



Statement of the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship on the Draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

The Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, to which 96 Protestant churches in Europe belong on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973, dealt with the Draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Convent 28) at its meeting held in Belfast from 15 to 18 June 2000. From this place where the task of reconciliation in Europe between humans and confessions is of particular significance, we welcome and support expressly the intention of the European Union to strengthen the protection of fundamental rights by means of a charter. Such a charter will contribute to making tangible a common basis of fundamental human rights.

As representatives of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship we would like to comment on Article 14 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion). We are of the opinion that the freedom of religion should be guaranteed not only at an individual but also at a corporate level. With this in mind, we would like to suggest the following wording:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The freedom of religion includes the freedom to adhere to any confession in public or private, individually or collectively as well as the right of churches and religious communities to set out their order and administer their affairs within the framework of the laws of the member states."

This wording insures the insertion of the collective freedom of religion and the inclusion of not only individuals but also communities and corporations in the range of influence of the European Union. In addition, it draws upon the decisions of the European Human Rights Commission, in which churches and religious communities, on their own right, have increasingly been granted the resort to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. On account of many different regulations regarding the State-Church relations, Article 14 would also have to refer to an inner-state right

his statement has been made in a close partnership with the statements of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) whose Protestant members also belong to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), a signatory member of the Leuenberg Agreement.

Belfast, 18 June 2000
Heinrich Rusterholz
President of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship

At present 96 Protestant churches in Europe and South America belong to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF). Lutheran, Reformed, United, Methodist and Hussite churches grant each other pulpit and table fellowship based on the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. The five South-American member churches developed from earlier

immigrant churches. Between the General Assemblies of the LCF, the 13-member Executive Committee makes decisions concerning the work of the LCF. The executive president (of the 3-member Presidium) is Prof. Elisabeth Parmentier, professor of practical theology in Strasbourg. Her deputies are Revd Thomas Wipf, president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in Bern and Prof. Michael Beintker, director of the Seminary for Reformed Theology at the University in Münster. The other members of the Executive Committee are: Dr Peter Bukowski (Wuppertal), Moderator of the Reformed Federation, OKR Doris Damke (Bielefeld), Dr. Friedrich Hauschildt (Hanover), president of the Head Office of the United Lutheran Churches of Germany (VELKD), Bishop Dr. Mihály Márkus (Táta/Hungary), OKR Dr. Michael Bünker (Vienna), Revd Piotr Gaš (Szczecin/Poland), Prof. Willy Willems (Brussels), General Secretary Ane Hjerrild (Copenhagen), Revd Fleur Houston (Oxford) and Revd. Nigel Collinson (London). The Secretariat, which carries out the ongoing tasks under the direction of the Executive Committee, is housed in the Head Office of the Evangelist Church of the Union in Berlin, Jebensstr. 3, D-10623 Berlin. Its director is Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, President of the EKV Head Office. OKR (senior church official) Udo Hahn (Lutheran Church Office, Hanover) is responsible for the public relations: Tel. 0511/62 61,226, fax 05111/62 61,511, hahn@velkd.de.