

World Churches to Mark 100 Years of Landmark Mission Event

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MEDIA ADVISORY, May 14 /Standard Newswire/ -- As the centennial of a landmark mission event approaches in 2010, a global study process is mobilizing churches, theological institutions and mission bodies around the world.

The World Mission Conference that took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910 brought together some 1,200 representatives mainly linked to the Western missionary movement. In addition to its focus on evangelism, the historic gathering emphasized cooperation and unity.

"It is because of this concern for unity that Edinburgh 1910 is widely considered the symbolic starting point of the contemporary ecumenical movement, although there were no Orthodox nor Catholic delegates present at that time", says Nayiri Baljian, an Armenian Orthodox from the US. "In 2010, as opposed to 1910, we look forward to a gathering and its preceding study process that is much more inclusive and representative of the global church."

Baljian is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. In that capacity she sits on the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, a body charged with coordinating the worldwide centennial celebrations on behalf of a network of stakeholders which includes churches, Christian world communions, regional associations of theological institutions and world mission bodies.

Key among the activities marking the centennial is a study process on nine themes that are at the centre of contemporary missiology. Launched in 2005, it has an interdenominational and intercontinental scope and a decentralized approach that allows for the participation of many organizations and movements.

The themes range from the foundations of Christian mission to current forms of missionary engagement, including aspects like inter-religious, postmodern and other contemporary contexts in which the missionary endeavor of the churches takes place. The inter-relations between mission and power, unity and spirituality are also among the themes.

"The study process is certainly polycentric and quite global", says Edinburgh 2010 research coordinator, Dr Kirsteen Kim. "Eight of the nine working groups could be described as having worldwide participation", says Kim, and "almost all have demonstrated that they are confessionally representative as well".

According to Kim, "a very wide range of institutions and church and mission agencies are represented in the make-up of the groups, with many centres for the study of world Christianity and mission in different parts of the world involved in the Edinburgh process".

"In addition to the main study process, a series of events are taking place around the world in which different church communities choose their own ways to mark the centenary, whose theme is Witnessing to Christ Today", says Edinburgh 2010 international director Dr Daryl Balia, a missiologist from South Africa. "These events are encouraged by the Edinburgh 2010 General Council but planned and executed locally."

"This way of marking the centennial recognizes and affirms the development of the church around the world in the last 100 years", says the Rev. Andrew Anderson from the Church of Scotland, who is the general council's chairman.

Celebration, repentance, re-commitment

The outcomes of the study process will be the main input for a 2-6 June 2010 conference hosted by the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Some 150 delegates from the stakeholder organizations will engage with about 70 delegates from the study process.

"We need to ensure that the results of the study process are not confined to academic discussion but are really engaged with in the conference sessions on the study themes", says Kim. She is asking the study groups to think how their work "can be made meaningful to the constituency of the conference and the churches at large in creative ways".

Organizers envision the conference as an opportunity for joint celebration of what God has done in the growth of the church over the last 100 years; repentance for all that has gone wrong in mission; and re-commitment to a new shared vision for the present and future of God's mission in the world.

"There will be many events marking the Edinburgh centennial in 2010, and several major Christian organizations will have their assemblies during that year", says Jacques Matthey, a Swiss pastor who is the director of the WCC programme on Unity, Mission, Evangelism and Spirituality. But "the specificity of the common 2010 Edinburgh conference lies indeed in the wide spectrum of churches, denominations and mission traditions united around the project".

This spectrum includes Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, **Seventh Day Adventist**, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent traditions. "Although relatively small in terms of participants, the 2010 Edinburgh conference will be the most representative of

the diversity of world Christianity today", adds Matthey, who has been involved with the project since its inception.

The conference culmination will be on Sunday, 6 June, when participants will join members of the local churches and gather at the 1910 Assembly Hall for what organizers anticipate as "a significant celebration".

Whilst Edinburgh 1910 gave indirectly birth to the International Missionary Council and the contemporary ecumenical movement, Edinburgh 2010 is not expected to create a new structure or institution. However, the four-day long conference will not be the end of the Edinburgh 2010 process.

"There are already many ecumenical or interdenominational mission or church bodies at global and regional levels who can take up the results of the process and of the conference", explains Matthey. "It will be up to them to keep going on the key conversation on mission that Edinburgh 2010 will initiate."

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