



ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN
FORUM OECUMENIQUE DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

EFECW News

June 2020



@'Pavamani-Pentecôte', artiste Indien protestant, Notre Dame du Cénacle

«Blessed art You o Christ Our God

You have revealed the fishermen as most wise

By sending down upon them the Holy Spirit

Through them You drew the world into Your net

O lover of Man, Glory to You »

Troparion (Tone 8)

Orthodox liturgy of Pentecost

'When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' Acts 2, 1-4

Dear sisters, First of all, let me tell you, on behalf of the CC, that we are, in compassion and in union with you in these difficult times. We specially think of those who are in mourning and suffering. Be assured of our deep affection.

The health crisis that we are experiencing in the world today is giving rise to a few thoughts on my part, at this time of Pentecost, that I offer to you and to which I invite you to respond.

The disciples were confined, fearful, locked up in the Cenacle just as we were or are still confined because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At Pentecost, the disciples, prompted by the Holy Spirit, came out of their confinement. They came out of their physical confinement but also from their confinement of pre-conceived ideas, from their confinement created by fear to go and proclaim to the whole world the Good News.

Beautiful symbol and coincidence of the Christian calendar, for us too, the de-confinement begins, today in this time of Pentecost.

A de-confinement is not a static situation, it is not to remain in a closed circle among those one feels good, where one feels safe or well protected.

The de-confinement is to go out, certainly physically (we are happy about it), but it is also to go out of oneself. It is about going, like the apostles, to meet others. It is not always comfortable. One needs to leave behind prejudices and fears!

Meeting others, not to make them come to us neither to capture them, but to share with them the infinite love of our merciful God. This and only this is what proclaiming the Good News is.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the humble. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim to the captives their deliverance, to the prisoners their release, to proclaim a year of blessings granted by the Lord, and a day of vengeance for our God, console all those who are in mourning, those who are in mourning in Zion, put the diadem on their head instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a festive habit instead of a broken spirit. They will be called "Terebinths of justice", "Planting of the Lord who manifests his splendor" *Isaiah 61, 1-3*

Let us take in the Breath of the Spirit.

Perhaps we have just experienced profound changes in our lives, our family or our friends; changes in our habits of consumption or of work; in our accumulation of material goods; or in our ways of living our faith in the Church.

Admittedly, we have a legitimate desire to return to our churches, to find our parish communities and to celebrate the joy of reunion. But this crisis has also distanced us from our spiritual automatisms and made us discover to *do* Church differently.

What we are experiencing today is also a new chance to rejuvenate our faith, to re-anchor ourselves in the founding texts and rediscover the invigorating breath of the first Church turned towards charity.

«The Church does not fear to be constantly reborn to its own identity by following the calls of the Spirit which it discerns in contemporary cultural developments. This rejuvenation of the Church gives rise to a renewed way of thinking about faith, of saying it and of living it.» *Philippe Bacq in «A new chance for the Gospel - Towards a pastoral of engendering» (2004).*

De-confinement is an engendering act; an engendering act as a creative impulse for renewal.

An open, de-confined Church allows herself to be engendered by the innovative breath of the Holy Spirit. Let's not forget that the Church is we, the people of God. So let's get out of our cenacles!

Will we have the audacity not to fight the wrong battle and rather than fight only to de-confinement of the liturgies, would it not be better to fight as well for "de-confining God and get Him out of the Churches that are sometimes too closed" as *Isabelle de Gaulmyn, a French journalist and biographer suggests in an article in the newspaper "La Croix"*?

Engendering is not a lonely act; it can only exist in relationship with the other; all the extraordinary gestures of solidarity throughout the world that this crisis has engendered are a clear confirmation of this.

"From the moment one of us opens up to Life, to Love, it allows this Life to pass ... to reach out to others" *Marie Jung in "Spiritual insights into daily life"*

Creating Life is also resisting everything that degrades the human being, Faced with a deliberate destruction of the planet, our common home, we are both victims and executioners.

This pandemic brutally reminded us that we are all connected, whether we are refugees or well-established owners, slum-dwellers or princes.

Beyond the risks to our health, our societies will suffer and will have to think of different operation modes to survive even if, once the danger is mitigated, we will tend to forget, as our human memory is short when it suits it.

"Like a sphere radiating from innumerable centers, the Material World seems to us to be suspended, today, from the spiritual human consciousness." *Teilhard de Chardin, in 'My Universe', 1924.*

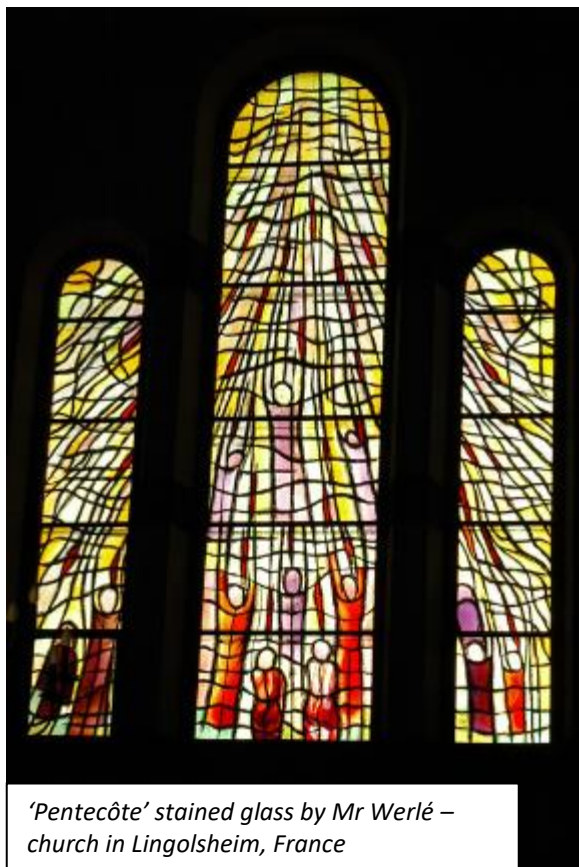
Particularly today, the aims of EFECW take on their full meaning: to strengthen the women's ecumenical network in order to develop a deeper understanding for one another; to help women explore their common European identity; to promote initiatives for peace, justice and reconciliation; to commit ourselves to action for the care of God's creation; to commit ourselves to action on behalf of women's rights, which are human rights.

Living one of the greatest challenges of our humanity, as women we have a major role to play in a commitment to solidarity and ecology, a major role to re-enchant the future.

To re-enchant the future is to give life to Hope.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us, the Christian women of the Ecumenical Forum, so that we may be free, creative women, concerned with making this world more human and showing the Father's tenderness to all and especially to wounded and abused women. May the Holy Spirit work in the depths of our hearts to help us discover, in unity, new and original ways to speak the Gospel in deeds and words.

Anne-Marie Schott, member of the Coordination Committee



'Pentecôte' stained glass by Mr Werlé – church in Lingolsheim, France

*Au milieu d'une Création qui crie sa souffrance
L'Espérance se faufile sans bruit
Elle est bien là, au carrefour de nos errances
Quand elle vient dissiper nos nuits*

*Au milieu d'un monde qui ne sait plus voir le ciel
L'Espérance chante son hymne
Il suffit que nos regards se tournent vers elle
Pour que soient chassées nos abîmes*

*L'Espérance se sème à tout vent
Et devient le germe d'une vie plus belle
Elle raffermir les coeurs en leur donnant
Une énergie nouvelle*

*Au milieu d'un quotidien
Souvent envahi par le doute ou le chagrin
L'Espérance vient rallumer la flamme
Et sécher toutes les larmes*

*L'Espérance est la Lumière
Qui donne un sens à notre vie
Et les coeurs qu'elle éclaire
Retrouvent paix et harmonie*

Prayer by Françoise Saillen

Supporting the elderly during COVID-19

Soroca, Moldova

Our EFECW member Asya Railean and the priest are supporting elderly people in Moldova during COVID-19.

The Obşteca Association "Fate" distributed packages of food and hygienic materials for the elderly in the village of Slobozea Cremene. We are thankful to the Max Face Foundation for their financial support and the Dutch people for their donations for the elderly in Moldova.



We are also thankful to the

Bishop of Soroca, Ioan Moşneguţu, and Proto-popului de Soroca, Nicolae Craveţ for the good organisation and the volunteers involved in distributing packages directly at the door of the elderly.

We are also grateful to the family of Priest Victor Ungureanu, who together with his sons Serafim Ungureanu and Ungureanu Eleazar, were our volunteers and distributed the packages at the doors of the elderly. A model family, from which we all have something to learn!



Asea Railean, ex-EFECW Co-President

and National Coordinator Moldovan Forum

9th April 2020

Dear sisters,

Moldavian forum wish all of you, the Blessed Easter Days, staying healthy and praying each other. Unfortunately, we lost two active and lively women. The COVID -19 pandemic brought these two women to heaven.

Yesterday a 55-year-old lady died, and today a 53-year-old woman.

Both are from my locality.

God forgive them.

Health for all in these hard times.

Asea



State of emergency and domestic violence

Reflections on the effect of lockdown to increase of domestic violence (Armenia)

Coronavirus has fundamentally changed our daily lives, and these changes have had both positive and negative consequences. Under our usual circumstances, many problems had ceased to exist, and many of us felt that they had been overcome.

Family members usually would wake up in the morning, greet each other warmly, have a quick breakfast or coffee, leave home for 8-12 hours, return in the evening, have dinner, spend 2-3 hours together and finally go to bed. This left little time for communication in the family, which made many seemingly manageable but in fact insurmountable problems remain hidden. But the state of emergency or isolation exposed this reality. After a couple of months of more than 12 hours a day being and communicating in the same area intensified and revealed the carefully hidden problems. Many couples began to find each other's faults unbearable. For many parents, living in a closed (and sometimes very little) space with their children life became so unbearable and stressful that they forgot the basic rules of parenting and resorted to aggressive actions and violence. Thus, during the lockdown, the number of cases of domestic violence (reported for the first time) increased in many countries, and the older cases aggravated and became crueler, as the victim had to live alone with the perpetrator in the same space for long hours and for a long period of time, becoming increasingly defenseless and vulnerable.

In almost every country, regardless of the level of development, the number of domestic violence incidences have increased along with the days of lockdown. Armenia was no exception. Throughout the state of emergency, all women's and children's advocacy organizations reported an increase in violence, and the number of women seeking for support increased by about 30 percent. Only the Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Armenia has received 13 calls on domestic violence. Note that during the same period of last year this number of calls was 5. Of course, this is not a complete picture, as under the strict control of the perpetrators at home, the victims do not have the opportunity to contact the aid agencies.

One of the women's NGOs recently published some disturbing and sad facts: a woman who was regularly abused left the house under the pretext of going to the pharmacy and asked for help from the pharmacy employee, with the help of whom it was possible to be taken to a special shelter for abused women. In another case, in order to escape from the hands of the rapist husband and save her life, the woman had to walk from her village to the capital, because during the state of emergency travelling beyond the region limits was not allowed for about two months. The woman asked for help from the first police officer, who told her that she should return to her region and file a complaint with the local police. Can you imagine the feelings of a woman who was subjected to violence and had to walk for days when she heard such an answer and the inextricable and hopeless situation after all this? In any case, it is rare for a victim of violence to dare to turn to the police, as new difficulties await her after filing an official complaint, which for many seem insurmountable, and they prefer to stay with the perpetrator.

According to the Armenian law, the abuser is given only a verbal warning, and he returns home with the victim, promising that he will not use violence again. It would be naive to think that the perpetrators keep their promises. Living with the perpetrator under the same roof after filing a complaint to the police is an unspeakable risk for the victim. In some cases, the law requires the abuser to leave the home for 18 days, after which the abuser returns home more aggressive and angry, continuing his brutal behaviour with the victim, but this time being more careful so that the victim somehow fails to turn herself to the police. In our country, the structures where the specialists will work with the perpetrators are still in the process of creation. At present many such processes are underway. Let's hope that this will be possible in the near future.

The cases presented above are unique as thankfully it was possible to rescue these women and take them to a shelter. But imagine how many women are still with the perpetrator and even deprived of the right to make a call. Probably a few months from now, new research on domestic violence will be published, and the picture of increase in violence during the lockdown will be more vivid. And now we can only hope and pray that there will be no new cases of female murder (femicide) in this period and that all women who have been abused will be able to break the vicious chain of violence and get out of that environment for their sake and the sake of their children, whose eyes are on them.

Naira Kerobyan

Social worker, psychologist, member of the Armenian EFECW



“We must enable and promote safe spaces for all”

Statement on the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and sexual and gender-based violence

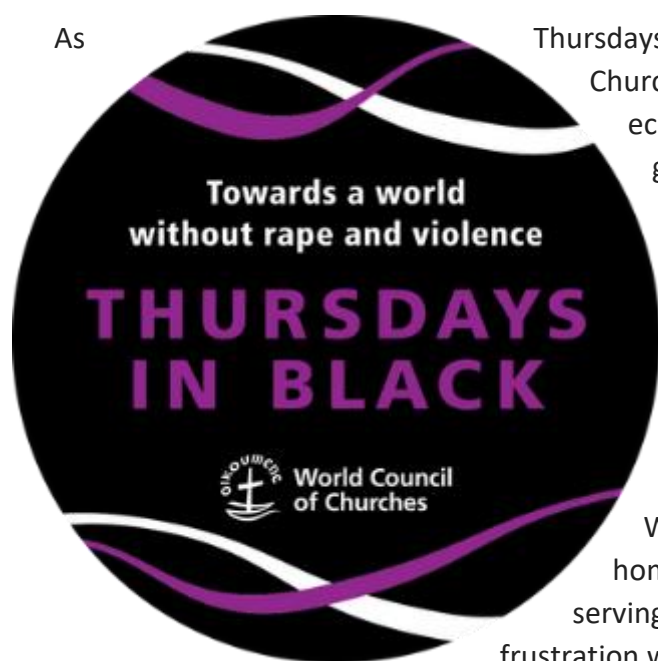
World Council of Churches (WCC) ambassadors of the Thursdays in Black campaign, 23 April 2020

‘... when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Matthew 25:39 – 40 NRSV

As countries respond to COVID-19 with necessary restrictions on movements and activities, more people are calling violence hotlines and crying for help in other ways. The effects of lockdown, job losses, and the sheer vulnerability of people who were already on the margins of society are all serious concerns. Such stresses, experts say, can contribute to higher incidences of violence. Further, the incidences of gender-based violence may be higher than reported because of the barriers to seeking help during global quarantines.

Conflicts and crises nearly always carry gender-based burdens – which can be compounded by other factors such as race and ethnicity, ability, and economics. Gender-based violence, along with other forms of violence and oppression, are exacerbated during times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different.

As



Thursdays In Black Ambassadors for the World Council of Churches, we appeal to WCC member churches, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and persons of goodwill to actively help raise awareness, protect against, and prevent rising levels of gender-based violence during this global COVID-19 pandemic. We do so as part of our longstanding individual and collective commitments to gender justice, and as part of our pilgrimage toward justice and peace. During these times, and always, we must enable and promote safe spaces for all.

We urge everyone to care for the persons in their homes, personal relationships, and in all workplaces still serving the public good. Violence is not the solution for frustration with or fears about the spread of COVID-19.

Change must take place at the grassroots as well as at the leadership levels, and we appeal to individuals and community agencies to assist in providing mechanisms for the protection of the vulnerable among us.

We encourage individuals to seek pastoral and social service care if you are experiencing stress and need support to care for and protect people in your daily life. We also invite you to participate in [Thursdays in Black](#) at home and post your photos on social media using [#ThursdaysInBlack](#).

We are inspired by churches who have already proactively responded to those in their communities with increased vulnerability, by raising awareness of helplines, ensuring people are connected,

delivering food and providing for basic needs. We encourage churches to be involved in creating physical and virtual safe spaces for those who are not safe in their homes. This can include support to local professionals and caregivers in the field of sexual and gender-based violence through prayer, space, materials, and money.

As people of faith and of goodwill, we must continue to speak and act in our communities to ensure that our responses protect everyone: from guaranteeing that those on the frontlines of caring have adequate protective gear, regardless of their place in the medical hierarchy, to finding effective and creative ways to continue services for learning, employment, counselling and support. While we need to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we must not victimize or stigmatize people in the process.

We also must look beyond the current crisis and renew our resolve to address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence that are only exacerbated during conflicts and crises. Rather than wish for a return to “normal”, which has perpetuated gender-based inequities and disparities, we can more firmly proclaim our vision for societies based on justice and peace that ultimately reduce vulnerabilities for all.

An unusual time asks for unusual responses. As Thursdays in Black ambassadors, we pray that people of faith join us in creating a world of justice and peace in these challenging times.

Signed:

Dr Agnes Abuom, Moderator, World Council of Churches Central Committee

Rev. Claudia Bandixen, Switzerland

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Dr Chris Ferguson, General Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Jouni Hemberg, Executive Director, Finn Church Aid

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Mrs Alison Judd, World President, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Larissa Aguiar Garcia, Brazil

Rev. Dr Anders Göranzon, General Secretary of the Swedish Bible Society

Rev. Damon Mkandawire, Hospital Administrator, Mbereshi Mission Hospital, Zambia

Rhee, Hanbeet, Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, Presiding Bishop Elect, Bishops' Conference of the Church of Norway

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary, World Methodist Council

Joint Statement: Gender, Faith and COVID-19

Rebuilding a Just World: Faith Actors Call for COVID-19 Responses to Tackle Gender Inequalities

Introduction

As religious actors and networks of faith-based organizations, we are called to work together for gender equality and justice, amid global changes, rising nationalism, and conflict. We are living in changing global, regional, and national environments. As COVID-19 spreads around our world, countries, communities and individuals face increasing challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many faith actors are at the forefront of the design, delivery, and implementation of a gender sensitive and holistic response based on accurate information. While also practicing social distancing, and adhering to health ministry guidelines. This urgent time calls for responsive action based on love, dignity and justice.

The COVID-19 crisis does not operate in a vacuum and, as a result, COVID-19 increases preexisting inequalities. Women and girls are experiencing intersecting injustices in political, social and economic spheres.¹ Faith in Beijing is a collective of religious actors and networks, who are calling upon governments, faith based actors and civil society, for strong responses to COVID-19 that put gender justice at the centre.

Gendered dimensions of COVID-19

Governments worldwide have struggled to adequately respond to the crisis. This is a result of decisions made by powerful leaders, which includes decades of underfunding public health services, and the multilateral health system, including the World Health Organization (WHO). For many decades, the WHO has consistently presented robust evidence about the social determinants of health, the need for health to be rooted in all policies, and observed that health cannot be separated from other policy areas. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that strong responses require intersectional approaches, which include protecting women's rights and gender equality.

Looking at COVID-19 from an intersectional gendered lens, we can see that the various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate one another. The big picture is much more complex than is often portrayed by governments. Pre-existing vulnerabilities are exacerbated during a crisis, since social and protective networks are disrupted. Under lockdown policies, many women are forced to stay at homes where they are not safe or secure. They are forced to live with abusive partners or parents, while services to survivors of gender-based violence are harder to access.² As the pandemic unfolds, we have witnessed an increase in intimate partner violence and other forms

¹ For more information, see: UN (2020) Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-theimpact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5029> [last accessed 15/04/2020]

² Many women are being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers at the same time that services to support survivors are being disrupted or made inaccessible. For more information, see: UN Women (2020) COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violenceagainst-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006> [last accessed 15/04/20]



of domestic violence. In some communities around the world, violence against women during the pandemic has been by the security agencies enforcing the lockdown, sometimes using undue force. The COVID-19 response must therefore include strategies to address and prevent Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This work must be conducted in a holistic way, with a multi-sectoral approach so that people's mental, social and physical needs are addressed. By integrating psychosocial aspects in the approach, the wellbeing, safety and hope among survivors and communities can be strengthened.

As gender injustice persists in our world, the impacts of COVID-19 will be hardest felt by women and girls. Worldwide, many people who are enrolled in health care and the related care economy are women. Occupying positions on the frontline makes women more susceptible to the risk of infection. Many people will lose their livelihoods, as already experienced worldwide with the global lockdown. This impacts the service industry and informal sector, where many women work. The closure of schools will impact girls' education now and in the long-term, with an increased risk for child marriage and child labour.³

This becomes more acute when we look at the different levels of vulnerability women might be exposed to, such as age, race, ethnicity, class, disability and immigrant status. Since health care systems are immensely pressured during COVID-19, it is important that governments worldwide continue to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. These services are essential and lifesaving, especially for women and girls, and are now more crucial with heightened risks for women and girls.

Faith and Gender Sensitive Responses

Once more we see that religious actors and faith communities can play an important role in the time of an unprecedented crisis. Faith actors are deeply rooted in the communities they serve and as such they are often the first responders. In the face of the COVID 19 pandemic, local faith institutions, religious leaders and other faith-based organizations are responding to the needs of their communities as humanitarian actors as well as leveraging their moral authority to share positive health messaging and guidance, as informed by government health ministries.

Around the globe, millions of people have been placed under lockdown to reduce transmission of the virus and halt rates of infection and death. Isolation associated with lockdowns and quarantines will have an impact on the communities that we work in and to which we belong. Faith communities are social by nature. Religious institutions and religious practices are impacted, as ceremonies that

³ Studies from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone show that girls' education was negatively affected by the Ebola epidemic. After the outbreak, less girls returned to school. For more information, see Malala Fund (2020) Girls education and COVID-19 – what past shocks can teach us about mitigating the impact of pandemics, <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19> [last accessed 15/04/20]

usually bring many of us together are being curtailed. Easter was, and Ramadan will be, marked differently this year, yet continue to be opportunities to give and receive, forgive, forbear and exercise patience.

Faith communities have a strong base from which to promote social distancing (to reduce transmission of the virus causing COVID-19), while also practicing solidarity. Service to those most oppressed must continue, albeit in new ways. Many religious leaders hold significant power and trust, sometimes more than the government. Thus, religious institutions can play a vital role in distributing accurate key public health information to their communities. As well as promoting messages of gender justice, challenging stigma and harmful gender norms.

Inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration is crucial at these times. Majority religions, with stronger relationships and trust among authorities and state officials, can collaborate with minority religions, who are extra vulnerable in many contexts. Moreover, faith actors and religious institutions with more resources and capacity to respond to this crisis can share knowledge, resources and best practices where possible with other religious communities, traditional leaders and women's rights organisations. Therefore, faith actors continue to be critical partners in addressing this crisis and in the work to come.

Post COVID-19: A Vision of Gender Justice in Our World

We, as religious actors and faith-based networks, are committed to ensuring that gender justice and equality becomes a reality around the world. We believe that Agenda 2030 is critical to ensuring that 'No One is Left Behind', and that gender equality is about equal rights for all.

As business as usual is paused, we have the opportunity to reflect upon the brokenness in our world and our economic system. In these spaces, we can begin to imagine a world rooted in equality and justice for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how globally interconnected we are and how gender injustice reveals itself at an individual and a collective level.

During this crisis, our focus will be on how best we can work together to support religious leaders and faith communities to effectively respond to increasingly challenging circumstances. In particular, our work for gender justice remains important, to ensure a just and sustainable future for all. We will continue to work within and between our faith communities to shape a world that is sustainable and where the human rights of all are respected.

Our commitment to human rights is not an arbitrary cultural or ideological preference; it is rooted in religious convictions. There can be no justice where God-given human rights are violated or where duty bearers fail to discharge their responsibilities. In this vision, we value the work of caring and nurturing within our communities. Let us seek to truly learn from those who already hold the knowledge and wisdom of alternative systems. Let us understand that one knowledge alone will never be complete. Only by truly engaging with one another from a place of humility and vulnerability, with a willingness to defamiliarise ourselves with current norms that we might see the radical shift towards a justice-centred world. This is necessary for true gender equality, as well as human and planetary flourishing.

Recommendations to Governments, Faith Based Actors and Civil Society

In the weeks, months, years and decades ahead, we will continue to work together to advocate to our governments, and within our communities, for an acceleration of action to achieve Agenda 2030. In light of this commitment, we submit the following recommendations in the midst of COVID-19 response and beyond.



A Collective Call to Governments

1. We advocate that all responses involve faith actors, and ensure coordination and meaningful partnerships between faith, traditional and secular actors. Faith actors are key in reaching communities both with essential information, providing service to vulnerable groups and promoting behaviour change and challenging harmful norms, stereotypes and stigma.
2. We advocate for the adoption of gender just policies and funding of COVID-19 response plans that holistically address the pandemic, including the secondary impacts on education, health, economy and livelihoods.
3. We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic response requires resource mobilisation, and we urge our governments to continue to fund and resource their commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. The 'domestic' workforce, where women make up 70%, are more likely to be part of the frontline response. We advocate to our governments for coordinated responses that are sensitive to the needs of women and girls, where unpaid caregivers and community health workers are provided with adequate training, equipment, and livelihood support to respond effectively and keep themselves and their families safe.
5. We advocate for a holistic development agenda that addresses intersectional injustices, including universal health coverage and gender just health systems, equality in education, economic empowerment and freedom from exploitation, violence and discrimination.

Governments must integrate a gender assessment to understand the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, including economic impact, and how to address it effectively. Governments must plan and resource its response for the long term as the impacts will continue long after we have tackled the virus.

6. We advocate for governments, faith leaders and civil society to collaborate in designating safe spaces (physical and online) for women where they can report abuse without alerting perpetrators, e.g. in pharmacies or via digital platforms.

A Collective Call to Fellow Faith-Based Actors and Civil Society

7. We advocate that political, religious and community leaders speak out against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, and ensure that survivor-centred services for women are well resourced and functioning. Awareness campaigns should be continued, and tactics that include targeting men and boys at home should be integrated.
8. We encourage faith communities to support social solidarity through whatever means are available, and for those with additional resources to support connection and community among those most at-risk.
9. Faith-based actors are already important providers of education and psycho-social support. We advocate during this time, for practices to be adapted and resourced to ensure this work continues.
10. We advocate to faith-actors to promote values of love, dignity and justice in their work to tackle this pandemic. It is vital that a non-discriminatory approach is exercised in all aspects of the COVID-19 response.
11. We advocate that political and religious leaders adopt communication channels that reach people marginalized in our communities, particularly women and girls. Women and girls may have restricted access to information in times of crises, therefore, limited access to food distribution systems, health care or accessibility to protection services.

We will not remain silent when gender inequalities are exacerbated as a result of this crisis.



Prayer

Merciful God,
who revealed your love in Your Son,
and poured out on us by the Holy Spirit,
Today in this moment at the time of the pandemic,
we entrust to you the destinies and lives of all our sisters all over the world.
Have mercy on us,
heal our weakness,
defeat every evil,
help us have a vision of better world and help us contribute.
God the Savior of the world,
make all the inhabitants of the earth



experience and feel your mercy,
so that they will always find a source of hope in you,
the One God.
Eternal Love,
after the bitter torment of your Son and His resurrection,
be merciful to us and to the whole world.
Give us a strong faith to continue supporting and
listening the quiet voice that says:
Do not be afraid!
You are not alone!
Amen

Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

European Women's Lobby (EWL) Statement

Women must not pay the price for COVID-19: Putting equality between women and men at the heart of the response to COVID-19 across Europe

The COVID-19 crisis is disproportionately impacting women and girls who are made vulnerable by our patriarchal and neoliberal capitalist system: a system that is not working for people or the planet, and most definitely not working for women and girls. In these immensely difficult times for all people and societies in Europe and globally, the EU and its Member States must show political leadership and urgently ensure that gender-sensitive responses are implemented so that the price of these current crises is not paid by women, most especially the most marginalised.

On 5th March, the European Commission launched its strategy: "A Union of equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025" setting out the key priorities to put equality between women and men back at the heart of the EU and all EU policies. This new Strategy recognises the need to integrate a gender perspective in all EU policies and major initiatives. Its effective implementation is instrumental in ensuring that the application and resourcing of special measures are targeted at women and girls who are exposed to heightened situations of vulnerability in this current global context.



As individuals, communities and families are isolated, and the delivery of essential services are limited by the current pandemic, many women and girls are even further exposed to male violence. Due to lockdown measures, victims of intimate partner violence are confined at home with their abusers, with less possibilities of seeking help without further putting their lives at risk.

We have been hearing from our Members - feminist and women's organisations throughout Europe - of the specific impact on women and girls and especially:

- Women who continue to care and provide for their own families, women who are the sole caretaker of their household, and those of others in situations of isolation, and economic insecurity;
- Women who are at risk or currently experiencing poverty, social exclusion or homelessness;
- Women who are at risk of male violence at home, or are victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking;
- Refugee and women who are seeking asylum from precarious migration tension, especially those who are currently being turned away from facilities and are forced in life-threatening situations on the street;
- Women who are already experiencing multiple discrimination in our societies such as Roma women, migrant women, women with precarious employment;
- Women with disabilities and older women who have limited or no access to ongoing and quality services and/or are living in care facilities where living in self-isolation is extremely challenging;

- Women with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression are exacerbated in this current pandemic.

As women make up the majority of those currently working in hospitals, providing essential care and cleaning services, or continue to work in retail, hospitality and education contexts that enable the rest of the community to live in self-isolation, we are reminded about how invaluable women's care work is to the wellbeing and functioning of our societies and planet. The gaps in care provisions exposed by this crisis demonstrate once again the urgency of moving towards a socio-economic model that recognises women's invaluable contributions to society and places care at the centre, where all women and men have equal, flexible options to balance their work and care responsibilities, and live a dignified life.

As feminists, we understand that women and girls will bear the burden of this situation and need to ensure that there is recognition for that throughout Europe's response which must not leave any woman or man, girl or boy behind.

We, at EWL, stand in solidarity with everyone impacted by the crisis and we will continue to demand more accountability from our leaders to build responses based on care, compassion, justice and equality for women and girls.

The EWL Secretariat, European Women's Lobby

European Women's Lobby // Lobby européen des femmes

Website: www.womenlobby.org

Facebook: European Women's Lobby

Twitter: @EuropeanWomen

Instagram: @Womenforeurope



We lift our voices for the Integrity and Well-being of God's Creation!

Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC), Circle of Prayer (CoP) Vol. 25



INTRODUCTION

“Go up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news! Lift up your voice in strength, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news! Lift up your voice, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”
Isaiah 40:9

This text of Isaiah has been identified as a prophecy that represents God's calling. It calls us to look and act in anticipation of a future that is not yet here, but that we can certainly foresee. All of this is possible because we trust in a God that is with us, reversing and transforming our present reality and encouraging us to move towards that future that is yet to come.

You can see that the call is to go up on a high mountain where nothing is hidden; but also where one can see beyond one's limited perspective. In spite of the fact that much pain and sorrow surround us, we do not fear, because God is with us - still re-creating and transforming the world and everything in it, including ourselves.

There are those who can only see doom and condemnation. Such a message pushes people into a dark pit of fear and despair. When that happens, some may feel guilty or frustrated. They are not able to find possibilities because they cannot see any. Others may continue to act as if nothing is happening. They may not hear and see because they don't want to face the reality that is crushing and suffocating all of creation.

We lift up our voices, because that is what we are, bearers of good news. This task is not done in shame or fear. The message is true, and it brings good news to those that need to hear it.

There is a command to climb the mountain, and from there, open our eyes to see the future that is approaching. There is an imperative to proclaim that God is in our midst, and that God opens new possibilities and opportunities to hear the good news of peace and reconciliation to all of Creation.

As women, bearers of good news, we lift up our voices with clarity, with boldness, with passion, with strength, with love, so that the world may know and experience the Glory of God, revealed to us in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. We lift up our voices in prayer, because we know God hears and answers!

Hear our voices through this Circle of Prayer!

Rev. Yamina Apolinaris-Concepción

Convenor, FLC CoP 25 Committee

Hope in Despair

Text: Jeremiah 29.11 - FLC Circle of Prayer (CoP) vol.25, June 2020

It is a declaration that God has a plan for us, yet in the midst of our trials, misfortunes, poverty, sickness, death or being a refugee we are lost. "Future", "hope" and "a plan" become a luxury to some of us. We are trying to survive the moment. Yet, without hope and a plan for a future who can survive?

As a social worker I faced refugees who had lost everything. They didn't know where their future lies, or when would they immigrate and how will they survive. A father came to my office telling me that they fled from their homeland. His 30 year-old son who worked and provided for them a home and food had a heart attack and passed away. This father was not only grieving for his own son. He was also concerned about their future, how would they survive, where should they bury their son, or who would cover the burial expenses. Plans were shattered.

With each story of each life situation we are lost. We might ask God where the prosperous life is, and a future that was promised. We don't even have hope for the future anymore.

This verse begins with "I know the plans I have for you." God has a plan for each and every one of us. It isn't our own plans God should fulfill but God's. Where, when and how is not in our hands. We are in God's hands. In our despair and exile when we are weak, we seek God - calling and praying. God promises to listen. In praying we find God, and there is our destination, our hope that doesn't disappoint us (Romans 5.5).

PRAYER:

O God, you are the provider of all.

You know our past, present and future

yet during difficult times we rely on ourselves

and our wisdom which lead us to hopelessness.

Help us to lift our eyes to you from whom our help comes from,

and where our hope and future lie.

Amen.

Aline Deyirmenjian⁴

Please continue to support:

The Fellowship of the Least Coin (<http://www.flc.net.ph>)

and the Ruth-Epting Fund (www.efecw.net)

Thank you for reading our newsletter! Follow us also on www.efecw.net and facebook. Please make our newsletter more informative and inclusive by incorporating news/ info from you:

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⁴ Aline Deyirmenjian is a member of the Armenian Evangelical Ashefieh Church, with a background in psychology and works as a social worker in the Armenian Evangelical churches in Beirut. Aline is married, and gifted with a daughter and son.