

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)
– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –



Press release 13/2008

No financial speculation with basic foodstuffs

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is calling for rapid rethinking in the face of the worldwide shortage of foodstuffs. The right to food is a human right. This presents politicians with specific demands.

The scarcity of foodstuffs is a worldwide crisis. The prices for wheat and soya on the world market have doubled in the last ten months. Over the same period the price of rice has risen by 75%, of corn by 66%. A billion people do not have enough to eat, and the World Bank estimates that famine threatens in 33 countries.

For many decades church development work has been promoting local agriculture in the poor countries of the world. This accords with the protestant understanding that men and women should be given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives. In many countries global structures of food production and distribution are increasing the danger that the rural population will become detached from economic envelopments and impoverished. Moreover financial speculation with basic foodstuffs is making their situation particularly precarious.

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe therefore demands:

No financial speculation with basic foodstuffs

Speculations on foodstuffs by hedge funds have increased with the financial crisis. As a result the fluctuation in food prices seems to have intensified. However, basic foodstuffs should be protected from such speculation by regulating the relevant instruments of investment. In principle it is in keeping with ethical investment for basic foodstuffs not to become the objects of speculation.

Food instead of gas

In many countries agricultural land which is used purely for growing foodstuffs has become scarce. The construction of energy plants is increasing. Here there is a conflict of values between the right to food and the right to promote sustainability by shifting to biofuels. However, in conflicts over distribution elementary needs have priority: the right to the food necessary for life comes before the right to mobility. The food of the many poor must not be sacrificed for the gas of the rich.

An end to agricultural export subsidies

The export subsidies for agricultural projects granted by Western industrial states are destroying the local production of foodstuffs and possible income for farmers in the South. In so doing they are contributing to the crisis over foodstuffs. Savings in the agricultural budget should be used to safeguard food for the world. Planned EU

subsidies in the agricultural budget which are not necessary because of the rise in food prices and the implementation of agricultural reforms should be released for aid over foodstuffs. In this way the EU would take responsibility for the effects of its agricultural policy. In the mid-term, however, agricultural export subsidies must be stopped completely.

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At present 105 Protestant churches in Europe (including five South-American churches originating from Europe) belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist along with pre-Reformation churches such as Hussites and Czech Brethren grant each other pulpit and table fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. A 13-member Council carries out ongoing business between two general assemblies, headed by a 3-member Presidium: Revd Thomas Wipf (President), Council President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in Bern , Prof. Michael Beintker (Co-President), Director of the Seminary for Reformed Theology at the University in Munster , and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich (Co-President), Diakonhjemmet University College Oslo. The Secretariat, which operates under the direction of the Council, is housed in the Severin-Schreiber-Gasse 3, A-1180 Vienna, office@leuenberg.eu, tel. +43.1.4791523.900, fax .580. Its director is Bishop Prof. Dr. Michael Bünker. The CPCE press officer is Dipl.theol. Thomas Flügge (Bern), tel. +41.31.3702502, t.fluegge@leuenberg.eu.