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Public Issue Statement

Called to a world free of nuclear weapons

2009 commemorates the end of the Cold War 20 years ago bringing with it the hope that Europe would no longer be a divided continent. It also brought the hope of a Europe free of the fear of a new war that would bring nuclear annihilation. Yet today nuclear weapons continue to pose just this threat. Although their numbers have been drastically reduced, some 25.000 nuclear weapons still exist, many of which are ready to be launched within minutes. Furthermore, the world is faced with new threats of more states developing nuclear weapons and of terrorist groups acquiring them.

During the Cold War, many churches strongly voiced their moral rejection of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, considering it to be contradictory to their deepest beliefs and convictions that security should rely on a readiness to destroy the world which God has entrusted to us.

Since the ending of the Cold War however awareness of this threat faded but now, at the time of this 13th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches, new hope has emerged that a world free of nuclear weapons may yet be achieved. On April 1 of this year, in a joint statement in London, US President Obama and Russian President Medvedev committed their countries to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and President Obama has repeated this call in a speech in Prague in April. This Assembly strongly supports the aim of removing all nuclear weapons.

The Assembly regrets that in this new and hopeful situation, European institutions, in particular NATO and the EU, have been reluctant to endorse this new call and have failed to announce new steps of their own. Several thousand “tactical nuclear weapons” are still in Europe, as relics of the Cold War. Most are Russian, and five NATO countries still host a few hundred US bombs. Moreover, the UK and France continue to have their own arsenals.

On March 30, on the occasion of NATO's 60th anniversary, the Conference of European Churches, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, and the Canadian Council of Churches, wrote a letter to the Secretary General of NATO and to NATO's member states. The letter asked for an end to NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, using three arguments:



- Such a step would help to revitalise the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968), which includes the obligation for nuclear disarmament by the nuclear weapons' states.
- The new vision of a nuclear weapons free world brings hope to citizens and churches in all member states and must be supported.
- Security must be sought in resolving injustices and conflicts, and in affirming and enhancing human interdependence within God's one creation.

The Assembly strongly endorses the call by President Obama for a world free of nuclear weapons. We appeal to all nuclear weapons states to publicly endorse this goal, to refrain from modernisation of nuclear weapons, and to set a time schedule for their dismantling. We appeal to NATO and the EU, to their member states, and to Russia to address the issue of those nuclear weapons in Europe that are not included in current negotiations. We appeal to those states that in the context of NATO still have nuclear weapons on their soil to signal that their role must be ended. And we appeal to our member churches to express their full support for a nuclear weapons free world. In 1989, it was the people who ended the Cold War. Today, it may be people who end the threat of nuclear catastrophe.