



Busan Communication Statement

Reclaiming communication for life, justice and peace

Statement from the International Consultation on the Theme of the World Council of Churches' 10th Assembly: A Communication Perspective held in Busan, Korea, 22-25 May 2012 and organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), and the Korean Host Committee (KHC).

Preamble

The world is a very different place from when the World Council of Churches addressed the issue of communication at the Uppsala (1968) and Vancouver (1983) Assemblies. Today, people everywhere, even children, share their stories through media platforms – ranging from Internet-based social networks to the initiatives of citizen journalists – that are more powerful than those available to churches, governments and media conglomerates 30 years ago.

Political, economic, social, and cultural structures have been transformed by globalization and technological innovation. Yet, important elements of our context remain unchanged. Urgent questions of justice and equality need to be addressed all over the world, not least in countries suffering repression, conflict and poverty.

As the World Council of Churches prepares to gather on the Korean peninsula, we are mindful of the role played by communication in deepening divisions that have lasted for generations, but also in sowing the seeds of reconciliation.

In today's world, despite the potential of social media, a few powerful corporations and individuals continue to decide whose voices are heard and what images are seen by the public, allowing them to shape policy, form public opinion, and move people toward war or peace.

The integrity of the journalistic enterprise has been compromised by media conglomerates and challenged by new forms of media. Some media workers, journalists included, have dared to lift up the concerns of the excluded and to interpret with insight how power flows today.

Communicators who discern the ebb and flow of political, economic and cultural power in a particular time and place can use their insights to denounce the abuses of the powerful and to defend the dignity of widows and orphans, outcasts and strangers. Communicators can also announce the good news of how God is working in our midst to bend human history toward justice and peace.

Communication for Life, Justice and Peace

During World War II, many women – including many Koreans – were forced into sexual slavery by Japanese soldiers. Euphemistically, these victims of war were known as “comfort women”. Beginning on 8 January 1992, a group of survivors gathered each week in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul asking for a formal apology from the Japanese government. When they held their one thousandth gathering on 14 December 2011, they unveiled a statue of a bare-foot girl seated on a school chair. Beside her is an empty chair that invites people to sit next to her in solidarity. As Christian communicators we are called to sit next to this little girl and be witnesses in service to life, justice and peace.

God of Life

What if God had not spoken?

According to the Genesis account, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” According to John's Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word. [...] All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

Without communication there would be no life. Creation was, and is, an act of communication. Communication was, and is, an act of creation.

All living beings consist of many cells that can only survive if there is communication between them. In the traditional Eastern worldview, as well as that of many indigenous peoples, the universe is understood to be an integrated whole, an interdependent organism. This view helps us to see that communication is the essence of life and that human beings are in communication with all creation.

Communication also plays a vital role in confronting threats to life. It affirms life by promoting truth-telling, fairness, participation, dialogue, openness, and inclusion. Communication that

threatens life is characterized by censorship, misinformation, hate-speech, lies, and exclusion.

Communication can strengthen people's ability to identify and respond to threats to life and can advocate for those made invisible and excluded. In a world that has enabled people of different backgrounds, religions and cultures to be more aware of each other and their inter-connectedness, communication has the potential to promote life together in faith, hope and love.

Lead us to Justice

Communicators are called to take a stand for justice. The struggle for the dignity of all women, all men, requires that communicators become effective advocates for human rights – including the right to communicate – as well as defenders of the integrity of all creation.

Communication in the way of Jesus must promote wholeness and the common good. According to Philippians 2:7, “Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” That means He served all people, especially taking up the cause of the poor, the suffering, the outcasts, the weak and the oppressed. Communicators for justice will empty themselves and act as servants of the Gospel – even if this means challenging structures of power.

Prophetic communication opens up alternative horizons that are not limited to the perspectives imposed by the dominant culture. Prophetic communication empowers individuals and communities to tell their own stories and to craft their own images and gestures. Communicators must ensure that those who have been silenced have access to the media they need in order to share their views with the larger world.

Lead us to Peace

Communication can sow understanding or misunderstanding, harmony or discord. Those who challenge injustice use communication to empower. Those who deny justice use communication to disempower. Communicators for peace seek to create images and tell stories that respect the values and traditions that lie at the heart of other people's lives. Such images and stories can strengthen inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding, challenge stereotypes, and promote societies that are able to live together in peace, affirming what they hold in common as well as what separates them.

Communication for peace creates opportunities for people to consider and value non-violent responses to potential and actual conflict. Communication for peace reveals backgrounds and contexts, listens to all sides, exposes hidden agendas and highlights peace initiatives no matter their origin.

The complexity, scale and diversity of the conflicts that exist in today's world means that no single news source can hope to address adequately the challenge of communicating about conflict or ways of creating sustainable peace. Opening eyes and ears to diverse sources of information and knowledge fosters the depth and breadth of understanding that allows people to make informed decisions.

Reclaiming communication

Communication rights claim spaces and resources in the public sphere for everyone to be able to engage in transparent, informed and democratic debate. They claim unfettered access to the information and knowledge essential to democracy, empowerment, responsible citizenship and mutual accountability. They claim political, social and cultural environments that encourage the free exchange of a diversity of creative ideas, knowledge and cultural products. Finally, communication rights insist on the need to ensure a diversity of cultural identities that together enhance and enrich the common good.

Communication for life, justice and peace affirms the centrality of communication rights to mass, community and social media and to restoring voice and visibility to vulnerable, disadvantaged and excluded people in a spirit of genuine solidarity, hope and love.

God of life, in your grace, lead us to communicate justice and peace.

Call for Action

In order to be effective communicators in today's world and to give due recognition and support to church communication workers, secular media professionals and citizen journalists, we call on the churches and their partners:

- To become communicators for life, justice and peace throughout the world and especially in the context of the peaceful reunification of Korea.
- To advocate communication rights for all.
- To train people both within the church and secular society to communicate responsibly and with integrity and to understand how media are created and consumed in a globalized world.
- To reflect on their own ways of communicating internally and externally.
- To advance media literacy, communication for participatory development, media and gender justice, and to develop contextualized toolkits on how to communicate effectively.
- To integrate the study of communication for life, justice and peace into theological training.