



Called to Compassion and Freedom - Christian Women Shaping the Future of Europe

A Message from the Sixth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women held in the Czech Republic 25 August - 1 September 2002

Compassion and freedom are a gift of God, to women and men, said Bishop Jana Šilerová of the Czech Hussite Church. Dr Gret Haller, from Switzerland, Human Rights Ombudsperson for OSCE to Bosnia Herzegovina, urged women to participate fully in politics and in the whole life of the state, in order to help shape the future of Europe. She said that our contribution could challenge existing patterns, which were often one-sided and male dominated. The senator of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Jaroslava Moserová, drew attention to the duty and power of women, in their capacity as mothers and educators, to break the vicious cycle of hate which passes from generation to generation. A paradigmatic view of relationship and community came from the Bible Study on Philippians 2:1-5 by Carmen Marquez, a Spanish theologian. The image of the Triune God provides a pattern for human communities, through unity in diversity.

160 women from 30 countries and a wide range of Christian traditions gathered in Celákovice, Czech Republic, for the sixth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. They were guests of the local Churches and were honoured to receive greetings from Protestant and Roman Catholic Bishops and the Orthodox Archbishop.

The theme was 'Called to Compassion and Freedom - Christian Women Shaping the Future of Europe'. This formed the background not only to our keynote lectures, workshops and Bible Study, but also to our business sessions, worship and cultural events. A special highlight of the Assembly was the celebration of the Forum's twentieth anniversary. We recognised that, through the experience of so many years, the organisation has become a competent network of Christian women in Europe.

In discussion, and in our response to other speakers, there was a strong feeling that we women should have the right to determine our own roles in Church and society and the freedom to carry them out. The Forum was so moved by the damage caused by floods in Prague that a group of women took part in the clean-up operation for a day. The recent floods throughout Central Europe focused our concern on global and environmental issues.

Workshops covered a number of issues, which are of particular concern to women.

- We support the aims of the United Nations conference in Johannesburg to establish world-wide conditions for sustainable lifestyles which allow all human beings to live in dignity. We commit ourselves to promote the responsible use of biotechnology. The 'copyright' of creation is the Creator's!
- We encourage women as individuals and in groups to support and join campaigns that promote global economic justice and to be active in decision making structures.
- The Forum should represent as many minorities as possible and stand in solidarity with Christians of different ethnic background and colour in Europe, for example, the large Roma community. The Forum should join the struggle against racism in our churches and schools and in society in general.
- In conflict and post-conflict situations, prayer and action are equally important and sustain each other.
- Spirituality ought to be an indispensable part of Christian life, interacting with everyday situations and contributing to the enrichment of life. It is there where God's healing and renewal are experienced, and where borders of denomination and tradition can be overcome.
- We learn from interfaith women's organisations within our network the importance of reciprocal respect for persons of other cultures and faiths. This experience enables us to become agents of positive religious education in transmitting love, peace and reconciliation in the face of fundamentalisms.
- The Netherlands delegation sounded a warning against a new kind of European populist politics, which promises people instant gratification, and militates against the needs of marginalised people.
- Violence against and trafficking in women and children are major problems in all our countries. They destroy lives and corrupt relationships. We commit ourselves to work for their prevention, through consciousness-raising, education and training, especially among church leaders. The issue should be raised at the Conference of European Churches Assembly in Trondheim and within the Conference of Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe (CCEE), with a view to

taking it into the European Union structures and moving it beyond the borders of Europe.

- The action of the Holy Spirit connects us to the compassion of Christ. This empowers us to speak out and act as prophets of God's will. In our political and social commitment, we are inspired by the women prophets in scripture. In our theology as women, including Feminist Theology, we can rediscover the richness of our different traditions in East and West.
- The Forum is a network in itself, and includes in its membership women who relate to other similar organisations. The Forum would benefit from working more closely through the existing connections and from sharing resources and ideas. We were pleased to welcome representatives from the Conference of European Churches, the Fellowship of the Least Coin and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.
- The young women challenge the Forum to greater respect for people of different ages and denominations and both genders. Through the Young Women's Leadership Training Course, they enjoyed working together across cultures and traditions.

Together with our sisters from the Czech Republic we acknowledge that Europe is going through great economic, social and spiritual changes, to which the Forum ought to pay appropriate attention. They, in turn, are happy to bring their gifts and strengths into the European search for new values.

[Home + Briefings](#)

