

# WCC pressed to develop new policy statement on gender justice

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Geneva, February 21 (ENInews)--Members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, at their meeting here, took a fresh look at the ecumenical movement's progress on gender justice issues and many members didn't like what they saw.

Introducing on 19 February a plenary session on "The Community of Women and Men," the Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson of the United Church of Christ in the U.S. and the WCC's North American president, noted that in 1981 the Central Committee established a commitment to have women delegates make up 50 percent of the WCC Assemblies and the Central Committee.

"As a WCC president, I want to express sadness that we seem to have moved away from that commitment," Powell Jackson said. "It's about more than numbers - it's about how we share power and God's bountiful resources."

Later in the plenary, Kathryn Lohre of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America urged the WCC to conduct a comprehensive study of gender justice issues and develop a policy statement on the role of women in the WCC and its member churches and societies.

The Rev. Karin Achtelstetter, general secretary of the World Association of Christian Communication, told the Central Committee that WACC has been compiling such research for a number of years "and is prepared to offer our data and findings as our contribution to the WCC."

The Rev. Gregor Henderson of the Uniting Church in Australia noted that "across the churches there are very different understandings of the role of women" and that a number of churches don't ordain women "even though in probably every WCC member church the majority of church members and worshipers are women."

He echoed the call for greater attention to the role of women in the church.

"Women's participation in the church has not been a prominent issue in the WCC," Henderson said. "We've had no systematic collection of data since 1981. We don't even know how many of our churches ordain women."

The issue of ordination of women is a non-starter for Orthodox churches, said Archbishop Anastasios of the Orthodox Church of Albania. "To implement such an idea would be to isolate us and set back the goal of the participation of women," the WCC's Orthodox president said. "There are many ways to empower women without the issue of ordination."

Building just communities of women and men lies far beyond issues of ordination of women and voting percentages, said Magali Nascimento Cunha, a Brazilian Methodist. "This [50 percent women's representation goal] is a challenge, yes," Cunha said.

"However, it has to be accompanied by other actions ... Full participation of women through numbers has to be achieved," she said, "and has also to mean women being able to speak, being able to do, to lead, women being respected as partners being seen, being heard, their gifts being recognized and valued."

Cunha, too, called for a new "WCC gender policy statement to guide the council's actions concerning guaranteeing participation in governance, staff positions and representation."