

Students pledge to resist Empire

WSCF students meeting in Nairobi have pledged to resist the modern day Empire and build positive alternatives.

Gathering in the Kenyan capital for a week-long programme of study and solidarity, 22 students from 19 countries have put forward a worldwide plan of action, which defines and challenges the Empire. The International Solidarity Plan calls on SCMs around the world to oppose imperial control by equipping themselves with the tools to understand and overcome: "We, the participants of the WSCF Inter-Regional Programme "Empire, Christians and Basilea" believe that we live under a global system of domination that constitutes an Empire. We believe that the Empire's political, economic and military powers are used to subjugate the many for the profit of the few. We believe that naming the powers that control our world is the first step in being liberated from the Empire's ideological captivity. The next steps are unmasking and engaging the Empire and creating alternatives."

Meeting at the All Africa Council of Churches Guesthouse from 31 July to 9 August, programme participants were led in a threefold process of study, reflection and action which set out to name, unmask and engage the powers of the Empire. The



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▲ Students at the 2006 WSCF Inter-Regional Programme "Christians, Empire and Basilea" labour on the construction of a sand dam with workers from the Utooni water project in the Machakos Region, Kenya.



Photo © WSCF/M. Wallace

▲ Students at the 2006 WSCF Inter-Regional Programme "Christians, Empire and Basilea" strategise ways to globally network for positive change. Pictured from left are; Nimie Blamo, Leonard Ogbajah, Rosie Venner, Paska Cherotich Valentine and Ruth Ngotty.

students identified institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, European Union, IMF and World Bank as actors in the Empire and named multinational corporations and rich nations as the Empire's unacknowledged rulers.

A cornerstone of the programme were the Bible study sessions led each day by the Rev'd Chris Ferguson. Students analysed Biblical empires through the studies and looked closely at the impact of the Roman Empire in Jesus' life and ministry. Jeremiah Jenkins (USA) said that for him the Bible studies undergirded the whole discussion of Empire:

"We were able to use the Bible as a tool for thoughtful reflection on Empire, on injustice and on the Basilea of God - a vision of egalitarian social and economic relationships. From the critique of the monarchical state in Samuel, to Jesus' edicts against Roman authority and even an exploration of Paul's suggestion to obey governmental authority, we were able through dialogue to explore

the theological and biblical insights to both Empire and Basilea giving our socio-political work a spiritual depth, and for many of us, strengthening our faith and resolve."

Participants then moved on to assess the structures that allow the world's most powerful individuals, nations and organisations to control trade, supersede governments and impose their military might around the globe in the name of profit. They found where it profits the wealthiest few, the Empire will support the rule of repressive and corrupt governments, subjugate indigenous peoples' rights and utilise patriarchal structures that deny the rights of women.

Each participant helped put Empire into context with a presentation of how it impacts on life in his or her own country. The scope of the Empire was a surprise to Fei Skyvalaki (Greece) who found that, "Empire is everywhere; it can exist even there that we cannot imagine". Palestinian student Bissan Qumsieh shared that her vision of Empire

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had been enlarged and challenged in some unexpected ways:

"I realised that the concept of Empire exceeds beyond America and Israel and what they are doing to the Palestinians at the economic level. It also exceeds what America is doing to the whole Arab world. I discovered that America, as the most economically powerful country in the world, is benefiting from all poor people, even their own people, the Americans. The American economic system does not differentiate between American or Arabic, or between Christian or Muslim as long as they are profiting and becoming even more powerful".

A key part of the threefold process was the unmasking or "judging" approach to the Empire's founding myths. Together the students unravelled the logic of Empire and its claim that nothing should stand in the way of profit. In their final critique they decried the myth that "over-production, materialism, competition, individualism, mass-consumerism, violence and coercion" are all essential and rational. Indonesian SCMer Freddy Pandiangan pointed out that a vital step in unmasking the Empire is to realise how you might be enjoying its benefits, "Whether they like it or not, many people enjoy the benefits of Empire and they don't realise that they have become the perpetrators of Empire. There are so many disparities because of the hegemony of the Western over the Eastern countries". British SCMer Rosie Venner felt inspired by the "unmasking" process:

"The Empire fools us by insisting that 'There is no alternative'. No alternative to the neo-liberal economic model. No alternative to force. No alternative to individualism. But the thread running through the WSCF programme was a phrase from Liberation theology: The world is not as it should be, it can and must be changed". At the third stage of dealing with



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▲ A group of Empire programme participants take a break during the rural solidarity visit. From left: Normand Ndayizeye (Burundi), Rosie Venner (UK), Nimie Blamo (Liberia), (behind) Leonard Ogbajah (Nigeria), Bissan Qumsieh (Palestine), Georgine Kengne Djeutane (Cameroon), Lena Taub (Puerto Rico) (obscured), Sunita Suna (India), Juan Luis Loza León (Mexico), Paska Cherotich Valentine (Kenya) and Jeremiah Jenkins (USA).

Empire students were challenged to "engage the powers" by getting involved in processes and projects for positive change.

They returned to the Bible to encounter Jesus' vision of Basilea— as the ultimate positive alternative to the Empire of his time. Next they began to look for signs of God's reign of peace and equity already underway in the work of communities and people's movements. Hopeful signs of Basilea were strongly evident in the exposure and solidarity part of the programme, which took the group to visit NGOs working in the Korigocho and Kibera slums and to a community-initiated water project in the Machakos region.

Nigerian student Leonard Ogbajah was impressed with what he heard from the Kenyan NGO workers. He believes the SCMs and the churches should take themselves seriously as potential agents for social change:

"I believe that the church, and more particularly young Christians, need to be armed with the right kind of teachings so that we can affect our communities positively. We need to be constantly transformed as a church and as individual Christians to be able to bring the much needed change around us." As a student from Europe, Fei Skyvalaki was particularly moved by the poverty she

encountered, "When we went to the slums I was shocked. My first thought was "Oh my God, how can they live here, under such conditions?" I felt angry because the rest of the world is letting those people live like that and then I felt guilty because I am part of the "rest of the world". Despite these feelings, Fei was not left with an overriding sense of despair, in fact she felt hopeful due to the commitment and drive of those she'd met who were working for change. Rosie Venner shared Fei's sentiments, "The only word I can think of is overwhelmed". Overwhelmed not by the poverty in the slums but by the enthusiasm of the young people we met. Overwhelmed not by the lack of resources in the rural area, but by the generous hospitality that we were shown by the families we stayed with. Our "debrief" session was emotional, with many of close to tears, not I think because of the hopelessness of what we had experienced, but because of the signs of hope that we had seen". Australian SCMer Eloise Wright found that the exposure and solidarity visits had another benefit for the programme as a whole, " Living and working with these people (from the Utooni Water project) really helped our group to refocus our discussions and move towards producing ideas for action which can be grounded in the specific daily lives of our communities".

Participants departed in this spirit, with many fired up to begin or continue work on positive projects back home. Participants have gone back to Pentecostal, Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches and to their movements in Romania, Australia, Cameroon, Indonesia, USA, Palestine, UK, Mexico, Liberia, Greece, Egypt, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Burundi, Puerto Rico and Kenya. To date seven of the students have told WSCF of new projects and actions they are working on in their own countries as a result of attending the programme. The WSCF International Solidarity plan and the programme's final definition of Empire can be viewed on the WSCF global website at www.wscfglobal.org under WSCF News "WSCF students plan resistance to Empire". ■

WSCF launches global website

The WSCF Inter-Regional Office (IRO) has launched a new website for the Federation at www.wscfglobal.org.

The site offers a broad description of the life and work of the Federation under sections named "Who are we?" and "WSCF in action". It also includes sections on current WSCF news, WSCF news from other media sources, WSCF leadership and regional profiles, contact details for all national movements and regions, Senior Friends registration and a links and resources section.

Still under development, the IRO plans to complete the site in English, Spanish and French versions in 2007. Following completion next year, the site will be updated regularly by IRO staff. Senior friends of SCM Aotearoa Marcus Thomas and Julianne Clarke-Morris provided the graphic design and site content respectively, working in collaboration with WSCF General Secretary Michael Wallace.

Visit : www.wscfglobal.org

Senior friends fire up support for the Federation

Senior friends in the Asia-Pacific region and the US have stepped up their support for the Federation this year. In the United States, the US Trustees of WSCF have added to their ongoing fundraising for the Federation with a pledge to provide the newly re-organised North America region with financial and collegial support. They have opened a new drive for the WSCF's Second Century Campaign with \$278,148 in gifts and pledges toward the Campaign's two million dollar goal. In the Asia-Pacific region, former SCMer have met in Japan to strengthen links and build up the region's senior friends' network in support of the Federation.

Efforts to organise senior friends and to support the Second Century Campaign were called for by WSCF's General Assembly in 2004. The GA called for 'a formal structure for senior friends to be set up which shall exist through the regions... (and) that a specific committee be set up to establish this structure'. In fulfilment of this mandate from the GA, the IRO and the Centennial Fund Board of Trustees are working to build a global senior friends network and to energise the Second Century Campaign. The Second Century Campaign's mission is to raise two million dollars for WSCF's endowment, the Centennial Fund.

These moves come at a crucial time for WSCF as it faces changes in funding levels that are taking effect across the ecumenical world. "Senior friends are one of our greatest assets, because no-one knows the extraordinary formative value of WSCF experiences better than they do" says WSCF General Secretary Michael Wallace. "Senior friends know that nowhere else are students led into the life-altering environment that WSCF offers, with its ecumenical international forum of peers that challenge and strengthen not only their faith, but their resolve for social justice and their sense of responsibility to the world around them. The Second Century Campaign provides an excellent opportunity for senior friends and others to ensure this work continues to thrive in the future"

Asia-Pacific senior friends meeting in Tozanso, Japan this June were all participants at WSCF A-P's 1970 intensive leadership programme, the first of 32 such programmes run by the region over the last 36 years. Meeting organisers Dr. Kang Moon-Kyu (Korea) and Dr. Bungarun Saragih (Indonesia) called the meeting to animate commitment to WSCF amongst senior friends, "As senior friends we need to recognise our role in supporting the current generation



▲ Werner Gebert



▲ Senior Friends gather in Tozanso, Japan for a reunion of the 1970 WSCF Asia-Pacific ALDEC Leadership programme. Pictured are: (from back left) Ichiro Yamakawa, Takashi Hongyo, Albert Haribuan, Sandy Yule, M.Nakamura, Akuila Yabaki and Asia-Pacific Regional Secretary Necta Montes. (front from left) Kentaro Shinzuki, Amir Sirait, Kang Moonkyu, Bungaran Saragih and Marshal Fernando.

of SCMs to carry out the vital vision and mission of the Federation" they said. A-P Regional Secretary Necta Montes spoke to the gathering and focused on the need to continue forming young leaders by generating support from the more than 600 former SCMer who have taken part in the region's training events. The A-P senior friends resolved to uphold the current SCMs in their work by offering advice on vision and mission, providing financial support to the projects and operations of WSCF and organising a team to revive WSCF work in China.

At the global level, WSCF has engaged a fundraising strategist to help develop a four-year strategic fundraising plan. Canadian senior friend and expert fundraiser Robert Brukner has prepared a strategy that moves WSCF to a more professional approach to long term sustainability and fundraising.

The plan focuses on building stable effective relationships with current and prospective financial supporters and improving WSCF's asset management to increase both financial and ethical revenue from its investments. In addition to working with its current assets and supporters, WSCF plans to broaden its base of institutional funding partners. According to Robert, WSCF faces the reality that the vast pool of post WWII senior friends will decrease over the next twenty years. In order to maintain the unique ministry of WSCF for current and future students, the Federation will need the commitment of substantial numbers of senior friends to annual donations and bequests as well as putting in place a permanent fundraising programme.

The WSCF Centennial Fund will play an important role in the development of WSCF's new approach to funding. Newly-elected Centennial Fund Board of Trustees president the Rev'd Werner Gebert (Germany) is in a unique position to advocate for WSCF. He came to know the Federation as a donor representative on WSCF's Executive Committee (ExCo) from 1988-95. Werner represented the European church partners on ExCo while Executive Officer for the Service in Society Desk of EMW (Association of Protestant Churches and Missions, Germany). Mr. Gebert was elected president of the Board in May 2006, following previous presidents the Rev'd Dr Phillip Potter (Dominica) and Dr. Ken Guest (USA). Werner believes WSCF has a unique role that is essential for the health of the whole church: "The ecumenical movement is going to dry out. We are experiencing a "generation gap". In the last few decades many churches ...have concentrated on their own profiles and survival and have neglected the formation of ecumenically committed youth. It is a matter of "to be or not to be" for the churches to earmark a considerably higher percentage of the available funds for investment into young people, especially for their ecumenical empowerment. Young people need ecumenical space for the realisation of their own ideas and occasions for them to meet with youth from other countries. The WSCF is in fact the place where all this already takes place. It would be very wise for church leaders to support this federation which has more than a hundred years of experience and practice in this field" ■

WSCF gives thanks for the life of Frank Engel

Renowned Australian ecumenist and former East Asia Secretary of WSCF the Rev'd Dr Frank Engel has died, aged 94. A long-time contributor to ecumenism, anti-racism and student ministry, Frank was "one of the 20th century's outstanding ecumenical leaders" according to former NCC Australia General Secretary, the Rev'd David Gill. The son of missionary parents in Korea, Dr Engel studied theology and ministry in Australia to become a Presbyterian (and then Uniting Church) minister and went on to serve as General Secretary of both Australian and New Zealand SCMs. In 1959 WSCF recruited him for regional work, seeing that his vision, people skills and Korean background would serve him well as East Asia Secretary. During this time WSCF particularly welcomed Frank's "deep understanding and sympathy for the people" and his work on reconciliation (Thessaloniki GA, 1960). On returning home, Frank headed the Australian National Missionary Council and in 1969 was appointed General Secretary of NCC Australia. Following Vatican II, he ushered in a groundbreaking agreement for co-operation between Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Frank was active on the WCC Central Committee and on the General Committee of CCA. He was a strong supporter of the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism, motivated by his "abhorrence of discrimination of any kind". He opposed tours to Australia by the whites-only South African rugby team and pressed for more open immigration policies in Australia. In the 1960s he fought to end constitutional discrimination against Aboriginal Australians and published influential policy papers on the recognition of their land rights. After retiring in 1975, Frank earned a doctorate in theology and published two volumes on the history of the ecumenical movement in Australia. The WSCF tribute to Frank can be seen at www.wscfglobal.org - WSCF News - News Archive "WSCF mourns passing of Frank Engel (1911-2006)". ■

WSCF remembers Masao Takenaka - advocate of Asian Christian art

Japanese ecumenist and former Vice-Chairperson of WSCF Dr Masao Takenaka has died, aged 80. Dr Takenaka contributed decades of his life to social justice, ecumenical dialogue and creative expression of the Gospel through culture. He was involved in the Japanese SCM for many years and served as WSCF Vice-Chairperson from 1960-64. Takenaka presided over the North American Life and Mission of the Church (LMC) conference, helped lead two Asian LMC conferences and served as co-chairman of the International Study Fellowship committee. At the GA in 1964 he was praised for his faithful work for WSCF, for his sharp mind, quiet humour and width of human sympathy. He helped to build up the Japanese labour movement after WWII, in his work with unions and through the social justice education of Kansai Seminar House. He was in the forefront of the struggle in Japan against Emperor worship and educated Japanese people on the effects of Japan's wartime imperial rule in Asia. A long-term ecumenist, he attended the first six WCC assemblies and served as Chairman of WCC's Urban Industrial Mission. Dr Takenaka was well known for his commitment to expressing the Gospel through culture, particularly in the visual arts. He was a founder and president of the Asian Christian Art Association and was a prolific writer and publisher on themes of Gospel and culture. Dr Takenaka was professor of Christian Ethics and Sociology of Religion at Doshisha University's Graduate School of Theology, where he taught for 41 years. ■

WSCF pays respect to former global editor Audrey Abrecht

Long-time faithful SCMer and global staff of WSCF, Audrey Abrecht has died, aged 88. Audrey Abrecht was the backbone of the Federation's communications work for over twenty years as the editor of WSCF's global publications from 1949 to 1973. A dedicated SCMer, Ms Abrecht first joined SCM as a student in Calgary then Berkeley where she studied English and journalism. She became WSCF's editor when she moved to Geneva for husband Paul Abrecht's new WCC role in 1949. Over the next 24 years Audrey's editing bestowed "precision and readability" on all of WSCF's most important publications. She was Associate editor of Student World from 1949-68. For 24 years she was responsible for editing the minutes and reports from General Committees/ Assemblies and other WSCF meetings. Former WSCF General Secretary Risto Lehtonen remembers her editorial insistence on quality and accuracy, "Her editorial gifts gave everything on which she put her hand a touch of reliability and readability". Administrative assistant to Lehtonen for six years, Audrey was described by him as "a key person to bring continuity and radiate a sense of common calling to the Federation community". Risto Lehtonen's obituary for Audrey can be read on the WSCF website under WSCF News - WSCF mourns faithful long-time staff Audrey Abrecht. ■

World Student Christian Federation Contact information

Inter-Regional Office

Ecumenical Centre, 5 Route des Morillons,
PO Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2,
Switzerland.

Tel: + 41 22 791 63 58

Fax: + 41 22 791 61 52

Email: wscf@wscf.ch

Website: www.wscfglobal.org

Africa Regional Office

PO Box 14782, Nairobi, Kenya.

Tel: + 254 20 2730220

Fax: + 254 20 2730223

Email: wscf@wscf-africa.org

Asia-Pacific Regional Office

18/F, Room 1&2, 280 Portland Street

Commercial Building, Mongkok,

Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Tel: + 852 238 525 50

Fax: + 852 278 239 80

Email: wscfap@netvigator.com

Europe Regional Office

Kálvin Tér 8, 1091 Budapest, Hungary.

Tel: + 36 1219 5166

Fax: + 36 1216 5115

Email: regionaloffice@wscf-europe.org

Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office

Camacua 238, 1406 DOF, Capital Federal,

Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Tel: + 54 11 4631 219

Email: fumec@fumec-alc.org

Middle East Regional Office

PO Box 11-1375, Beirut, Lebanon.

Tel: + 9611 341 903

Fax: + 9611 341 902

Email: wscf-me@inco.com.lb

North America Regional Office

United Church of Canada Building

3250 Bloor Street West, Toronto,

Ontario M8X 2Y4,

Canada.

Tel: + 1 416 231-7680 Ext. 3118

Email: wscfna@gmail.com

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