

WCC co-launches call to action to break poverty's grip



Mother and child hurrying before dark to Benaco Rwandese refugee camp in Ngara district, Tanzania.

Photo Credit: Don Edkins/WCC

(World Council of Churches, 13 April 2015) The World Council of Churches (WCC) has joined over 30 leaders from major world religions and heads of global faith-based organizations in launching a call to action to end extreme poverty by 2030, a goal shared with the World Bank Group.

The 9 April statement titled **Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative** notes that remarkable progress has been made in reducing extreme poverty. Over 25 years the world has gone from nearly 2 billion people to fewer than 1 billion living in extreme poverty. Now, for the first time in human history there exists both the capacity and recognition of the moral responsibility to ensure that no one has to live in extreme poverty's grip.

“We have ample evidence from the World Bank Group and others showing that we can now end extreme poverty within fifteen years,” the Moral Imperative statement notes. “In 2015, our governments will be deciding upon a new global sustainable development agenda that has the potential to build on our shared values to finish the urgent task of ending extreme poverty.”

“We in the faith community embrace this moral imperative because we share the belief that the moral test of our society is how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring. Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst.”

The Moral Imperative statement seeks to generate the necessary social and political will by inspiring greater commitments from others to join in this cause, tapping into many of the shared convictions and beliefs that unite the world's major religions around the call to combat poverty.

The announcement on 9 April from global faith leaders arose from the World Bank's "Faith Based and Religious Leaders Roundtable" held on 18 February 2015, the first high-level meeting between World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim and faith leaders.

The Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, said that the ecumenical movement represented through the WCC has committed itself to pursuing a "pilgrimage of justice and peace". "For still far too many of the world's people" he declared, "there can be no justice and peace without an end to the poverty that afflicts them and their communities." He committed the WCC to working with other faith-based and intergovernmental partners "to challenge economic injustice, and unsustainable consumption of the majority of the world's resources by a privileged minority."

Endorsers of the Moral Imperative statement are committed to galvanizing greater commitment and action from within the faith community globally and across every sector to end extreme poverty.

Ruth Messinger, president of American Jewish World Service (AJWS), said "AJWS is deeply gratified to endorse the joint Moral Imperative statement because as an organization motivated by the Jewish commitment to justice, rooted in Jewish values and Jewish historical experience, we are committed to realizing human rights and ending poverty in the developing world."

David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, noted, "Now that it has become clear that it is feasible to end extreme poverty, faith communities are committing ourselves to ramp up our advocacy and build a movement that will translate this possibility into political commitment. The unprecedented progress that the world is making against hunger and poverty is an example of our loving God moving in the contemporary world, and God is inviting us all to get with the program."

World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim responded to the launch of this moral imperative, stating, "Faith leaders and the World Bank Group share a common goal – to realize a world free of extreme poverty in just 15 years. The moral imperative can help drive the movement to end poverty by 2030 by inspiring large communities to act now and to advocate for governments to do the same. These commitments from religious leaders come at just the right time – their actions can help hundreds of millions of people lift themselves out of poverty.

The statement closes by framing the imperative in stark terms: "Poverty's imprisonment of more than a billion men, women and children must end. Now is the time to boldly act to free the next generation from extreme poverty's grip."