

THE ISLAND OF HOPE - AN ALTERNATIVE TO ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

AS representatives of fifty-one churches, ecumenical and civil society organizations, from twenty-nine countries, we met in Nadi, Fiji from August 12-16 at a Global Conference on Economic Globalization: The Island of Hope. We share the conviction of the Pacific Churches and commit ourselves to this vision as well:

*“Spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are components of the concept of the Island of Hope which prioritises relationships, celebrates quality of life and values human beings and creation over the production of things. The Island of Hope is an alternative to the project of economic globalization which entails domination through an unjust economic system.”*¹

As we begin the millennium the churches find themselves confronted by the consequences of the process of economic globalization. It has become apparent to many of us that the negative aspects of economic globalization are incompatible with the reign of God and our discipleship with Christ. There is something seriously wrong with an economic system that produces so much suffering and poverty, exploitation of labour and widespread environmental devastation.

¹ from the Island of Hope : The Pacific Churches Response to Economic Globalization, p. 13

This global conference met in the Pacific Island of Fiji at the invitation of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Central to the meeting was the presentation of a document called “The Island of Hope” that will be distributed by the WCC together with this statement. For the Pacific Churches “The Island of Hope” represents life-centred values deeply rooted in Pacific communities, which provide an orientation for a just and sustainable economy and a life of dignity.

Today the ecumenical movement is faced with a profound challenge. This challenge is posed by a competing vision to that of *oikoumene*, the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth². This competing vision is part and parcel of economic globalization. In its negative effects economic globalization becomes an expression of the emerging global system of domination, of one ideology, one political system, one international coalition of the wealthy and the powerful.

The Christian vision of One World is a vision of compassion for the weak and the marginalized. It is a vision of cooperation with all people of goodwill in defense of creation. It is a vision of solidarity with those forced to survive the tidal waves of injustice sweeping across our globe.

² *oikoumene* is the Greek word for the whole inhabited earth, God’s household of life; the word *oikos* means house or household so that economy is about the ordering of the household and ecology about its logic.

Churches and many people have come to recognize that this is a “kairos”³ – a time for resistance and a time for alternatives. It is a time for the churches to offer prophetic guidance and leadership to the world. In order to do this the WCC has been consulting its member churches around the world to find acceptable alternatives. Other consultations in Bangkok and Budapest helped churches to better understand and challenge not only the logic of economic globalization, but also the underlying paradigm, the major actors, and the loss of sovereignty and democratic control it entails. In Fiji we were inspired by “The Island of Hope” presented to us by the churches of the Pacific Islands.

“The Island of Hope” represents life-centred values deeply rooted in Pacific communities, which provide an orientation for a just and sustainable economy and a life of dignity.

³ *Kairos* is another Greek word for the right moment, a moment of crisis and a chance for something new to begin, when a clear Christian witness is required. The “*kairos* document” was a wake up call in the struggle against apartheid.

VISION

The “Island of Hope” is a fitting expression of the global, ecumenical concept of the Kingdom of God in the Pacific context. Jesus called us into this Kingdom of God. God’s inheritance is one of generosity and reciprocity and the sharing of communal resources. It requires hospitality to the stranger and the affirmation of all human beings as sisters and brothers in the family of God.

The values of globalization as the people of the Pacific experience them, stand in stark contrast to the values of the Kingdom taught by Jesus⁴, while the traditional values of the Pacific Island societies are similar to Kingdom values.

We are not saying that the traditional values of Pacific Island societies are identical with the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. We are all too conscious that negative forces were also at work and traditional ideals were not always lived out in Pacific societies. However, if the best of Pacific’s lived traditions are put together, they offer viable alternatives to the destructive ways associated with globalization.

“The Island of Hope” is life-centred, affirming the very soul of the Pacific Islanders. The concepts of **whenua**, **fenua**, **enua**, **vanua**⁵ all mean that the land is the people’s identity, life and soul. Land is people, resources, cultures, beliefs, spirituality, languages, social systems, and the sea. The practical outcome of this understanding is communitarian sharing and distribution of resources with the absence of the selfish pursuit of wealth. While Western economics revolve around profit and economic growth,

⁴ cf. Island of Hope document p.12

⁵ This is a common word, only differently pronounced in different Pacific languages.

the traditional economies of the Pacific are concerned with people and the total quality of their lives; caring and concern for others within the extended families and compassion for all people, especially for the sick and elderly are values of the communities; respect, hospitality, generosity, and forgiveness are other marks of the traditional communities. Nobody is excluded.

The land, the sea and people are integral parts of one entity. Subsistence farming, a sustainable agriculture and the sensitivity of the sacredness of the trees and the sea are part of their identity. While traditionally these values operated mainly within the context of the wider family or clan, Jesus challenges us to extend them to all, because we are all members of the family of God.

Over many years the World Council of Church has articulated criteria to help its members discern the difference between islands of hope and reefs of despair. In the presentation on the Island of Hope we recognize our own ecumenical journey. For example:

- Responsibility – one of the oldest traditions of the Christian Church is that power and privilege carries equivalent social responsibility. The most powerful people, churches, nations and corporations bear the most responsibility for addressing the problems of the world. It is also true that we must be accountable for the consequences of our actions.
- Justice – The Christian Churches follow Jesus Christ and the Prophetic tradition in demanding a right relationship with God and with our neighbours. This means recognizing and defending the

human rights of all God's children and an equitable sharing of all the world's resources.

- Participation – The dignity of every person is compromised without the right to participate in decisions which affect them. The World Council of Churches has consistently supported these historic struggles.
- Sustainability – Human technological capacity is struggling with the sin of pride by refusing to acknowledge that only God is without limits. The ecological limits of the globe are being challenged as well as the social limits of human communities.
- Peace – The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Peace, not violence, a Kingdom of Reconciliation not militarism. God can only be glorified when peace on earth is enjoyed by ALL the people of God, especially women and children, minorities and the vulnerable.
- Integrity of Creation – The Kingdom of God includes the whole of creation which sighs together in anticipation of the coming reign of Peace.

Our challenge today is to discern whether the current vision of economic globalization represents a world of compassion or indifference, a world of solidarity or domination and oppression, an ocean of hope or despair.

The Island of Hope challenges us to recognize God's presence in all of the cultures of the world. When we affirm the integrity of local culture, we resist the temptation to stand alone, each on our own island, for as disciples of Christ we are called to stand together.

Our challenge today is to discern whether the current vision of economic globalization represents a world of compassion or indifference, a world of solidarity or domination and oppression, an ocean of hope or despair. The Island of Hope challenges us to recognize God's presence in all of the cultures of the world.

ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION: MEANING AND LOGIC

Economic globalization has different meanings for different people, groups and communities. Highlighting the basic characteristics, we may define economic globalization as a process of

- transnationalization of capital, most prominently ensuring the mobility of finance capital round the globe, round the clock,
- process of centralization of capital via mergers and acquisitions,
- transnationalization of production, e.g. the sales of foreign affiliates of transnational corporations (TNCs) is over \$14 trillion as against an export trade of just half of it,
- standardization of consumer tastes,
- legitimization of the process by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organization (WTO).
- unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of self-appointed “rulers” in the economy, the media and other spheres of life without legitimization by democratic processes.

The theoretical rationale of this process is rooted in the assumptions of neo-classical economics. Making no reference to basic needs of the community, this economic paradigm assumes that wants are unlimited, while the means to satisfy them are limited. The most efficient allocation of these scarce resources is secured through setting the prices via the competitive market mechanism. The recurring theme of IMF, World Bank, WTO literature is summed up in the expression “set prices right”. Given this organizing principle, earth’s resources become raw materials and the global commons, such as the ocean, atmosphere, forests and even individual labour power are subordinated to capital.

Indeed, it legitimizes exclusion and non-participation of the weak and less endowed by its own logic. It rationalizes expansion unto the end of the earth and has coined such widely used phrases like “developed countries”, “developing countries”, “least developed countries” and so on. The big truth that development of a community is culturally rooted is simply thrown overboard. Now what are the consequences?

THE IMPACT

In the midst of increasing plenty, rapid technological advancement, export-led growth (devaluation, export-zones etc.), we encounter deepening poverty, including unemployment (“jobless” growth), intolerable inequality, destruction of life-support systems and continuing exclusion and marginalization. The number of absolute poor in South Asia has doubled in less than three decades. Although poverty has decreased in East Asia, the number of absolute poor is around 278 million, bigger than the size of USA’s population.

Africa and its people exemplify the worst case of exclusion and deprivation. Environmental degradation puts additional pressure on poor communities. Africa has a large refugee population in distress. The situation is further aggravated by the HIV/Aids pandemic. The number of people who earn less than one dollar per day is over 1.5 billion of which 70% are women.

People in the industrial countries also increasingly become victims of economic globalization. The rate of unemployed people, poor people, street children is also growing in highly industrialized countries. In the field of employment, the key words under economic globalization regime are informalization, casualization and feminization of labour. Typical is the case of

People in the industrial countries also increasingly become victims of economic globalization. The rate of unemployed people, poor people, street children is also growing in highly industrialized countries. In the field of employment, the key words under economic globalization regime are informalization, casualization and feminization of labour. Typical is the case of garment industry where mostly women (90%) are working under very exploitative conditions. This industry can be found wherever wages are low, including Fiji.

garment industry where mostly women (90%) are working under very exploitative conditions. This industry can be found wherever wages are low, including Fiji.

While developing countries sink deeper and deeper into debt, the value of finance capital transactions delinked from production in a year is over 600 trillion dollars per annum. This game continues merrily although the East Asia crisis is still not yet over, and Argentine, Turkey,

Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Indonesia are today facing acute foreign exchange crisis and debt problems. This is to be seen along with the fact that the estimated reverse flow of resources to the North by way of debt repayment, royalties, brain drain, adverse terms of trade is over \$500 billion.

Under the rules of WTO regime, but with the whip of sanctions held before them, the

developing countries face food insecurity, depressing agricultural prices and marginalization of small farmer categories. Subsidies to inputs, operating costs, preferential user charges, public distribution system are “actionable categories”, under the WTO Agreements. The interests of developing countries, which are home to the vast majority of known species and

thus very rich in their biodiversity, cannot be served under the regime of the Agreement on Trade Related Property Rights (TRIPs). As it is today, TRIPs can serve only corporate interests such as biotech industries and corporate plant breeders.

Through their voting power and control USA⁶ and other G7⁷ countries manage the IMF and WB and the economic and financial management in a substantial measure. The US dollar remains the effective reserve currency and international media of exchange. Being the unchallenged super power backed by military and support of G-7, USA is virtually the policeman of the world and controls the empire of finance capital. The impact of economic globalization cannot be evaluated independently of policies of this super power.

All these have to be seen and understood in the background of the crisis of governance the nation-states of the world encounter today. While they have to roll back their intervention in favour of the private sector, which includes even cutting expenditure on vital areas like education, health or social security, or abdicating responsibility in terms of public utilities and governing them efficiently the people of the developing world face their moment of truth.

Youth in particular are affected by the negative impacts of economic globalization.

The lack of new jobs hurts the young first. The loss of jobs make the young vulnerable to violence, drugs and even suicide. Social and environmental dete-

rioration is the struggle for upcoming generations and threatens their future. If youth lose their hope, then the whole society will suffer.

Women are the most victims of globalization in the North *and* in the South because they do most of the unpaid work in the informal sector and the hardest and lowest work in the formal sector. Women often accept any job to help their families to survive. This is misused by the TNCs to undermine efforts regarding the implementation of social standards in their own operations.

The devastating social effects are accompanied by destruction of the natural environment. The United States, the single largest polluter alone accounts for 25 % of world's total carbon emissions. Global warming is a threat to communities all around the world. People in Africa experience changing rainfall patterns with droughts on the one hand and devastating floods on the other. The Pacific islands are especially vulnerable. They contribute only 0,6% to the greenhouse gas emissions, yet they will sink, if people in other parts of the world and especially in the most polluting countries in the North do not act. The US government, however, and corporations active in mining, car production and the energy sector, work actively against even modest measures to decrease greenhouse gas emission proposed by the Kyoto protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

⁶ Armed with Super 301 and Special 301, the USA puts itself virtually above WTO or other international regulatory mechanism.

⁷ USA, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy.

MAKING A CHOICE

“Serve God not Mammon” (cf. Mt 6:24) was the title of the message of the Budapest consultation of Churches in Central and Eastern Europe in June 2001. The ethics of economic globalization are ethics of competition and domination, which favours individualism and fosters consumerism at the expense of social cohesion and sustainability of the community of life. The ethics of “The Island of Hope” are based on the deep respect for the whole community of life. It fosters a culture of sharing and caring, based on justice. Its values reflect God’s care for creation and Christ’s teaching to love one another and do justice to the poor.

Following Christ, we must make a choice. We oppose the ethics of economic globalization and join others who do the same. This choice is costly. It requires us to share what we have. It demands of us a commitment to give up what binds us to the system that exploits and enslaves our sisters and brothers (Mk 10: 17-31). It leads into conflict and perhaps into persecution (Mk 10:32-34). Making this choice is a question of life and death.

We are obliged to choose between serving God or Mammon, power or people. Everyone, politicians and business people included, are responsible for the consequences of their actions. We will be held accountable by the people who suffer the

consequences. We have a chance to turn around (Mt 6:12.13). We also hear the promise of the Gospel that choosing life will create an alternative and truly ecumenical community of sharing and solidarity (Mt 14:13-21; Acts 2:41-47) in response to the prayer “that all may be one as we are one” (Joh 17:11).

The project of economic globalization pretends with religious fervour that

The ethics of “The Island of Hope” is based on the deep respect for the whole community of life. It fosters a culture of sharing and caring, based on justice. Its values reflect God’s care for creation and Christ’s teaching to love one another and do justice to the poor.

economic growth, free flow of capital and the allocation of resources and goods through the market mechanism serve the common

good. But the market as an instrument is amoral and does not automatically lead to more justice and quality of life. It rather aggravates existing inequality and unequal distribution of power and leads to massive exclusion and environmental destruction. This is the reason why resistance and alternatives become essential and urgent.

The movement to struggle against economic globalization is growing. There are many positive examples for action taken by people in North and South. This movement is confronted with the powerful forces of economic globalization that are promoted by global media, massive advertisement for consumer goods and even military presence and interventions. The existing alternatives, however, motivate and inspire the movement to continue its struggle.

ALTERNATIVES

Churches and communities are defending, affirming and announcing that solidarity and love among human beings are central values in life. These values, although they are not priced at the Market, have the strength of God. Solidarity with the Pacific churches and people promoting “The Island of Hope” is an expression of our common struggle and our common search for alternatives to face economic globalization. “The Island of Hope” and the alternatives inspired by it resonate all around the world:

From Africa we heard about the concept of “UBUNTU”; going back into ourselves and the knowledge of our communities, to find solutions to problems, through sharing traditional values of inclusiveness, sense of community, reconciliation, participation, dialogue, partnership, hospitality and fellowship.

UBUNTU inspires work for a people-centred economy, that provides food security, the exchange of goods and services, especially by women.

Participants from Asia showed us the concepts of “gotong-royong” (togetherness), in Indonesia, “bayanihan” (collective living), in the Phillipines, “panchasila” (five principles of peaceful living), in India, “daedong yundae” (great solidarity), in Korea, against the culture of domination, competition and individualism, taught by economic globalization. Asia’s richness has secured the food and basic needs of the developed countries, leaving people to share the leftovers among themselves. Asia has a potential but neglected and exploited domestic economy that needs to be recovered, protected and maximized.

Sharing and attending to one’s another needs is a central element in the lives of the Pacific people as stated in “The Island of Hope”. Cooperation and partnership recognizing mutual

Subsistence economy is still important for the life of the people and merits much more attention and support compared to the destructive effects of the monetarized economy and the spirit of competition that accompanies it.

interdependence is an alternative to economic globalization based on individualism and dominance. Subsistence economy is still important for the life of the people and merits much more attention and support compared to the destructive effects of the monetarized economy and the spirit of competition that accompanies it.

Western European and Canadian participants underlined the importance of sharing and interdependence in churches’ networks worldwide. Examples were presented of people active in advocacy campaigns and developing alternatives to the consumerist lifestyle, e.g. fair trade and ecological products, or more ecological transport systems. Highlighted were also alternative forms of financial investments like oikocredit and others, which are supported by people in industrialized countries.

The group from Central and Eastern Europe pointed to the importance of protecting the spiritual heritage of the countries in the region, caring for family as a basic unit of society and encouraging the value of sharing. Participants from Latin America and the Caribbean reminded us about communal values shared by their Indigenous cultures. Building on their teachings, poor and unemployed develop alternatives such as bartering systems, communal-collective labour, and the sharing of food. They practice economies of solidarity.

We were also reminded of the vital contributions of women's networks that oppose male domination entrenched in economic oppression. We heard of the enormous experience of Indigenous Peoples communities all around the world that live alternatives of collective labour, bartering and sharing of food and shelter as values opposed to private-corporate neo-liberalism. We also want express our appreciation for the important contributions of the youth participants in our meeting and for the document of the youth consultation on "The Island of Hope" that preceded our consultation. Youth celebrates the joy of dreaming and acting passionately to overcome selfishness and isolation, deadly values brought up by economic globalization.

The rich sharing between the regions shows that there are many different forms of life in community and economies helping people to survive and live in dignity. Christianity had to learn the hard way that the good news of the Gospel has to be contextualized in order to be meaningful for God's people in their diversity. The same applies to the economy. The economy is to serve and not to dominate the society. The concrete shape needs to be different according to the social, cultural, environmental and historical conditions of societies and their value systems. In each situation it has uniquely to be decided, which kind of political framework and intervention is

The economy is to serve and not to dominate the society. The concrete shape needs to be different according to the social, cultural, environmental and historical conditions of societies and their value systems. In each situation it has uniquely to be decided, which kind of political framework and intervention is necessary to make the economy function, how to find the right balance between state, communal and private initiatives, between local and global orientation, production and consumption.

necessary to make the economy function, how to find the right balance between state, communal and private initiatives, between local and global orientation, production and consumption.

Given the formidable challenges thrown up by economic globalization, alternative strategies have to be envisaged on three levels: long term, medium term and short term.

Keeping the vision of a just society and world order as against the corporate utopia now under way, the following measures were discussed during the meeting:

Campaign to restructure global institutions based on a global constituent assembly from which a peoples' assembly and new financial architecture will be created.

Vital issues like global accumulation without responsibility, transparency and accountability to the global community, drug trafficking and money laundering, rampant sex tourism including child prostitution, globalization of crime, global gambling and speculation, unjust international division of labour, widening inequality of income should engage the agenda of any UN assembly.

The dominant technological paradigm that keeps people redundant must yield to one that absorbs more labour and less pollution. This is the value of a new world order which will encompass the following medium term measures:

- work for local self government and participatory governance;

- implement a code of conduct for TNCs;
- introduce a tax on incoming finance capital and a fund to provide for better health for all

“The Island of Hope”, as we experienced it during these days, calls the churches and the ecumenical organizations to:

- Strengthen and continue the process of clarification, critique and work on proposing alternatives to economic globalization.
- Work on a theology of reconstruction and deconstruction that promotes communities of life and wholeness, which affirm human dignity and build confidence.
- Be fully involved in the struggles of the people, specially churches that are rooted in communities where the poor and the deprived live.
- Support regions in their own efforts and outcomes and the exchange among them..
- Call on the churches to provide opportunities for young people to be educated on the implications and effects of a globalized economy so that young people can strengthen their faith, values and dreams and bring them to reality.
- Call on the youth of the world to participate and be active on initiatives by churches and the ecumenical movement. Their gifts as youth are needed in the struggle for justice and abundant life
- Make sure that the Decade to Overcome Violence addresses the economic root causes of violence in its many forms.
- Co-operate with social movements, such as World Social Forum, Focus on Global South, Third World Network, Jubilee South and others.
- Encourage the development of traditional economies. Subsistence economies, for instance, need to be re-evaluated and seen as partial alternatives to globalization- especially in developing countries. Subsistence production ensures self-

sufficiency, sustainability, food security, livelihood for many and it is important that the existence of a dual economy (cash/subsistence) be acknowledged and applauded. The cash economy alone does not have to dominate the world.

- Organize encounters with International Financial Institution’s and the World Trade Organization not focusing on how to make the prevailing economic model work, but how to make it different.
- Work for radical changes in the current economic system that:
 - Put people first.
 - Restore national and people’s control over development.
 - End protectionism in the world’s richest countries.
 - Give priority to the poor.
 - Make multinationals accountable and transparent to civil society
 - Make international organizations (IMF, World Bank, WTO) subject to democratic decision-making.
 - Build democratic space for genuine debate.
 - Regulate financial transactions with instruments that avoid flying capitals or speculation, such as currency transaction tax.
 - Help in the enforcing of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. Every country is responsible on reducing air pollution.
 - Learn from the experience of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) and work towards an Exxon boycott⁸ as a method of the work on Climate Change.

⁸ Especially youth supported this initiative to boycott Exxon Mobil by a number of Environmental NGOs, see www.stopesso.com

AFFIRMATION OF THE ISLAND OF HOPE

The Pacific Islander delegates have called the churches and ecumenical organizations to be in solidarity and participate in the prophetic voice of the Island of Hope. They have begun to work for an alternative to economic globalization with the small Pacific Islands coming together in solidarity. World-wide partnership in solidarity, which is a reflection of the triune God's partnership, will set free unthinkable potential and positive transformation in the world.

The representatives of different regions brought together by the WCC have received the Pacific Churches' response to economic globalization: Island of Hope. They expressed their thanksgiving and our solidarity with the people and churches in the Pacific. The document on the Island of Hope will be sent to churches and ecumenical organizations all around the world together with this report.

The sharing of stories and values of the Pacific not only inspired all of us together but challenged everybody to accompany the Pacific people in their struggle against injustice. This meeting has helped all of us to better understand the struggle of the people in the Pacific region and also to see how well Pacific values resonate in other parts of the world. We want to assure the people of the Pacific that their struggle is our struggle and their concern is our concern.

Encourage the development of traditional economies. Subsistence economies, for instance, need to be re-evaluated and seen as partial alternatives to globalization—especially in developing countries. Subsistence production ensures self-sufficiency, sustainability, food security, livelihood for many and it is important that the existence of a dual economy (cash/subsistence) be acknowledged and applauded. The cash economy alone does not have to dominate the world.