

International Ecumenical Peace Convocation addresses issues of nonviolence and the environment

News

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Kingston, Jamaica, 23 May (ENInews)--As the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Kingston, Jamaica, enters its seventh day, attendees discussed topics such as helping communities resolve conflict through peaceful means and how churches can positively respond to the challenge of climate change and environmental destruction.

The IEPC website refers to the conference as both a "harvest festival," celebrating the achievements of its Decade to Overcome Violence initiative, and a call for individuals and churches to renew their commitment to nonviolence, peace and justice. The event, taking place from May 17-25, is being hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), and the Jamaican Council of Churches (JCC). A number of news releases have provided updates about events at the convocation.

Margareta Ingelstam, coordinator of Just Peace, a group of Swedish churches, shared her experience organizing the Ecumenical Monitoring Program in South Africa. She believes peace monitoring teams should arrive in local areas before conflict erupts into violence. "Most conflicts have to be taken care of early before they become violent," said Ingelstam. "Education should be the most important part of bringing peace to a community."

"To be involved in conflict resolution from a faith perspective, churches should carefully consider whether or not a community has already been manipulated by a damaging theology," said Rev. Sofia Camnerin, a member of Just Peace and the WCC Central Committee. Some theological interpretations are dangerous to victims of violence, especially children, according to Camnerin.

More than 40 panels at the conference are focusing on "peace with creation." In one, a short video was shown about the impact a missionary society in Germany had on a small village in West Papua, Indonesia. A shipment of solar-powered lamps from Germany provided electricity where it was previously unavailable--improving the lives of both the village and the broader province, creating awareness about the need to care for creation, and setting a new environmental standard.

The issue of climate change is also being addressed in developed countries. In Germany, the Green Cock program, named for the animal that traditionally sits atop weather vanes, helps churches set goals for saving energy and reducing their ecological footprint. The Green Cock label has already been applied to more than 25 percent of the churches in Westphalia, including several Protestant and Roman Catholic dioceses.

Rev. Jochen Motte, executive secretary for justice, peace, and integrity of creation at United Evangelical Ministry (UEM), says he believes environmental issues should be the "main focus of the ecumenical movement now, just like the issue of violence was a priority over the last decade."

For Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, president of the All Africa Conference of Churches, poverty is a crucial issue. He expressed surprise that a mining compound in Tanzania has houses with private swimming pools, while just outside the walls there is abject poverty. "You visit healthcare clinics and there's no medication. People are dying." Ideally, the church should help protect people from economic exploitation, he said, but it may well play into the massive socioeconomic inequalities that plague Tanzania and many other countries.

"Within the church, all hands are not clean," said Rev. Roderick Hewitt, a minister of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Churches cannot begin to forge justice in an inhumane marketplace until they get out of that marketplace themselves, he said.

Rev. Emmanuel Clapsis, an Orthodox theologian from the U.S., continued this line of thought. "We are searching for a new economic system that distributes our resources in a more equitable manner. Otherwise, there will be more misery for the majority."