



EMS Statement on Gender-Based Violence

EMS holds a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of all people it works with. We recognize that sexual and gender-based violence is a continuing global problem that takes place in all countries, religions, and social classes, in different and often hidden contexts.

Definition

Gender-based violence (GBV) is any act of violence that results in, or may result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering, in particular to women. This includes threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty occurring either in public or in private life. Gender-based violence comprises any harmful act that is committed against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed differences, for example, power inequalities between females and males. Acts of GBV violate a number of universal human rights.

Commitment

Our Theological Guidelines (TG) focus on witness:

"Our common witness means our response and our participation in God's compassionate and transforming love." (TG 2)

We acknowledge that GBV is happening in many churches and church communities, and lament that most often, we do not talk about it, rather consider it a taboo. The sin of the abuse is compounded too many times by a failure by church personnel, structures, and systems to act, by words and actions that blame the person who is abused, and by silence and looking away that denies justice to the victim.

"Our witness finds expression in signs of living solidarity. As reconciling and healing communities we share life, also suffering. We strive for human rights. We also strive for a just community of women and men and in all generations." (TG 8)

We acknowledge that sexual exploitation, harassment, and abuse is based on the marginalization of women, children, and other vulnerable groups. In acknowledging the critical role that the church plays in society, we understand the obligation to actively contribute to the elimination of GBV and abuse.

We commit ourselves to continue and intensify our support for those affected and to condemn the notion that such violence is ever acceptable.

Call to Action

We follow up our witness and commitment with action:

"As a forum for ecumenical living in our common witness across borders, our fellowship enables us to learn from each other, to encourage each other, and to challenge each other." (TG 10)

Together, we commit to advocate for restored relationships of mutual respect and love, modelling the reconciling love shown by Christ to all people.

- Our theology, our education, our governance must show a clear orientation towards prevention of exploitation and abuse. Any form of violence against women, children and vulnerable people, any rejection of the equal dignity of all people is sin.
- We renew our commitment to prevent all forms of misconduct and harassment as formulated in our Code of Conduct. The existing CoC is to be extended to cover not only our international meetings but e.g., our youth volunteers service and other cooperations.
- Every allegation of harassment and sexual abuse must be taken with seriousness and investigated independently, impartially, and thoroughly. All parties should be properly supported in the process including pastoral care (see resolution MC 16.3).
- We encourage one another to share existing policies and practices which ensure support to persons who are harassed or abused and hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour to the fullest extent of the law.
- We acknowledge the importance of awareness creation in teaching and worship, using appropriate language to say clearly that violence against women, children, and vulnerable people is wrong.

All forms of harassment and violence must stop.

Being committed to promoting and supporting safer environment includes that all people feel welcomed, respected, and safe in the churches and mission associations of the EMS fellowship.

Sources:

EMS Theological Guidelines – Common Witness

Adopted by the EMS Mission Council in 2003

Act Alliance, Gender Justice Policy, 2017

The Lutheran World Federation, Churches say “No” to Violence against Women, 2001

World Council of Churches, Central Committee’s Statement on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, 2022