Petition to the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee

Health and Healing – Essential Dimensions of the Churches’ Mission
To be kept on the WCC Agenda

Representing Christian organizations actively involved in international health, Christian health professionals, academic theologians, pastors and members of Christian communities, we share the vision for a strong commitment of Christian churches to the health and healing ministry. We are very concerned that the involvement of the WCC in strengthening the healing ministry has been drastically reduced and is in danger of being terminated in the work of WCC in the future. The core mandate of the church is based on our Lord’s great commission to ‘preach, teach, heal and reconcile.’ Health and healing are justice, peace and life issues which remain very relevant to the people of today.

We strongly express our common vision that “Health and Healing” must have a visible place on the agenda of the WCC following the General Assembly in Busan 2013.

Specifically we refer to two main areas that urgently need the future engagement of churches:

1. The need to strengthen church health services as a matter of justice and peace

Church health services, especially in the global South, are of utmost importance for countless women, men, and children. In many regions it is primarily the churches who provide access to health services for the people and who lobby for the implementation of the right to health. Church health services are irreplaceable, both in terms of their quantity and quality. The church health facilities offer comprehensive care and are well recognised and appreciated for their compassion and love. These qualities are frequently missing in secular health services. Globally church health services are facing challenges and need to be strengthened by the ecumenical commitment to health and healing:

- In spite of the incredible benefit they offer to people, church health services are not adequately recognized or supported by governments and donor organizations – sometimes not even by umbrella bodies of their churches.
- The Christian Health Organizations/Associations in different countries need to be supported and encouraged by the worldwide church in order to have a voice for justice, peace, health and healing within communities and nations.
- Church health facilities are often located in remote areas which are poorly serviced by governments. Churches must be enabled to continue to provide care and health services to those most in-need and be supported by the worldwide body of Christ in this ministry of love and justice.
- Networks such as the Africa Christian Health Association Platform (ACHAP), the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN) and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), which were founded within the WCC, play a crucial role in networking and advocacy and need to be strengthened.
2. The need to promote theological reflection on health and healing and the dialogue between medicine and theology

In the decades following its inception in 1968 the WCC Christian Medical Commission (CMC), as the health program of the WCC, undertook a pioneering role in working towards a shared Christian understanding of health, healing and the healing community, by developing new approaches to health, and by advocating for the Christian healing ministry. The insights gained, through the activities of the WCC’s worldwide health programmes, continue to be very relevant today especially for a Christian understanding of the healing ministry and for the dialogue between medicine and theology which is of growing importance at the beginning of the 3rd millennium.

The World Mission Conference in Athens in 2005 under the theme “Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile. Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities” built on the findings of the WCC health program and contributed to an understanding of the Christian healing ministry to be implemented by the churches today. However much remains to be done as quite conflictive understandings of the healing ministry are still prevailing among various Christian church traditions.

Among the areas needing further attention and clarification are the followings:

- Definition and description of forms of traditional healing and a dialogue between traditional healing and scientific medicine.
- Approaches of spiritual/divine healing and their possible integration in medical approaches to health.
- Dialogue between the Pentecostal and the so called Mainline Churches on the role of the Holy Spirit in healing processes.

We deeply believe that “Health and Healing” need to be adequately represented on the agenda of churches after Busan 2013 and that they remain relevant in today’s world. We strongly ask the WCC Central Committee to provide the organizational framework for a continuous engagement of the churches in the area of health and healing in WCC’s next working period.