

South African scholar Jerry Pillay elected WCC general secretary

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [July 13, 2022](#) issue



(World Council of Churches/Peter Williams)

On June 17, South African scholar Jerry Pillay was elected general secretary of the World Council of Churches during the central committee's first in-person meeting since 2018.

Pillay, who was one of two candidates standing for election, will replace Ioan Sauca, who has served as acting general secretary since April 2020.

Agnes Abuom, moderator of the central committee, congratulated Pillay on his election.

"May the WCC global fellowship warmly welcome you, pray for you, and show you in every way that we care for you as you take on important leadership in our ongoing

journey toward Christian unity,” she said. “You and the ecumenical movement are making history—and forming a future in which we can live out God’s love for one another and for all.”

Pillay is currently the dean of the faculty of theology and religion at the University of Pretoria, a position he has held since 2018. Prior to that, he was the head of the school’s department of church history and church polity.

He also previously served as general secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. In the late ’80s, Pillay was the senior minister at Bridgetown Presbyterian Church in Cape Town before moving to the senior minister position at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Benoni.

While his election was praised by many—Najla Kassab, current president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, called it a “special day” not only for the global Reformed community but for the ecumenical movement—it was decried by at least one group.

In a statement, Seth J. Riklin and Daniel S. Mariaschin, president and CEO, respectively, of the Jewish humanitarian group B’nai B’rith International, called Pillay’s election “astounding and alarming.” They raised concern about a 2016 article in which Pillay equated the situation in Israel-Palestine with South African apartheid.

Pillay will officially begin his new position in January 2023.