

International Affairs Statements Regarding the Gulf War, 1991

Call for Prayer by the General Secretary, 8 January 1991

We urgently call on the WCC's 311 member churches around the world to continue their special prayers for peace in the days and weeks ahead in view of the growing fears of imminent war in the Gulf region.

We are confident that people of all religious persuasions will join in this spiritual endeavour and in so doing will contribute to the creation of a climate of reconciliation and cooperation which will prevent a surrender to the dynamics of a military solution with catastrophic consequences. Prayerful support should be offered for UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuellar, encouraging him in his efforts in the search for a peaceful resolution of the Gulf crisis.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter by the General Secretary to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 7 January 1991

Dear Secretary-General,

With the deadline set by the UN for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait just a week away from now, there is increasing anxiety and genuine consternation around the world about an imminent war. The churches around the world have affirmed their strong opposition to a war in the Gulf.

The peoples of the world in whose name the United Nations was established look up to the UN to take immediate steps to prevent a catastrophic war. A war will only defeat the declared purpose of the UN Security Council "to restore international peace and security in the area". War on the scale now envisaged would be a terrible cataclysm for the whole of the Middle East and beyond.

We are confident that you are actively engaged in efforts to avert a military conflagration. As you intensify those efforts to promote all necessary diplomatic initiatives for a negotiated settlement, we assure you of our highest consideration and our support and prayers for efforts for peace.

Yours sincerely,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to the Members of the Security Council of the United Nations, 15 January 1991

Your Excellencies,

As the Security Council meets today, just a few hours before the deadline set for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the World Council of Churches renews its appeal to take urgent steps to avert a war in the Gulf.

At this crucial moment in history the peoples of the world in whose name the Charter of the UN was proclaimed turn to the Security Council with the expectation that it will fulfil "its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". It would be tragic if a war with catastrophic consequences is waged in the name of the United Nations, a war over the course of which the UN will have no control.

It is incumbent upon the Security Council even at this eleventh hour to explore and pursue peaceful means to attain its objectives in the Gulf, in the true spirit of the UN Charter. People around the world are praying for peace at this time. We hope that the Security Council will seize this moment in history to attain peace.

Assuring you of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to President François Mitterrand of France, 15 January 1991

Mr. President,

May I convey to you the profound appreciation of the World Council of Churches for the initiative you and your government have taken to find a peaceful settlement for the Gulf Crisis. We encourage you in your efforts. This is a critical moment in history. Peace-loving people around the world look up to leaders like you to avert a catastrophic war.

As you continue your efforts, please be assured of prayers of churches around the world that the hands of those who attempt to make peace be strengthened.

Assuring you of our highest consideration.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Appeal by the General Secretary to President George Bush of the USA and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, 16 January 1991

Your Excellencies,

At this moment when the world faces an imminent military conflagration with the most devastating consequences, the World Council of Churches appeals to you both to pursue all possible steps and initiatives to avert a war. We urge you not to rush a war, to show flexibility and explore avenues of negotiation.

One of the most crucial decisions affecting humankind in this century is in your hands. Even at this hour peace can be sought. It is never late to make peace. There is no deadline for peace. We join with millions of people of different faiths around the world in continuous intercessions and prayers for peace.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Statement by the General Secretary on the Gulf Crisis, 17 January 1991

This is a sad moment in history. A war of ominous dimensions and unpredictable consequences has begun in the Gulf. It is a war that will cause unimaginable human suffering.

The World Council of Churches deplores the US government's decision to initiate hostilities. It regrets that the United Nations failed to find peaceful means to resolve the Gulf Crisis and that the war is justified on the basis of a UN Security Council resolution. The Council regrets that the Iraqi government did not respond to international appeals.

The Council calls for an immediate cease-fire and cessation of hostilities. It appeals to all parties to initiate negotiations to seek a just, equitable and peaceful solution. It urges the UN Security Council to regain its primary responsibility "for the maintenance of international peace and security". In seeking a resolution to the conflict it is essential that other outstanding issues in the region including Palestine and Cyprus are addressed vigorously and in a just and credible manner.

The Council appeals to all the nations involved not to employ any weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical, biological or nuclear. It urges all parties to abide strictly by international humanitarian law in times of armed conflict, referred to as the "Geneva Convention" and to guarantee the strict applications of international standards for the protection of refugees.

The Council calls upon member churches

to pray and join in prayers with people of other faiths for a speedy end to the war,
to express our pastoral concern to all victims and all those at risk and to all who make decisions with affect the course of the war,
to seek to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons, refugees and other victims and to support the efforts of the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches,
to continue to promote inter-religious dialogue especially because of prevailing perceptions of the conflict in religious terms.

It is just on the eve of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches, gathering with the prayer "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation", that this tragedy has taken place. This prayer assumes special significance at this moment in history. The Spirit summons us today to our sacred duty of interceding for the world to be builders of peace and defenders of the creation.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Statement by the General Secretary on the Gulf Crisis and the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 23 January 1991

The hostilities in the Gulf have broken out at a time when the member churches of the World Council of Churches are about to meet in their Seventh Assembly in Canberra, Australia, beginning 7 February after three years of prayerful preparation.

The World Council of Churches is deeply distressed by the escalation of the war and by the potential expansion of this conflict in the Gulf. We reiterate our commitment to search for a just and peaceful solution and we are sure that many people of goodwill and of different religious persuasions are joining in similar efforts.

In the light of the nature of this conflict, the Presidents and the Officers of the Council have conferred during the past few days on the issue of holding the Assembly in the prevailing situation. The overwhelming concern was to reinforce the peace testimony of the churches and of the Council and to express and articulate the Christian solidarity with the people in the Middle East.

A process of consultation took place with many churches and especially with the churches in the region. This course of action was undertaken in view of suggestions received from one national delegation that the postponement of the Assembly could be offered as an act of solidarity with the suffering people in the region.

The Council gave special attention to the view of the leaders of member churches in the Middle East region to ascertain their judgement on the issue. In the light of all the discussions, the Officers decided that the Seventh Assembly be held at the place and on the dates anticipated. Some of the considerations that have influenced the decisions are the following:

We need to confer together on the present world situation and especially on the issues of justice and peace in the Gulf.

The Assembly will provide an opportunity for the churches to express their minds on this crisis and to witness together to the need for a constructive and just solution to this conflict.

The Assembly will uphold in prayer people, families, churches and countries affected by the conflict.

The Assembly will support churches and church leaders in national situations where countries are involved in this conflict who try to witness for peace and reconciliation as a way forward in international relationships.

The Assembly will provide a space for the churches coming from the nations involved in the conflict to coordinate their efforts for peace and for relief operations in their respective nations across racial and religious barriers.

The Assembly will be calling for intensive intercessory prayer for this conflict and for many other situations in the world.

Finally, while the Gulf crisis will occupy a central place in the concerns of the Assembly and in the prayer life of the same, it is necessary to hold the Assembly in order to address other pressing issues, some of them of a local nature and others with tremendous potential for becoming world conflicts.

In the light of all these considerations, the Officers decided to hold the Assembly in Canberra in February as scheduled. Steps are of course underway to provide a space within the Assembly to take account of this particular crisis and to join hands in our common witness.

We urge the member churches to continue to uphold the situation in prayers and to join and foster every effort made to bring about an end to the hostilities. We also encourage the churches to participate in the process of relief operations that are being coordinated through the services of the World Council of Churches.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan, 23 January 1991

Your Majesty,

We have conveyed to your Majesty's government the statement that the World Council of Churches issued on 17 January 1991 on the Gulf War. In that statement we called for an immediate cease-fire, cessation of hostilities and commencement of negotiations.

We are writing this to express profound appreciation for the calls Your Majesty has made for an end to the fighting and more than that for the active diplomatic initiatives you are pursuing for a peaceful settlement. We are aware of the unceasing efforts Your Majesty has been making from the beginning of the Gulf Crisis for a negotiated solution.

As an organization devoted to humanitarian causes we are also deeply grateful to your government for opening the borders of the Kingdom to the people fleeing from the war. This act of magnanimity following the generous reception Jordan gave to the earlier wave of migrants is highly commendable and in the best traditions of the Kingdom.

We assure you of our support for the initiatives for negotiations. We would like to keep in touch with Your Majesty and with your government as you continue your efforts for peace.

We pray to God Almighty that the hands of those who make peace be strengthened.

Assuring you of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to the Israeli Community in Geneva, 25 January 1991

Dear friends,

We are in receipt of your letter of 18 January and share your sorrow and anxiety. It is deplorable that the Israeli civilian population has come under attack by Iraqi missiles. We appreciate the restraint shown by the Israeli authorities.

We are alarmed about the escalation of the war and the expansion of its theatre. We deplore all attacks on civilian population from any party and in any country. We are convinced that only an immediate cessation of all hostilities can avoid further suffering and prevent a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions for the region and beyond.

The World Council of Churches has always upheld the state of Israel's right to security within internationally recognized borders. We have also maintained that there can be true security for the countries in the region only by a peaceful settlement of outstanding issues. This war will not enhance or ensure genuine security of any country in the region.

That is why we believe that the adherents of the three living faiths that originated in the region, Jews, Christians and Muslims should pray and act together for peace, and affirm solidarity with all victims of the war.

Yours sincerely,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretaries of WCC, LWF, WARC and CEC to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 4 April 1991

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

We are deeply troubled by reports of the indiscriminate killing of civilians at the hands of the Iraqi military in the Kurdish region of that country. We encourage you to take immediate action to investigate these reports.

We ask you to give serious consideration to sending a United Nations monitoring and peace-keeping force to the area in which the massacres are reported to be taking place in order to provide guaranteed protection to the civilian population.

We are also concerned about the large number of people, many children and elderly among them, who are presently fleeing into the countryside and seeking refuge in neighboring countries. Reports indicate that there is no adequate provision for their most basic needs. With utmost urgency we appeal to the United Nations to provide a mechanism for a coordinated response to the suffering of the civilian population.

Be assured that we support your efforts. Our member churches around the world stand ready to respond to requests to assist in the humanitarian care of civilians from the Kurdish and other regions of Iraq during this time of crisis.

Respectfully,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Gunnar Staalsett
General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation

Milan Opocensky
General Secretary
World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Jean Fischer
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches