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## Public Issue Statement

### Called to strengthen human rights, religious freedom and relationships

“Called to One Hope in Christ”, the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Conference of European Churches, meets in the context of a Europe which is becoming increasingly diverse religiously, ethnically and linguistically. There are many positive consequences of this but there are also real concerns that human relationships are under strain and human freedoms are being restricted. These include growing misunderstandings between religious communities, religious discrimination and violation of religious freedom.

In this context the Christian churches must bring to the forefront of their policies and programs their fundamental insistence on the equal dignity of all human beings as made in the image of God and loved equally by God.

This love of God for the world (John 3:16) and its people is expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is at the heart of the churches' commitment to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and to their open relationships with people of other religions within and beyond Europe.

As churches in Europe we commit ourselves:

- To the equal dignity and worth of all human beings under God and in consequence to their equal treatment in the laws of all countries.
- To insist that all human beings and communities are everywhere entitled to hold, practise or change their religious beliefs without hindrance.
- To practise both the hospitality and the embassy of God in our relations with people and communities, including those of other religions, both by welcoming in love and by reaching out in friendship for the good of the world and to the glory of God.
- To increase participation in inter religious dialogue.
- To deepen our understanding of the concepts of human rights and religious freedoms.

As churches in Europe we ask the public authorities:

- To enforce respect for holy sites and religious monuments.
- To protect the freedoms of all religious communities.

Amongst the many places where these commitments are of particular relevance, we highlight the following situation; the countries of the Middle East in relation to the need for inter religious dialogue and serious concerns about the continuing decline of historic Christian communities; the Republic of Georgia in relation to legislation on religious minorities; the Republic of Turkey in relation to its policies on religious education, and in relation to the restoration of churches for Christian worship in occupied northern Cyprus; Kosovo in relation to religious freedom.