**Moderator speech, ACT alliance, digital general assembly, 2021**

2021-12-02

Dear general secretaries of the WCC and the ACT,members of the ACT alliance. I feel honored and humble by having been selected as moderator for the next 3-year period. It is a daunting task to replace Birgitte Quist Sörensen, who has done such a good job since Uppsala 2018, together with the vice-moderator Tagwende Leonard Kinda. But I have excellent co-members on the board, not least Minnie-Anne as vice-moderator and Simangaliso as the treasurer and it is reassuring that we will have a good mix in the new GB, with both continuity and new faces. We also have high-level capacity and competence in the secretariat, led by gen sec Rudelmar and his excellent staff, both in Geneva and in the regions. The visibility of the ACT alliance in high-level political spaces is an astonishing achievement to which Rudelmar and his staff have contributed a lot, in close co-operation with global reference groups and communities of practice. This general assembly has also shown that we can be proud of our youth COP and their expertise, on not only climate change, but also on all the conversations we’ve had during this week. Anti-racism work, power relations, gender, inclusion. What a difference it makes to have a governing board with two youth representatives and supported by youth from across the ACT membership. We’re on the way of building a strong youth movement, but will only do it through your experiences, advice, and competence.

For those of you who don’t know me I am married to Annika and have two children, Elin and Nils, 20- and 17-years young. My very first professional experience was in South Africa, 1991 to 1994; the transition years that took the country from the apartheid system to the first, non-racial democratic elections , thanks to Mandela and great leaders of his generation. I came there for solidarity work, a 25-year-old Swede that was welcomed by South Africans to take part in the struggle to end the racist brutality of the apartheid system. I was also there as a representative of a Swedish ACT member, channeling funds to churches, church councils and anti-apartheid organization, which was important to their work. But the lasting memory of that time is one of being together in a global struggle to combat racism, ending apartheid. It holds similarities with our mission today. We’re in the alliance because we have a common cause, a global faith-based struggle for climate justice and social justice.

However, these are troublesome times. It is so obvious and deeply painful that we find ourselves amid two parallel and existential crises as humanity. The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency, with all their disastrous consequences for millions of people, challenge everything we have agreed on as the international community: Sustainable development. Multilateral cooperation. Respect for democracy and human rights. Peace. Dignity. Equality.

But I am proud to moderate an alliance that embodies exactly these commitments, a global coalition of actors that work together to contribute to a just, inclusive, and peaceful world. A church-based alliance with its roots in faith-based communities at local level. An alliance that puts Christian faith and hope into action.

Earlier this year, I was deeply moved and inspired by the words of the young poet Amanda Gorman at the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden in January. She ended her astonishing poem with the words “For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.

So, let’s pray that we as an alliance can be brave enough to see the light and be the change.

**We will continue to push political leaders to be brave on addressing climate change.** We now know the outcome of the COP 26, and that much more action and mobilization is needed to keep the 1,5 C target alive. Our work has just begun. As an alliance of faith-based actors we can offer hope that another, more sustainable world, is possible and step up the pressure on our political leaders. It is late, very late for the planet but the COP 26 at least gave us the opportunity to foster even more engagement, even more advocacy for countries to be braver at the COP 27 and deliver on climate justice, such as climate finance for adaptation and loss and damages and the full inclusion of women in all climate programmes.

**We can also be braver as champions of gender justice in our churches and as ACT members.**  I fully agree with my archbishop Antje Jackelén in Church of Sweden that we need to transform the unjust patriarchal heritage in our church traditions, narratives, and faith interpretations and change laws and norms that make women and girls second-class citizens.   But we also need patience and humility to understand that faith patterns and theological traditions do not change overnight, but may change after a combination of many, many long days of safe and respectful dialogue and education, and ongoing empowerment and inclusion of women, girls and LGBTQI communities.  For some of us this is challenging, for others is not. But we have a unique opportunity to walk together as ACT members, and the roll out of our gender justice policies and projects around the world is part of the walking together and may lead to better outcomes for women, girls and LGBTQI people.

**We have become braver in discussing challenging issues, such as power relations, racism, and localisation**.  I’m proud that the alliance is already on this path and so clearly aims to lead the shift in power towards local actors and supporting locally led responses. The overall pattern in our development sector is that 93 % of all development funds go through international NGOs or organisations in the global North while only 7 % go directly to civil society organisations in the global south.  This is not sustainable, and we know it. A power shift, including financial resources, from the global North to the global South must happen. And it will happen regardless of our response. Many government donors are now looking at ways in supporting civil society organisations in the global South directly. We need to “decolonize our minds” as Patrica Mungcal said so eloquently the other day. We need to work together in challenging structures that stand in the way of this shift to happen. Among these are of course all the compliance requirements that go with government funds. I am dreaming of the day when the emphasis even in our own alliance is less on conditional donor-partner relationships, and more on partnering together in our global social justice movement where each of us contribute resources of different kinds, human, material, spiritual and have downward accountability to local communities and people as our first priority.   We need to think deeper about how to get there, for instance by setting up new ways of working together at regional and national forums and build on and strengthen the localisation aspect of response funds by national ACT members. We need to be brave enough to do it.

**I see hope in our ability to adapt and come together as an alliance to find new ways forward**. We will not return to business as usual after the pandemic. So much has changed, and so much needs to be rebuilt.  We need to hold many different and sometimes conflicting perspectives at the same time.   Whenever you choose one way, you will also lose something.  This is very much true for two of the most important issues that we are tackling as the ACT alliance, the sustainable funding model, and the revision of the humanitarian response system. Church offerings, individual donations and other fundraising efforts among some ACT funding members are levelling out, making it more difficult to finance ecumenical work. Back donor requirements also make it difficult for some members to use the humanitarian response system. However, we have come to a point where we need to be braver. It is time to put trust and resources into these models and create the stability and flexibility that we need for the secretariat and for the whole alliance. What matters most is the will to take decisions that reflect our values, vision, and mission as an alliance. The value of ACT members acting together is so much greater than each member acting on its own.

**We have the gift as an alliance to manifest God’s unconditional love for all people**. A love that calls us to embrace peoples’ struggles, vulnerabilities, and tears.  We are sustained and carried by the Christian hope. The struggle for justice, peace, and radical inclusion is rooted in Christ’s love for all of us.

We know there will be ups and downs in our alliance, but I believe us to be resilient.  And we shall be brave enough to see the truth, not only the truth of what needs to happen in the world, but what needs to happen in our own faith-based alliance, in our churches and in our own organizations. So, let us be brave and see the light. Let us put faith and hope into action. Let us be the change ourselves!

/Erik Lysén