

Youth Acquire Experience, Find Inspiration at Rio+20

The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) sent a delegation of 25 young people from Latin America, North America, and Europe to participate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, also referred to as Rio+20) and the parallel Peoples' Summit for Social and Environmental Justice in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 13-22 June.

Twenty years after the UN Conference on the Environment and Development in June 1992, Rio+20 was intended to establish a global, sustainable development agenda for decades to come through a document entitled "The Future We Want."

Most of the WSCF's involvement happened at the Peoples' Summit, which occurred simultaneously but autonomously from the UN conference. The summit was organized by global civil society to articulate the social and environmental crisis occurring regionally and locally as a result of a neo-liberal global economy.

The WSCF delegation was sent to Rio as part of the Latin America and Caribbean Region's (LAC) "Youth and Environmental Justice" leadership training program, and as part of the WSCF Global Eco Justice Programme. The

leadership program, planned and led by LAC Interim Regional Secretary Marcelo Leites, gave the delegates experience in civil society mobilization and eco-justice advocacy. The broader Eco Justice Programme aims to foster mobilization of students at all levels of World Student Christian Federation in order to develop and implement advocacy work on eco-justice.



WSCF Delegation to Rio +20

In order to promote religious voices at the Peoples' Summit, WSCF delegates participated in the Joint Women's March on Monday, 18 June, protesting the UN's proposed "green economy" as another stage of the commodification of nature.

The march was described by delegate Noel Platte (Canada) as "energetic, diverse and exciting to see." WSCF Europe's Jill Piebiak felt similarly. Jill wrote on WSCFconnect.org: "There was a fervour of energy and passion as women and men together marched through the streets of Rio in costumes, traditional dress, and union t-shirts."

"It's exciting to meet other volunteers working for the well-being and the protection of the common good."

— Johana Nuñez, SCM Colombia

The WSCF's LAC Region presented a photo exhibition on the water crisis in Latin America (*la Muestra Latinoamericana Itinerante del Agua*) at the World Council of Churches' Religions for Rights tent. With photographs from throughout the LAC Region, the exhibit helped viewers pinpoint common problems confronting peoples' access to potable water.

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Youth at Rio+20, Cont'd



WSCF Delegates Noel Platte and Jill Piebiack

The Religions for Rights tent was also the setting for forums organized by ecumenical partner organizations ACT Alliance, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the WCC and others. WSCF delegates contributed to these forums by engaging theologians and ecumenical leaders from around the world.

The WSCF Rio +20 delegation helped create awareness about the final document of the Rio +20 conference among the wider WSCF community. Many of the delegates expressed that the conference had inspired them to continue their Eco Justice work in their own contexts. SCM Colombia's Johana Nuñez professed, "It's exciting to meet other volunteers that are working for the well-being and the protection of the common good."

[**Read More About the Experiences of WSCF Participants at Rio+20 on WSCF Connect!**](#)

[**Read Press Releases and Articles About WSCF's Participation at Rio+20!**](#)

Ecumenical Partners Reflect on Rio+20

On Tuesday, 3 July, the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva hosted a panel discussion on the outcome of the United Nation's Conference on Sustainable Development and the Peoples' Summit held in Brazil last month. Four representatives from advocacy-oriented ecumenical organizations heavily involved at the conference shared their disappointments and hopes coming out of Rio +20 with the wider ecumenical community.

Dr. Guillermo Kerber, of the World Council of Churches, shared his frustration with the outcome document, arguing that it does not convey the urgency of the earth's situation. Furthermore he stressed that the Peoples' Summit was both geographically and ideologically distant from the main conference, observing that some Peoples' Summit participants chose not to attend the main conference at all. This pointed to a glaring divide between the interests and decisions of the world leaders and the needs and demands of the peoples.

Suvi Virkkunen, Senior Advocacy Officer of ACT Alliance, also expressed her regret that participants in the Peoples' Summit did not make more of an effort to get involved in the formal conference. While Virkkunen did not feel that the Peoples' Summit had much influence over the outcome of the final document, she said the opportunity for people to come together to discuss and share visions for change was important in itself.

Peter Prove, Executive Director of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, said that the reviews from the conference were uniformly tragic, and while a negative assessment is correct, there were some good things to come out of the conference that should not be overlooked. Prove pointed out that the document made an explicit commitment to universal healthcare and made some important steps for food security.

Isaiah Toroitich, Climate Advocacy Officer of ACT Alliance, proposed that youth need to be a part of the discussion about moving forward. Pointing out the technological savvy of the current generation, Toroitich suggested that youth might find solutions in areas that older generations have overlooked. The challenge, he averred, lies in finding the gaps where youth can get their foot in the door and contribute.

[**Read More About Rio+20 From Our Partners!**](#)

[**ACT Alliance Articles from Rio +20**](#)
[**Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Report from Rio +20**](#)
[**World Council of Churches Countdown to Climate Justice**](#)

[**More Information about the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development**](#)

WSCF Executive Committee Meets in Berlin

The Executive Committee (ExCo) of the WSCF held an in-person meeting 20-27 May, 2012 in Berlin, Germany with an ambitious agenda. The group achieved its goal of using this key meeting to “strengthen WSCF’s ability to provide ecumenical leadership formation to generations of students and to set a course for renewal and sustainability.”

“The ExCo followed up the work initiated in the 2008 General Assembly, reflected in the WSCF Strategic Plan, with an action plan to become programmatically vital, fiscally stable, and with a strengthened capacity to carry out our mission. “The vision, plan and tools that came out of this meeting will set us on the path to increase our institutional and financial sustainability and to express in concrete actions the unity of our Federation,” reflected WSCF Chairperson Horacio Mesones.

The Action Plan runs through General Assembly in 2014, to be held in Mexico City. It includes a new level of global initiatives and programming, including: global solidarity programs in Colombia and the Middle East, a continuation of the Global Eco Justice Programme, a Federation-wide gender justice evaluation, and a “You Are the Federation” communications campaign.

“The vision, plan and tools that came out of this meeting will set us on the path to increase our institutional and financial sustainability and to express in concrete actions the unity of our Federation.”

The WSCF leadership body renewed its commitment to put the gifts God has given to its members to work for the Federation and in the service of the ecumenical community and a world in need. External facilitator Anders Skoe helped the group put this commitment into a plan. “A key to the meeting’s success was the integration of prayer, worship, and Bible study; skill building; work on casting and articulating our vision and mission for WSCF; and concrete and specific action-planning,” said General Secretary Christine Housel.

The WSCF’s Student Christian Movement of Norway



WSCF Executive Committee in Berlin

fully funded the meeting and Gaute Braekken, SCM Norway’s General Secretary, accompanied the group for the week. “We believe that society needs our global movement, and we’re proud to take an active part in it,” Braekken affirmed.

ExCo representative from the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region Sarahi Garcia shared: “We achieved a concrete plan, and at the same time it is visionary, a dream. We want to keep giving capacity and formation to Christian students to work for justice in our communities and society. [This meeting] was also an opportunity for me to rethink my role in the LAC Region and connect it with our global strategy – to get the students involved.”

At this meeting, the Executive Committee recognized Georgine Djeunge Kengne and her contribution to the WSCF in her 7 years as Africa Regional Secretary as she prepares to leave the post. The ExCo also said goodbye to Katarina Babicova, Europe Regional Secretary Interim, and welcomed Hans Hommens as Europe Regional Secretary.

[To view the WSCF’s Action Plan for 2012-13, click here.](#)

WSCF Delegates Speak up for Youth at Indonesia Ecumenical Gathering

The WSCF was well-represented at the World Council of Churches' AGAPE Poverty, Wealth and Ecology Forum, 18-22 June in Bogor, Indonesia. The forum was in preparation for the World Council of Churches General Assembly in 2013 in Busan, South Korea. Issues discussed during the forum included poverty eradication, wealth sharing, ecological protection, the impact of globalization on young people and green economy.



WSCF Delegates from left: Shibi Peter, Dianet Martinez Valdes, Janejinda Pawadee, Luciano Kovacs, Bungaran Saragih, Jimmi R. P. Tampubolon

Senior friends expressed support for and confidence in the current generation of SCMers, and their own desire and willingness to work with the Federation towards peace and justice.

Dianet expressed

appreciation for their support, saying "they inspired me to keep promoting a real spiritual transformation in the ecumenical community and for the whole world (through) local initiatives and advocacy..."

The following day, WSCF delegates gave a presentation on "Youth and Eco Justice" to the main forum. They posed challenging and pertinent questions to the gathering, such as why there wasn't greater participation from poor or marginalized groups during the deliberations of the forum. The Senior Friends once more expressed their trust in the current ecumenical youth's ability to bring about social and spiritual transformation to the world. For SCMers like Dianet, their affirmation showed a spirit that said, "Once you become member of the WSCF you will always be part of it."

According to North America Regional Secretary Luciano Kovacs, participants went away from the forum with a stronger commitment to continuing their work around the forum's themes by doing advocacy in their home churches, movements, and communities.

"They inspired me to keep promoting a real spiritual transformation in the ecumenical community and for the whole world (through) local initiatives and advocacy."

Our delegation consisted of Luciano Kovacs (WSCF North America Regional Secretary), Janejinda Pawadee (WSCF Vice-Chair), Dianet de la Caridad Martinez Valdes (Student Christian Movement Cuba), Jimmi R. P. Tampubolon (Student Christian Movement Indonesia) and Shibi Peter (Student Christian Movement India). Ms. Georgine K. Djeutane (WSCF Africa Regional Secretary) and Rev. Amos Kamugisha Mushendwa (Student Christian Movement Tanzania) were also part of the delegation but were unable to attend. The WSCF delegates held a fishbowl activity on youth perspectives of the forum's themes, where twenty-three participants talked about their SCM experiences and invited others to enter into dialogue with them. They continued this dialogue by meeting whenever there was a break during the forum.

On the third night of the forum WSCF delegates hosted a Senior Friends event, where, according to SCM Cuba's Dianet Martinez Valdes, "the meeting took place between laughs, stories and shared struggles." Jimmi Tampubolon, from Student Christian Movement Indonesia, described the atmosphere of the evening as being "a family gathering."

As determined in the Call to Action section of the PWE final document, member churches of the WCC will be expected to make a genuine commitment to strengthening prophetic and transformative action in the areas of poverty eradication, ecological protection and climate justice. This commitment will be manifested through concrete steps on the part of member churches. Such steps include mobilizing people and resources, and developing more cohesive and coordinated programmes for the transformation of economic structures, production and consumption patterns, and cultural values.

To read more about the Forum, visit the World Council of Churches website.

CWM and WSCF Develop Partnership at Mission Assembly

WSCF General Secretary Christine Housel represented the World Student Christian Federation at the Council for World Mission (CWM) Assembly as an ecumenical guest June 16-22, 2012 in American Samoa. The theme of the assembly was "Hope: the Language of Life."



Council for World Mission Assembly in American Samoa

Christine played an active role at the gathering; she addressed the assembly on an ecumenical panel with the general secretaries of the World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), led an evening worship service, helped monitor elections, interacted with the youth delegates, and organized an evening conversation with WSCF Senior Friends and students present at the Assembly.

Christine reflected that what was particularly satisfying for her about the experience was the opportunity to spend time with the youth delegates and CWM staff working with them, three of whom were SCMer. In her address to the assembly, Christine shared about WSCF's ongoing work with students and youth, and explored potential opportunities for partnership between WSCF and CWM.

She also commented on the quality and commitment of the youth delegates, saying, "The youth delegates were motivated by the international connections and solidarity that CWM can provide... [they are] inspired by their faith to serve others and want to help inspire other young people to an active faith and participation." CWM

and its member churches are currently looking for new ways to reach out and partner with young people, and during the assembly CWM made a historic step in this direction by including two young adults under the age of 30 in their highest governing body.

The Council for World Mission is a worldwide community of churches committed to practising partnership in mission, who are called to partnership in Christ, to mutually challenge, encourage, and equip churches to share God's mission. The vision of CWM is fullness of life through Christ for all creation, and their organisational values are justice in relationships, mutuality, equality and inter-dependence, generosity of spirit, and unity in diversity.

[Read more about the Council for World Mission here.](#)

Missioners Join IRO Staff in Geneva

This spring, the Inter-Regional Office in Geneva was excited to receive two new missioners from the United States.

Carrie Diaz-Littauer arrived with her husband, Samuel, in April to begin duties as the Office and Projects Manager. She is supported and sent by the several parishes and the Diocese of New Jersey through the Young Adult Service Corps program of The Episcopal Church. Carrie brings with her an MDiv. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and several years of experience in the non-profit sector. The focus of her work this year will be to strengthen and implement office systems while managing various global projects.

In June, Rachel Berry arrived and began her work as an Advocacy and Solidarity Officer. Rachel is sent by the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries and will be in Geneva until February 2013.

Born and raised in California, Rachel has a Bachelor's in International Studies from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Geneva is going to be a big transition for Rachel, who, prior to her arrival, spent nine months interning at the Women's and Youth's Desk of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines through GBGM.



From left: Rachel Berry, Christine Housel, and Carrie Diaz-Littauer

[Read more about Carrie and Rachel on their blogs: Carrie's Blog Rachel's Blog](#)

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