

At the fringes and in the Centre – Racism in Germany
Ecumenical Exposure and Consultation on Group related Enmity in Germany

Transforming the Whole - Not Just a Niche

Embargoed until 14th of May 2010 at 12:30

See also: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDrYy8_aaqE

Among German churches and their members there is a growing concern regarding latent and explicit group focused enmity in the form of racism. Many church groups have been working on the subject and there was a one day presentation at the Kirchentag in Bremen in 2009 which focused on right-wing-extremism in Germany. After the Kirchentag it was decided that an outside-perspective on our work was needed.

Several German churches and church institutions decided to invite an ecumenical group of international experts from Uganda, South Africa, USA, United Kingdom and India to gain new insights, to be presented at Oekumenischer Kirchentag in Munich 2010 (listed at the end of the statement). These experts were asked to become acquainted with the context of group focused enmity, right wing extremism and racism in East and West Germany, to visit and get to know how different German churches and their partners understand, work and cooperate on projects. Also they were asked to hold a process-oriented consultation which will attempt to synthesize theological insights with concrete examples of good practice from the experience of Christian communities, and to compile and discuss their findings and elaborate an agenda for the churches in their struggle to overcome racism in German churches and society.

The report of the experts

We accepted the invitation of the German Churches, hearing therein God's call according to Lk.4, 16-22 and Acts 16,9. We believe: God created diversity. Racism is a sin. The fight against racism is an essential part of the whole gospel. We therefore respond as follows:

Racism is one expression of group focused enmity. It is prejudice plus power or presumed power. It is grounded in the discriminatory social construct of ethnic supremacy by a dominant group over other groups who have been historically, institutionally and systematically marginalized. It manifests as an unequal distribution of power, privilege and resources whereby one group has and maintains the ability to interfere with another group's ability to realize their full potential for human development. The non-dominant group is presumed to be inferior and is stigmatized which is used as a justification for their exclusion. Whilst 'race' is a social construct and does not therefore exist, racism and its effects are real.

What did we observe?

Accompanied by our German hosts we were exposed to a broad variety of projects and programs in the church, civil society and government institutions. We had the opportunity to talk to Germans and foreign nationals living in Germany. Our journey took us to four states in West and East Germany. We visited Hamburg, Schwerin, Guestrow, Hannover, Verden, Weimar, Erfurt and Jena.

Three things stood out at all of the places that we visited. (a) The memorials for the victims of racism in German history such as concentration camps, 'stumbling stones' etc. (b) There is a strong mobilization

in church and society to address the growing threat of right-wing extremism. (c) Many asylum seekers and refugees express their plight as a severe human rights concern.

Challenges ahead – blind spots

1. We note the tendency to equate racism with right-wing extremist politics. This does not help other forms of daily racism and of racist violence to be addressed in the manner and intensity they deserve.
2. We recognize the unhealed wounds, the guilt and shame still inherited from the time of the Nazi regime. As the past are receding fast, leaving a vacuum, new forms of remembrance (new forms of 'Gedenkkultur!'), reconciliation and the building of just and inclusive communities are needed. We also see wounds in dealing with GDR history. Acknowledging the personal histories of former GDR citizens and their experiences in living in a dictatorship is still a difficult challenge to address.
3. We observe that there is exclusion and discrimination within the church institutions – for instance in recruitment and employment policies resulting in unequal opportunities.
4. We commend the churches effort on working with the immigrant communities and 'International Churches' (see glossary) and Christian communities. However, we have observed that at times this has resulted in "working for" rather than "with" them.
5. We note that often "integration" is wrongly perceived as assimilation of one culture by the dominant culture. We believe that, instead, integration should be a space for diversity where responsibility for democratic nation-building is shared by all.
6. We do recognize that there are critical gaps in legislation and policies regarding racist discrimination of foreign nationals, naturalized citizens and especially refugees in Germany, as experienced by a member of the international experts himself at the airport. Similar voices of institutionalized discrimination were reported in the practices of FRONTEX on the European borders.

Recommendations

Working for human dignity and for just and inclusive communities fulfills our call to follow the Gospel. We request that the churches, i.e. congregations and leadership of all levels, give testimony against any racist ideology and action. The Gospel is incompatible with racism and all forms of exclusion.

1. In all our churches we have to face the above challenges. We all must pay close attention to the unconscious prejudices and stereotypes which are a part of our everyday speech, attitudes and actions. Ethnocentrism and eurocentrism cause people to think of themselves as the measure of all that is 'normal' and 'acceptable'; while 'others' are thought of as 'unlike us', 'abnormal' and 'inferior'.
2. Churches and Christians in Germany need to recognize their own responsibilities personally and institutionally. In all this young people have an important role to play.
 - a. The churches need to empower and further strengthen their membership through workshops, Bible studies and other activities.
 - b. The Protestant Churches and Catholic Church should give special emphasis on the inclusion of Christian people and communities with diverse descents. Also, the questions of self-assertion and self-organisation of international Christian communities and churches have to be addressed.
 - c. There is a need to be more inclusive with respect to recruitment policies as well as the composition of governing bodies. The majority of the immigrants have Christian roots. We recognize that church is a confessional body. With regard to people of different faith, there is a need for a review of current church policy regarding recruitment for employment.

- d. Churches should set up bodies such as commissions or special representatives to strengthen their focus on racism and discrimination.
 - e. We encourage the churches and their organizations to make a special effort in including the communities facing racism directly, i.e. in workshops and training on anti-bias, on prejudice, group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism. Also when planning other events and projects, the inclusion and respect of the feelings and of the identities of these communities need to be considered.
 - f. We recommend that ‘storytelling’ and ‘Healing of Memories’ workshops for senior and young members of the congregations be organized. We recommend new concepts of “Gedenkkultur” (such as ‘stumbling stones’ and ‘commemorative needles’) to address the present generation of adults and youth, especially young Muslim, African-descent, and other immigrant communities.
 - g. We appeal to the churches to take up the reflections and the suggestions that WCC has made with regard to ‘Being Church – Overcoming Racism’. The issues of ‘Transformative Justice’ and ‘Just and Inclusive Communities’ should be discussed in the parishes and the synods.
3. Churches need to take a stand in the civil society and actively take part in democracy building.
 - a. For example, the leaderships of city administrations may act as important partners in all such coalitions, as we have seen in Jena, Verden, Luebeck.
 - b. Citizens should be encouraged to take part in nonviolent demonstrations, and church should engage against criminalization of legitimate acts of civil disobedience (such as inner city blockades, etc.).
 - c. Churches must stand up and speak out against racist discrimination against people of Muslim faith. Their congregations and synods/dioceses should establish a culture of acceptance and collaboration with their Muslim counterparts.
 - d. In the face of new challenges, the clear stand against Anti-Semitism needs to be renewed and sustained.
 - e. The churches should lobby the government to strengthen federal and state programs for democracy and tolerance such as “Vielfalt tut gut” and “kompetent. fuer Demokratie”. These successful programs must be financially sustained and not weakened through an extension of funding to fight leftwing-extremism.
 4. Churches should engage in lobbying with the government and Parliaments in order to build up a strong political infrastructure to prevent racist discrimination and to implement the recommendations of international human rights bodies.

The international experts are: Dawn Linder (J & P, Cath. Archdiocese of Johannesburg, RSA), Rev. Jayne Oasin (Episcopal Church USA), Bev Thomas (consultant UK), N. Paul Divakar (Dalit Human Right Advocate, India), Dr. Silvester Arinaitwe Rwomukubwe (Exec. Secretary, Uganda Joint Christian Council)

The inviting churches and partners are: the Nordelbian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, the Protestant Church of Middle-Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg, the Evangelical Development Service (EED), “Bread for the World” (Platform “Dalit Solidarity in Germany”) and MISEREOR. Local cooperation and support is sought by the Ecumenical Councils of Churches in the regions visited.

Glossary: In our understanding “International Churches” are Associations of churches and Christian communities where Christians with African, Asian and other descents have come together in the name of God and call themselves “International Churches”

Annexure:

How to inform yourself about contemporary forms of racism in Germany

(Links can be activated by using ctrl & right side of your mouse or by copying the link and pasting it on the internet explorer page)

State, CSO and UN Documents

Core report of the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin 2009.

This is the core information on Germany that the Federal Government has prepared for the human rights treaty bodies. The purpose is to provide general information on the country and society of the state party.

http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session4/DE/A_HRC_WG6_4_DEU_1_E.PDF

National Action Plan against Racism and ... of the federal Republic of Germany.

This is the official document that has been prepared in the course of the follow-up to the Durban World Conference in 2001. It was issued in 2008 after long pressure of German action groups. Civil Society Organizations have criticized the Plan for its lack of substantial contents. The Plan is not action-oriented because it describes only those activities that are already in process and have been described in numerous documents, but there are no fresh activities. The plan is not a "plan" because it lacks any strategic approach. The Plan is not "national" because there was no consultation with the parliament, the States (Länder), the cities, or the societal organizations.

http://www.bmi.bund.de/cln_183/sid_5DAB5BFB1D637F97B3C91E8606DC101C/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Themen/Politik_Gesellschaft/Zivilgesellschaft/Nationaler_Aktionsplan_gegen_Rassismus_en.html?nn=267412

Eliminating racist discrimination in Germany, Forum Menschenrechte

Parallel report addressed to the Committee on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination of the United Nations, Berlin 2008.

It is a shadow report done by civil society organizations in order to provide more substantial information than was contained in the official state report. Forum Menschenrechte is the common platform of some fifty human rights organizations who work on the federal level.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/cerds73.htm>

Fourth Report on Germany, European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Strasbourg 2009.

The report contains a lot of issues which international bodies repeatedly are featuring on Germany that is the lack of preventive, legislative and law-enforcing political action, the lack of substantial data etc.

<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/germany/deu-cbc-iv-2009-019-eng.pdf>

Church Documents

Understanding racism today - a dossier

a revised and expanded version of a dossier produced for the WCC Harare Assembly, 1998

<http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2006pdfs/racismdossier.pdf>

Just and Inclusive Communities - Report of the la Paz theological consultation 2007

This report attempts to outline a theological framework for WCC's new programme: Just and Inclusive Communities that has been put in place by integrating four areas of its ongoing work: Overcoming Racism, Indigenous Peoples, Dalit Solidarity and the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network. It reflects a consultative process of sharing and conversation among persons impacted by these and other concerns.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/oerk-programme/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/2007-la-paz-report-just-and-inclusive-communities.html>

Break Down the Walls - End Racism and Racial Discrimination 2009

Message from the 14-17 June 2009 conference "Churches responding to the challenges of racism and related forms of discrimination and exclusion" in Doorn, Netherlands <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/racism/message-from-the-doorn-conference.html>

EKD Synod concerned about right-wing extremism

Decision of the 2nd Meeting of the 11th Synod in Ulm on 29. October 2009

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), concerned about the rise of right-wing violence and the increased expression and dissemination of right-wing propaganda, has adopted the following resolution:

"The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany is concerned that right-wing ideology, which manifests itself in increasingly brutal acts of violence, can be found in all of Germany. With similar concern we take notice that these ideas are not only voiced in private, small circles, but also voiced in public. We deplore both right-wing attitudes found with members of our congregations as well as increasing anti-Christian sentiments and actions/incidents on the part of rightwing movement.

Democracy is, according to Christian belief, the best of all forms of society.

We encourage the members of our congregations to collect information on right-wing aims and activities, to use civic counselling services, to conduct events on the topic in the parishes and to develop and share programmes to deal with the issue in working with children and youth.

The Synod of the Evangelical Church supports civil society initiatives that deal with racist and anti-Semitic attitudes upfront and tackle right-wing structures. We urge the federal government to promote their full-time and volunteer civic commitment to democracy and tolerance to make the work against right-wing extremism lasting and sustainable. We welcome the plan to establish an "Ecumenical Working Group of the Churches against Rightwing Extremism and for Democracy" on the 12th of February 2010 in Dresden, and call on all member churches of the EKD to participate in this working group. We ask congregations, congregation, religious works and institutions to participate in civil society initiatives for democracy against right-wing extremism.

The Synod of the Evangelical Church invites the offices of the member churches, to ensure that the issue of right-wing extremism will be given space in and worked on in the qualifications, training and educational events of the member churches. Furthermore, the Church Office will be asked to collect existing work material to prepare and present to the member churches and congregations. In addition further materials should be made available. The Synod expects a deepening of the theological debate in dealing with racist, anti-Semitic and inhuman beliefs, and an examination of the canonical consequences (including in relation to membership issues) as urgently needed.

We therefore encourage the programmes that encourage people to leave right-wing extremist structures that already exist in many communities and ask especially young people to participate in these programmes.

Ulm, 29 October 2009
Press office of the EKD
Reinhard Mawick