC.

125. As Accra approaches, CANAAC reaffirms its commitment to theological reflection and social reform as its primary *raison d'être*. It will take strategic steps towards integration between the North American and Caribbean churches, based on relationships of integrity. It will seek to engage young people in the churches in its key activities. It will foster greater involvement of the churches in unfolding its vision.

Europe

126. In 1995, the European area council appointed a policy committee to review aims, organization and procedures. The new area committee made a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the area and, as a result, established three taskforces.

- A taskforce on the ordination of women visited churches that do not ordain women.
- A taskforce on minorities discussed the problems faced by Hungarian-speaking minority churches, particularly in Romania, and Reformed minority churches elsewhere in Europe. Some of these churches are very small. Some are the churches of ethnic minorities that experience discrimination by ethnic majorities. Some suffer at the hands of majority churches or the state.
- A taskforce on sharing our faith sought to improve cooperation and communication between Alliance churches in Europe. Because of differences in church size and structure, it decided to encourage bilateral links.

From 1999, a fourth taskforce, on coping with the past, struggled with the “unfinished business” of the Alliance and its churches in central and eastern Europe after the fall of communism.

127. The theological subcommittee dealt with various questions raised by the area committee. Its work on Reformed identity was published as *Reformed and Ecumenical: On being Reformed in ecumenical encounters*, eds Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Hendrik M Vroom and Michael Weinrich (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000).
128. In response to the Debrecen call for a confessing process, the area committee encouraged our European churches to take part in the campaign to cancel the debt of the world's poorest countries. The area co-sponsored two

consultations in the covenanting for justice process (see §§30-40): a consultation on the ecological, economic and social consequences of globalization in central and eastern Europe (Budapest, 2001), and a consultation on economy for life, aimed at churches in western Europe (Soesterberg, the Netherlands, 2002).

129. In 2002, the European area council met in Oradea, Romania. The theme, “Life in fullness: global vision – local action”, was chosen in preparation for Accra and as a European contribution to the gathering process. Delegates also discussed the future of the European area, in the light of other ecumenical relationships. The council amended the by-laws and elected a smaller area committee. This committee is creating an area website as part of its effort to foster communication among our European churches, helping to prepare European delegates for Accra, studying theological questions of concern to our European churches, and preparing a meeting of European church leaders to review the future of the area.

Latin America

130. The Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL) traces its roots to the first continental Presbyterian congress, held in 1955 in Campinas, Brazil. At Debrecen, AIPRAL was incorporated as an area of the Alliance. The eighth AIPRAL assembly was held in Mexico City in November 1997 with the theme “Vision and mission of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Latin America”. It admitted seven new member churches, and developed guidelines for mission in Latin America in the 21st century.
131. The ninth assembly met in June 2002 in São Paulo, Brazil, with the theme “That All may have Life in Fullness”. The new executive committee is fostering greater closeness and communication among churches of the Presbyterian and Reformed family in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean. This included visits to many church assemblies and synods. The aim is to reaffirm Reformed commitment to mission, faith and economics, and life in fullness; and to strengthen Reformed community and identity through shared experiences, biblical, theological and social reflection, and public witness.
132. *La Voz* [The Voice] is the official periodical of the Latin American area. Since 1999, it includes articles from *Update* in Spanish. AIPRAL has translated Alliance books and papers, and publishes an annual prayer calendar.
133. AIPRAL held a women’s assembly in Mexico in January 2000 with the theme “Committed to mission”. In November 2001, AIPRAL and the Alliance’s department of partnership of women and men co-organized a consultation on gender and economic justice in Matanzas, Cuba. In 2003,

women from the Southern Cone held a conference on “Life and death in Latin America”.

134. AIPRAL organized a leadership training programme for the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Peru, in Huanta in October 1999, and a meeting in Chile in August 2000 of young people from the Southern Cone.
135. In 2003, AIPRAL hosted the south-south consultation on economic justice initiated by the department of cooperation and witness (see §35), enabling a deeply successful meeting that illustrates the contribution of this region to the Alliance’s work and future.

Northeast Asia

136. At its meeting in Taipei in October 1997, the Northeast Asia area council asked the churches in the region to set aside an annual WARC Sunday. It formed a taskforce on human rights, and issued a statement on the social challenges of the region, urging governments to make Northeast Asia a nuclear-free zone, supporting the struggle for people’s sovereignty, security and dignity, and voicing concern for vulnerable groups in society.
137. In 1998, the area held a theological consultation on the economic crisis in Northeast Asia and the responsibility of the church. The administrative committee recommended that churches in the region:
 - initiate dialogue among economists, local pastors and theologians
 - launch a study group to discuss the merits and demerits of the market system
 - take a leading role in protecting the environment and migrant workers
 - monitor whether international financial institutions act responsibly, taking into account local cultures and economies
 - be a watchdog against political corruption, which leads to economic exploitation
 - educate congregations in the true purpose of the economy from a Christian viewpoint
 - acknowledge the importance of democracy as a precondition for economic justice
 - encourage local cohesiveness and integrity
 - promote a spirit of cooperation rather than competition in the region.
138. At its meeting in Hakone, Japan, in November 1999, the council took several initiatives to raise funds and to include women and young people more fully in its activities. It considered the delicate issue of regional security and asked each church in the area to name theologians to a research group for the confessing process (covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth: see §§30-40).

139. In 2001, an area consultation on the tasks of the Northeast Asian churches in globalization called on Christians to recognize economic injustice as a matter of faith. Participants committed themselves to continue looking into the negative consequences of neoliberal economic globalization, particularly the unbearable burdens imposed on poor and vulnerable communities by the International Monetary Fund.
140. In 2002, the consultation focused on the Accra theme, "That All may have Life in Fullness". The area is seeking to make the Alliance more relevant in Northeast Asia, and to become the nucleus of a wider Asian fellowship. In this spirit, the administrative committee invited Margaretha Hendriks to speak about the suffering of the churches and people of Indonesia. It affirmed that the "idea" of promoting fullness of life can become a "reality" by strengthening the ministry and witness of presbyteries and congregations in the daily lives of the people.

Southern Africa

141. The Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches (SAARC) was formed in the struggle against apartheid. In the years since Debrecen, it has focused on developing mission for the post-apartheid era. It provided a channel for the Alliance family to churches in countries torn by war or politics, such as Angola, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. It appointed a human rights and reconciliation commission to support churches in responding to these deep needs. It rejoiced in the birth of the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and helped other churches facing divisions.
142. The SAARC conference in Gaborone, Botswana, in 1999 had the confessing process (covenanting for justice: see §§30-40) as its theme. It took steps to forge a new future for SAARC, focusing on economic justice, African theology, mission in unity, theological education and lay development, the rule of law, and HIV/Aids. It reaffirmed its commitment to empowering women ministers and lay women theologians and young people.
143. A mission in unity consultation in Kempton Park, South Africa, in October 2000 noted that
- the effects of apartheid are still deeply felt
 - economic injustice goes hand in hand with environmental degradation
 - political instability and the pandemic of HIV/Aids are devastating the lives of millions
 - many churches deny women their place as equal partners in ministry and mission
 - many young people are not taken seriously as the church of today.
144. In August 2002, SAARC organized a Reformed worship workshop in Zambia, to develop resources that can help people deal with the harsh realities of life in the region.

145. The regional conference in Harare in 2002 adopted the general council theme in preparation for Accra. Topics included life in fullness in the context of HIV/Aids, and peace and reconciliation in church and society in Southern Africa.
146. The major development of the period has been helping to give birth to the Alliance of Reformed Churches in Africa, covering the whole continent. ARCA was born in Yaoundé, Cameroon in November 2003, and SAARC is currently being transformed into a subregion of the new area. ARCA will be presented for formal recognition by the general council in Accra.

The Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa

147. Apartheid in South Africa began in the church. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) instituted racially separated churches for those converted by its missionary efforts, beginning in 1881 with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) for “coloured” South Africans. In the 20th century, it set up the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) for Africans, and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) for Indians.
148. At the Alliance consultation in Johannesburg in 1993, it was acknowledged that the reunification of the Dutch Reformed church family was the “acid test” of whether these churches had moved beyond apartheid. A first step was taken the following year when the DRCA and the DRMC joined together to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA); some African congregations stayed out of the union and continued as the DRCA. Further progress towards reunification stalled.
149. This has been of great concern to the Alliance, which committed itself at the 23rd general council to working pastorally with the DRC and the other churches in South Africa towards unity and reconciliation. After Debrecen, the executive committee created a taskforce to follow up on this decision. We rejoice at the readmission of the DRC to full membership. We give thanks to God for the prophetic witness of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. We are grateful for the critical accompaniment of many WARC member churches outside Africa, especially through the Reformed European South Africa Consultation (RESAC).⁷ The Alliance has made several team visits to South Africa, most recently in October 2002.
150. The Alliance will continue its commitment to pray, work and challenge for the reunion of this church family in South Africa. It is our hope that the four churches will soon be able to overcome the obstacles that still remain and move ahead with reunification – a sign that they have truly put apartheid behind them.

Gathering the fellowship towards Accra

151. Every seven or eight years, the Alliance family comes together in general council. The “gathering process” toward Accra began in 2000 when we announced the theme “That All may have Life in Fullness” (Jn 10.10) and invited our churches to reflect on the threats and challenges to life in the 21st century and how God is calling us to respond.
152. Three key Debrecen mandates return to the agenda in Accra for further deliberation: the process of confession concerning economic injustice and environmental destruction, our common engagement in God’s mission, and partnership between women and men in ministry.
153. The Global Institute of Theology, Reformed youth forum and women’s pre-conference expand the gathering process to include students and young pastors, women and youth more fully. A stewards’ programme will involve 58 young adults from around the world in the life of the council.
154. We are gathered and we are sent: the gathering process will not end in Accra, but will continue as delegates return to their churches and develop the new mandate.

Supporting the gathering process

155. By asking churches to name their delegates two years in advance and developing study resources unusually early, the Alliance has encouraged the widest possible participation and preparation, not just among delegates, but in congregations.
156. Many church assemblies, synods, pastors and congregations are using *Crossing Ten Seas*, a resource for congregational study published in 2002. This was widely distributed in English, French, Spanish and German, and also appeared in Japanese, Hungarian and Korean. We distributed a set of Christian education outlines on the Accra theme in English, French and Spanish for local adaptation by Alliance churches.
157. To write study texts and Bible studies for Accra from a grassroots’ perspective, we brought together pastors, theologians and journalists from our churches in December 2002. *Reformed World* published these study materials as a special double issue in October 2003.
Since June 2001, *Reformed World* has devoted several issues to the Accra theme.
158. We publish the Accra worship book, *Celebrate Life!*, on our website to encourage congregations to join us in prayer during the general council.
159. Through these ways of gathering for Accra, the 24th general council becomes more than an event. It becomes a process seeking to engage Alliance churches in reflecting on the council, its theme and its potential decisions

before delegates arrive in Accra – and in owning its outcomes when they return.

Future general councils

160. In the journey towards Accra, many Alliance churches spoke again of the human and financial strain of attending the many international and regional ecumenical assemblies.
161. Debrecen spearheaded the call for common assemblies: “future meetings of the general council should, if possible, be organized jointly and concurrently with the WCC and the LWF”, with business conducted separately. The call has led to new levels of cooperation in the present cycle of global meetings, and continuing discussion with sister organizations.
162. In its 10th assembly (Winnipeg 2003), the LWF committed itself, and called on its member churches, to take practical steps toward coordinated assemblies and to work toward the realization of a truly universal Christian council. The Alliance welcomes this openness to seeing future LWF assemblies as part of a broader, multilateral assembly.
163. Whatever happens in these ecumenical conversations, we believe that future general councils must be planned differently.

Communication: Sharing our life and witness

164. The ongoing change in communication has been to re-imagine the Alliance as churches talking among themselves rather than the Alliance simply speaking to them. Communication is the form of our common life, where experiences, understanding, discernment and commitment are shared and valued. Boundaries are crossed, new actions inspired, faith regenerated. Hopes, fears and dreams become the stuff of worldwide concern, encouragement and prayer.

A story of change

165. To re-read the report on communication prepared for Debrecen in 1997 is to visit a vanishing world in which communication meant publications and print. Change was overdue.
166. In 2000, the executive committee set out a policy for communication in the Alliance, with four objectives:
- to inform member churches and others of the activities of the Alliance
 - to generate solidarity among member churches
 - to present a credible image of the Alliance worldwide
 - to provide an “archival” memory for the Alliance.
167. Recognizing that communication needs to be integrated into all planning and programming by the Alliance, the committee commended regular review by executive staff of the demands of departments upon communications resources and the appropriateness of printed or electronic media. It asked the communications committee to review the performance of the Alliance from a communications perspective.
168. *Update* began life in 1992 as a sedate newsletter reporting on the Alliance as an organization. In 2001 it was comprehensively redesigned, moving to 16 pages in full colour. It became a platform for news exchange on the life and challenges of Alliance churches – just in time to focus on key events in Argentina, Iraq, Israel and the United States.
169. *Update* is published in English and French. *La Voz*, the AIPRAL periodical, carries *Update* materials in Spanish. Articles appear in the newsletter of the Reformed Alliance in Germany, and are reproduced by many other church publications.
170. *Reformed World*, our quarterly journal, carries a range of articles, popular, technical and academic, to attract a wide readership from students to general secretaries. Its target reader is the educated lay Reformed Christian. Themes since Debrecen cover the whole Alliance agenda: justice in the economy and the earth; partnership of women and men; mission in unity;

our ecumenical engagement; theology and human rights; and spirituality. We have used *Reformed World* to encourage discussion of the Accra theme and to present preparatory materials for the council.

171. We launched our first full website (www.warc.ch) in 2000, a fitting event for the new millennium. Maintaining and developing a website is a major responsibility, and since 2001 our communications staff have worked with interns, mainly drawn from the “Semester abroad” programme run by Kent State University, Ohio, and based in the John Knox International Reformed Centre, to expand and update the site. The resources posted continue to grow.
172. Reformed online (www.reformiert-online.net) is a website run by the Johannes a Lasco Foundation in Emden, Germany. In 2000, the Alliance appointed Reformed online as our “electronic publisher”, carrying our materials in a large database of Reformed theology, news and education resources.
173. At the time of writing, 55 Alliance churches have their own websites, and links to these are posted on the WARC site in the directory of member churches (www.warc.ch/mc.html).

From studies to resources

174. In 1982, *Called to Witness to the Gospel Today* launched our series of books, Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The series became the flagship of Alliance communication.
175. In the 15 years before Debrecen, we published 35 volumes. Since Debrecen we have published only 10. This reflects an intentional shift in strategy: from publishing studies to providing resources for our churches. The short volume of Bible studies, *Words of the Lord* (1999) was a first step in this direction. *Crossing Ten Seas* (the congregational studies for the 24th general council, 2002), *Preaching with Her on Life in Fullness* (the collection of sermons by women in *Reformed World* 53/1, March 2003), and *Created in God's Image: From hierarchy to partnership* (the gender manual published in 2003), are more significant steps. The move reflects a more fundamental shift in Alliance self-understanding: from seeing the Alliance as an organization with its own autonomous life to viewing it as an instrument of the Alliance family, at the service of our churches.

Justice in communication

176. Email has transformed the speed and efficiency of links with our churches, church networks, editors and translators. But 25 of our churches still lack internet access, 11 have no fax, and four have no telephone. A level electronic playing field is still a must.

Person to person, face to face

177. In 2001 we invited our churches to tell us who their communications staff are and to appoint a communications liaison. Our communications network now numbers 230, including 117 liaisons.
178. Networking among our churches is indispensable for cooperation and mutual support. Alliance networks include ecumenical officers, partnership of women and men, theological schools and youth, and help to foster a rich and multilayered communication with our constituency.
179. But nothing surpasses the value of face-to-face encounters through team or staff visits. Crossing lands and seas to meet member churches in Christian fellowship is the most informative and moving of all forms of communication.

Financing what we do together

180. In the years since 1997, we have witnessed economic crisis in many countries, currency fluctuation in some, and volatile stock markets worldwide. All of this affects our churches and our finances.
181. The Alliance is grateful to all the churches whose contributions have enabled it to maintain its mission, and to all the donors whose grants have enabled us to carry out the programmes mandated by the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997).

Financial strategy

182. Debrecen instructed the Alliance staff to develop a financial strategy and establish a financial plan for the period leading up to Accra. The aim was to overcome the discrepancy between the work mandated and the resources available to carry it out.
183. According to our by-laws, “membership in the Alliance implies that each member church is ready to support the work of the Alliance with an annual financial contribution reflecting the resources of that church, or, where that is impossible, through comparable support in goods and services, or through the support of partner churches”.
184. Since 1998, we have implemented a “fair contribution” policy, reflecting the financial circumstances of our churches. From 1998 to 2001, member church contributions increased by roughly CHF175,000. In 2002, contributions fell by almost CHF100,000, due in part to currency fluctuations. In 2003, they recovered over CHF30,000 of this decrease, but these variations in income make it difficult to predict the level of contributions in coming years.

Year	Contributions
1997	CHF1,365,059
1998	1,487,987
1999	1,493,745
2000	1,503,759
2001	1,541,897
2002	1,445,680
2003	1,477,977

185. Our goal should be to cover the core costs of our general operating budget (staffing and programmes) from member church contributions. On average, contributions income covers less than 60% of this budget, leaving more than 40% to be found through special grants from churches, church agencies and other donors. We have been reasonably successful in raising

designated funds for most of our activities. However, our core funding remains insecure.

186. Five of our larger, wealthier churches are not giving at the level we deem to be fair by comparison with other churches, and we continue to discuss this with them. Other churches have cut their giving because of their own financial difficulties. In the years 1997-2003, 40 (mostly smaller) churches were not able to contribute anything at all. If all our churches paid an annual contribution at the level requested, our financial difficulties would be greatly eased.
187. The downturn in the global economy has deepened these difficulties, and the strength of the Swiss franc reduces the real value of the income we receive. In 2003, for the fourth consecutive year, we closed the accounts for our general operating budget with a deficit, eliminating our small reserve fund. We anticipate a further significant deficit in 2004.
188. The executive committee has agreed on interim arrangements for 2005 to end this deficit spending.

Fundraising

189. In 1998 the executive committee set up a fundraising taskforce; a staff working group was also created. The executive committee put in place a number of proposals for individual or congregational giving and initiated the Alliance for Life Fund. So far the results have been modest.
190. We need to increase our annual income by working more effectively with our churches and expanding the range of our donor agencies and we need to work on the Alliance for Life Fund, with the aid of professional fundraisers where appropriate. This fund is an endowment fund intended to raise capital, only the interest from which is used to support Alliance expenditure. It is not a short-term solution to our income shortfalls, but a long-term strategy to secure our future.

Investments

191. Years of high performance by the equity market came to an abrupt halt in 2000. Markets were further depressed by September 11 2001, and by high-profile US bankruptcies (Enron, WorldCom). In 2002, the S&P 500, the best broad-gauged measure of US stock market performance, had its worst annual performance for a quarter century. Internationally, stock markets set new records for decline.
192. Funds that do not require to be spent immediately are invested by the Alliance according to ethical criteria first agreed by the executive committee in 1992 and revised in 1994.⁸ In 2002, the market price of our portfolio dropped significantly below accounting value, and a correction was made at the year-end.

Year	Accounting value	Market value
1997	CHF 3,410,000	CHF 3,812,000
1998	3,658,000	4,269,000
1999	3,768,000	4,638,000
2000	3,515,000	4,142,000
2001	3,430,000	3,562,000
2002	3,450,000	3,020,000
2003	2,840,000	2,802,000

193. Due to continuing uncertainty in the investment market, incoming funds are currently held on short-term deposit. The interest rates are very low, but this gives us the cash flow we need, without risking significant losses on investments.

From the desk of the general secretary

The work accomplished in the last seven years could not have been possible without the wisdom and vision of the president, Professor CS Song, and each member of the presidium, each officer, and the entire executive committee. Their commitment to the Alliance is evident not only in the passion with which they thought through challenges that faced the Alliance, but also in the ways in which they represented the Alliance in their various countries between meetings. Some have also helped raised funds for the Alliance. For all these we are very grateful to the presidium, officers and executive committee members.

We are indeed very grateful to all our member churches and area councils for their roles in participating in the life of the Alliance to make it what it ought to be. Your participation in programmes and contributions in all forms have made it possible for the Alliance to navigate the last seven years successfully.

Some churches in both the north and the south have gone more than an extra mile in contributing to the work of the Alliance. To these, we say a special “Thank you”. Others, in addition to annual contributions, have also given funds designated for specific programmes. In addition, financial resources have come from partner organizations and agencies to facilitate our programmes. We owe a debt of gratitude to all of them. While we do not name them here, we are grateful and look forward to their continued commitment as we seek to make a difference in our world together.

I express my gratitude here for the work of Milan Opocensky, who gave illustrious and productive leadership as general secretary until March 2000. The Alliance is indeed grateful to him and to his wife, Jana Opocenska, for their leadership. I can confidently say that because of Milan’s contributions over the years, when I took over as General Secretary the transition period with the current team has gone quite smoothly.

I also pause here to express thanks to my wife, Akpene, whose steadfast support and praying have been a source of inspiration and strength for the work of serving the Alliance.

The Alliance is very grateful to the families of the presidium, executive committee and staff. We could not have done much without their support throughout the last seven years. I single out two spouses in particular, who have gone beyond the call of duty to devote considerable time to the work of the Alliance. Terry White of the United Church of Christ in the USA has faithfully recorded the minutes of the executive committee, officers’ meetings and general council preparatory committees for most of the years since Debrecen. This has been a special gift for which we are very grateful. Duncan Wilson of the United Reformed Church in the UK recorded the minutes of the 2003 executive

committee and helped in compiling and editing this report. We owe him a debt of gratitude.

I pause at this point to express profound gratitude to all those who have served WARC as staff between the 23rd and the 24th general councils. Among those who have now moved on to other ministries we could name Gerhard Dilschneider, HS Wilson, Nyambura J Njoroge and Jill Schaeffer. We are also grateful for the contributions of Joanne Weil who served as assistant to the general secretary for more than 19 years, and Mireille Benkabouche who served as assistant in the department of cooperation and witness for 8 years. Others have served for shorter spells as assistants: Thérèse Goedtler, Violet John, Karin Kaufmann, Giulia Ramagnano and Annika Torre. We are also very grateful for the eighteen-month consultancy that Russel Botman of South Africa gave to stimulate the churches' engagement in covenanting for justice.

While we are grateful for the services of those who have served in the past, it is to those who are currently on the team that I reserve my greatest thanks. WARC and its churches face great challenges. We have a small and very dedicated staff, who work so hard that often they don't have time to think of what it means to be overworked! Without this team, this report would have been short and unremarkable. I hope all who read this report get to meet these hardworking people and express thanks personally.

The regular staff team consists of Renate Herdrich, Yueh-wen Lu, Odair Pedroso Mateus, Park Seong-won, Páraic Réamonn, Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Jet den Hollander, Penny Blachut, Marie-Thérèse Dimanow, Margaret Owen, Sally Redondo, Margaret Richard, and Karin Wisniewski. We have also had the pleasure of working with Terry Angleys, a dedicated volunteer for more than 4 years. The coordinating team for the general council, Doug Chial, Hartmut Lucke and Joseph Obiri Yeboah Mante, constitute a very important part of our staff. Our general treasurer, William A McComish, has been a source of great help and inspiration – not only in matters related to raising and managing our financial resources, but also in actions relevant to the life of the Alliance as a whole.

I call on the whole Reformed family to join me in expressing thanks to all these colleagues and their families.

Setri Nyomi, general secretary

Notes

1. The fourth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization, in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, promised to put the needs and interests of “developing countries” at the heart of the subsequent work programme of the WTO. That this promise was empty and insincere was evident well before the fifth ministerial, in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003, ended without agreement.
2. See “Called to Witness to the Gospel Today”, Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches No 1 (Geneva: WARC, 1983).
3. See *Mission and Unity*, discussion paper for the 22nd General Council, Geneva 1989, pp.38-39. How widespread these divisions are was convincingly demonstrated in 1999 by *The Reformed Family Worldwide*, an 800-page survey produced under the auspices of the John Knox Centre. Jean-Jacques Bauswein and Lukas Vischer eds, *The Reformed Family Worldwide, A survey of Reformed churches, theological schools and international organizations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
4. “A new discipline of mission”, *Mission in Unity* (Geneva: JKIRC, 1993), pp.33-38; *And the Net was not Torn* (Geneva, JKIRC, 1998), p.46.
5. The eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches (Harare 1998) responded to the Debrecen call and encouraged WCC member churches to join the process of recognition, education and confession.
6. Other Alliance churches have been formed by intra-Reformed unions or reunions.
7. Formerly the European Reformed Consultation on South Africa (ERCSA).
8. This investment portfolio includes monies held on behalf of the partnership fund, the theological education fund for women in the South and the European area; it also includes the general council fund, the publications fund, the Calvin publications fund, and diverse funds designed for use within the department of cooperation and witness. It should not be confused with our reserve fund (a hedge against deficits), which is a small fraction of the portfolio, and at the time of writing is entirely exhausted.