

MINUTE ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE
ADOPTED AT THE 10TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



From October 30, 2013 through November 8, 2013, a member of the Armenian Bar Association, Vanna Kitsinian, Esq. participated as a delegate on behalf of the Armenian Church at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th General Assembly in Busan, Korea. The WCC is the broadest and most inclusive organization of the modern ecumenical movement, whose overall goal is to achieve Christian Unity. Headquartered in Geneva, the WCC was formed in 1948 in Amsterdam and has 345 member churches in 110 different countries, representing more than 500 million faithful around the world.

The General Assembly is the highest governing body of the WCC, and takes place every seven years at a different place in the world. Although the WCC is at its core a religious organization, it is not concerned solely with theological matters. In fact, the WCC contributes much of its resources and activities to issues pertaining to social justice. The WCC deals with a variety of issues humanity is facing today, such as peace and justice, wars and conflict, inter-faith dialogue, nuclear arms, ecology, etc. For example, Ms. Kitsinian, as a lay representative of the Holy See of Cilicia, has been a Commissioner for the Commission of Churches for International Affairs (CCIA) for the past seven years. The CCIA is an advisory body to the WCC comprised of politicians, human rights activists, lawyers, political activists, and clergy that represent all regions of the world. Commissioners advise the Council on a variety of matters pertaining to international law, genocide, and migration, to name a few, and also work with a United Nations liaison to advocate for policy change in responding to various international crises.

The theme of the 10th General Assembly was “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace,” which was also a prayer that was echoed throughout the ten-day assembly. The theme was particularly fitting, as the meeting convened in South Korea, a country, which has remained divided for nearly 60 years and longs for peace and the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has had long-standing involvement in the ecumenical movement for many decades. Since 1962, the Armenian Apostolic Church, with both of its Holy Sees - the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicosate of the Holy See of Cilicia - have independently been members of the WCC and attend the General Assembly with two delegations representing one church.

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia appointed 9 individuals to be a part of the Cilician delegation at the 10th General Assembly, one of which was Ms. Kitsinian. The delegation was comprised of both clergy and laypersons from various parts of the world, representing different age groups and ecumenical experience. The Cilician delegation was actively involved in all aspects of the General Assembly, including various committees (Nominations Committee, Policy Reference Committee, Public Issues Committee, etc.), and led various ecumenical conversations regarding a variety of topics. Ms. Kitsinian served as a Rapporteur for an ecumenical conversation dealing with human security and human rights.



Additionally, the delegation made their voices heard on a variety of issues during the business plenary sessions, which are an important aspect of the General Assembly that involves decision-making processes. Delegates spoke and made constructive comments on a variety of topics, including the Moderator's Report, wherein it was requested that the council more closely study and reflect the churches' diversities so to create a safe space for their work. Another Armenian Church delegate, addressing the plenary in French, voiced her opinion on issues of genocide, peace and democracy. In turn, Ms. Kitsinian addressed the plenary by commenting on the report of the Programmed Guidelines Committee, which recommended the use and implementation of Special Envoys going forward.

Aside from the various committees that Armenian Church delegates were a part of and their active participation in the pre-assembly and assembly activities, one of the most important objectives for Armenian Church delegates was the adoption of a Minute regarding the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. This was a significant undertaking that was the result of months of preparation by the Catholicosate of Cilicia. A member of the Cilician delegation, Professor Nora Bayrakdarian-Kabakian presented the Genocide Minute document to the nearly 3,500 General Assembly participants. With the participation of His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, who was present at the General Assembly, together with the delegation of the Holy See of Cilicia, all Armenian Church representatives encouraged the adoption of the minute, which was ultimately accepted and adopted at the conclusion of the assembly.

The adoption of the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide Minute is very significant for the Armenian nation for several reasons. Not only did the Minute provide a historical background of the Armenian Genocide as a historical fact, but it also called for 3 very specific events to take place as the nation approaches the Genocide Centennial. Specifically, the Minute called for the following:

1. Organize in 2015, around the commemorative 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, an international conference in Geneva on the recognition and reparation for the Armenian Genocide, with the participation of WCC member churches, international organizations, jurists, historians, and human rights defenders;
2. Organize an ecumenical prayer service commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide at the Cathedral in Geneva in conjunction with the international conference; and
3. Invite member churches of the WCC to pray for the memory of the Armenian martyrs around the date of the international conference and for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The importance of the adoption of this Minute cannot be underestimated because seldom do Armenians have access to such a broad audience to which the Armenian Cause can be addressed. Through organizations like the WCC, the Armenian Cause can be pursued in an international arena, appealing to nearly 500 million people worldwide.

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION