Statement adopted by the EMW General Assembly

Evangelische Mission Weltweit (EMW), the umbrella and professional association of mission organisations and churches in Germany, works in partnership with international partner churches and organisations to address the questions and challenges emerging from ongoing changes within churches and societies worldwide. Today, many institutions and civil-society groups are asking how the legacies of the colonial era, reflected in mindsets, structures and material objects, can be critically examined and transformed in order to foster more just and equitable relationships.

Churches, too, are confronted with questions about their international engagement through mission, its entanglement with colonial structures, and how just and equitable partnerships can be realized in the present day. As a contribution to these efforts, the Theological Committee of EMW has prepared the discussion paper *Decolonising Mission? A Critical and Constructive Engagement with the Colonial Legacy of EMW Member Organisations*. It sets out theological and practical considerations, along with recommendations for further work towards decolonisation, particularly in the international relationships of churches. This ongoing work, as well as the decolonial engagement with the past, present and future, can only take place through processes grounded in partnership.

The varied responses to these reflections from church and theological representatives in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific, as well as from the World Council of Churches, underscore the urgency of ensuring that decolonisation becomes a lived reality in relationships between partner churches today, and that colonial continuities are overcome. This concerns the cultivation of a culture of remembrance that takes historical experiences seriously, as well as the handling of objects and archival materials from a period in which mission and colonialism were intertwined in diverse ways. It also concerns the many dimensions of decolonisation and the transformation of structures and mindsets that, as enduring legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism, continue to shape relationships between churches and societies today.

At the EMW General Assembly, we listened to and discussed our partners' constructive and critical responses to the discussion paper of the Theological Committee with gratitude and keen interest. We further express our gratitude for the statement, video messages and greetings from the General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM), which have prompted us to reflect more deeply on the theology of mission.

In light of the discussion, we recommend that the following points guide our further deliberations and work:

1. Continue to deepen the insights gained and discern potential steps towards transformation within the churches and member organisations involved, drawing on the discussion paper and responses from partner churches and organisations around the world. This work should take place within the respective member organisations and at an EMW consultation in 2027.
2. Review and further develop existing international church structures with a view to a just sharing of power, responsibility and resources. Churches from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and Europe must not merely be consulted; they must be involved as equal partners from the outset in shaping and making decisions about decolonisation processes.

3. The voices of the worldwide ecumenical community encourage us to deepen the theological understanding of mission as participation in God's mission, and to reflect on the significance of churches for our societies. We call on churches in Germany to examine critically their current understandings of mission, particularly in relation to colonial structures and ways of thinking.
4. The Theological Committee is requested to incorporate insights arising from a decolonising understanding of mission into EMW's preparations for the planned World Mission Conference in 2028.
5. We call on EMW member organisations to draw on their many years of experience in partnership and mutual exchange in order to promote a critical engagement with the colonial legacy both within the churches and in the wider societal context. We recommend seeking cooperation with civil-society actors engaged in cultures of remembrance, for example by disseminating and supporting the "Hamburg Appeal for Reappraisal of Colonialism".

"I pray that your journey be marked by truthful memory, the return of what should be returned, the repair of what can be repaired, the redistribution of power and resources, and the courage to prevent repetition. Then 'mission from everywhere to everywhere' will be more than a slogan. It will create a community in which no church is the permanent giver, no people the permanent receiver, and no culture the measure of the Gospel, but all are called together as equal partners into God's mission of justice, reconciliation and life."

Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, General Secretary, Council for World Mission (CWM)

EMW General Assembly
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