

**Head: Harmony with the World Church****Subhead: Background Given for Voted Document****GC Communication Department Staff****Word Count: 1,191****October 17, 2018**

On Sunday, October 14, the General Conference (GC) Executive Committee approved a document, [Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions](#) by a vote of 185 to 124. The decision was an extension of a vote by the GC Executive Committee at its October 2017 meeting.

The purpose of this voted document is to preserve the God-given, Bible-based authority of church organization and provide a redemptive process of enabling church entities to be in harmony with the world church and its decisions made at the highest representative levels—the General Conference Session and its Executive Committee. For a Q & A article about this document, click **here**.

On October 14, more than 300 executive committee members from around the world, along with hundreds of invitees and observers in the Kellogg Arena were provided with complete background information, including answers to questions raised regarding the purpose and process of the proposed document.

In summary, it was shown that:

1. The document was based on input from hundreds of leaders around the world.

2. Nearly three-fourths of church leaders reported that there should be consequences for entities not in harmony with world church decisions.

3. The document was fully in harmony with the world church's Constitution and Bylaws, and General Conference Working Policy.

4. The document provides for a Christ-centered approach to resolving issues of non-compliance by encouraging the entity closest to the issue to resolve the problem.

5. The document contains carefully crafted safeguards to protect against "Kingly Power," centralized authority and a hierarchal form of church structure.

"The origins of this document come from you; it is your document," stated Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to the committee members. "The issue is: 'Should organizations be willing to abide by the rules they themselves have set up?' "

### **Values of the Unity Oversight Committee**

Michael Ryan, chair of the UOC, outlined the committee's operating and procedural values:

- Transparency—to make public all information in a timely manner.
- Wide input—to gather input from church leadership representing their members.
- Brevity—to keep the document simple and short.
- Adherence—to preserve harmony with the GC Constitution and Bylaws and Working Policy.

- Acceptance—to accept the GC Session actions as authoritative.

The document was based on both qualitative and quantitative data gathered in fourteen meetings—one in each world division, and the Middle East Union—with 137 union presidents and 683 other world church leaders. A professionally designed survey was also sent out by the church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) to the 137 union presidents worldwide. The questionnaire was circulated in multiple languages resulting in 100 percent participation.

### **Survey Results**

Survey results revealed that nearly 75 percent of union presidents responded that consequences were appropriate for church entities that were not in harmony with world church decisions, reported David Trim, Director of ASTR.

In conclusion, Trim pointed out that while the document being proposed would not meet the wishes of everyone, there was “consensus on a key point: that non-compliance cannot be ignored and should result in consequences, in terms of how our Church works as an organization.”

### **Document is Legal**

Following Trim’s presentation, Karnik Doukmetzian, general counsel for the General Conference and the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, affirmed that the document was in harmony with the church’s constitution and bylaws.

“If compliance is not achieved [after following the process outlined in the document] . . . the organization or leader may be subject to one of the three disciplinary options,” stated Doukmetzian as he summarized the document. “Warning for the organization, Public Reprimand of the elected leader of the organization, or application of current policy or governing documents to implement a Removal for Cause. None of these three options nor the process outlined violate either the spirit or the text of the Constitution or Bylaws of the General Conference under which we have all agreed to abide and operate,” he affirmed.

### **Longstanding Conduct for Leaders**

In his presentation, Hensley Mooroven, secretary of the committee and undersecretary for the world church, pointed out that “compliance with working policy is a long standard of conduct for Seventh-day Adventist leaders.”

Turning to the Executive Committee members, he asked, ““What holds the Church together?”” Our daily submission to the Holy Spirit. Our willingness to keep striving for togetherness. Our commitment to a worldwide mission. Policy, therefore, is the *result* of unity, not the cause of it.

“May I submit to you,” said Mooroven, “that the first step toward splitting the church is taken when a leader decides to go against what we have already agreed upon—it is *not* a document that splits the church!”

Mooroven added that “Policy is not silent upon the expectation for officers to work in harmony with what is in this [*Working Policy*] book.”

He then quoted from the *Working Policy*:

**B 15 10 Adherence to Policy Required**—1. The General Conference Working Policy shall be strictly adhered to by all organizations in every part of the world field. The work in every organization shall be administered in full harmony with the policies of the General Conference and of the divisions respectively.

**B 15 15 Officers/Administrators to Work in Harmony with Policy**—Officers and administrators are expected to work in harmony with the General Conference *Working Policy*. Those who show inability or unwillingness to administer their work in harmony with policy should not be continued in executive leadership by their respective constituencies or governing boards/committees.

Moorooven went on to point out that these policies have been in existence for decades.

“Compliance with *Working Policy* is, and has long been, a standard of conduct for Seventh-day Adventist leaders, and the document that is being proposed is riveted on this principle,” Mooroooven concluded.

In presenting the document for consideration by the Executive Committee, Michael Ryan stated:

“What is proposed is a carefully considered due process for dealing with various kinds of non-compliance, a process that sets up filters and protections against both the arbitrary exercise of power and the willful defiance of what has been commonly agreed. As you consider the proposal, I ask you to bear in mind that more than two-thirds of the leaders of the constituent units of the world Church believe that there should be organizational consequences for missions, conferences, and unions that refuse to comply with what representatives of the world Church, acting together, have discussed and decided.”

Church organization is at the heart of unity among New Testament believers. Without church organization and compliance to the mutual agreements made in the General Conference Sessions, the church is in danger of fragmentation and a drift toward congregationalism.

It is the prayer of the GC leadership that the current document will help preserve the structure of the world church to fulfill the mandate of Jesus to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. After all, the very purpose of our church structure is to facilitate a Christ-centered, Bible-based focus on a Spirit-empowered mission.

For a report on the item's discussion and vote, see the report by Adventist News Network and the *Adventist Review* in "Annual Council delegates vote to adopt compliance document."

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