



Geneva, 10 February 2023

Message of Appreciation on the mandate of Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca

Your Excellences, distinguished guests, sisters and brothers,

It's a great pleasure to greet you today and honor the work and the lifelong commitment to the ecumenical movement of Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca.

Father Ioan Sauca joined the WCC in 1994 as executive secretary for Orthodox Studies and Relationship in Mission.

Since 1998, he served as Professor of Missiology and Ecumenical Theology at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and as its director from 2001 to 2022. A milestone of the Institute was the accreditation of all academic programs, for which Fr Ioan Sauca worked closely with the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva. Under his directorship, the Ecumenical Institute became not only a unique place to study and live ecumenically, but also a "living laboratory" where distinctive academic methodologies were tested and developed. Fr Ioan Sauca has always affirmed the holistic nature of theology, and its intrinsic link with worship and spirituality, which is integrated in the wider reality of the church and of the world. Under his leadership, Chateau de Bossey was completely renovated and it received its reputation as a welcoming place for conferences and gatherings; a place where nature meets hospitality, spirituality, and an academic atmosphere.

Father Ioan Sauca was elected as the first Orthodox to serve as the head of the WCC between March 2020 and December 2022.

In times of pandemic, he led the work of the Council in equipping the world's churches to address the healthcare and pastoral challenges posed and to minister in the presence of illness, death, and enormous disruption everywhere. Fr Ioan rapidly assembled a WCC ministry support team to respond to many questions and concerns, drawing on the deep historical identification of churches and the WCC with health and healing.

Fr Ioan's leadership was inspired by a profound spirituality nourished by a deep knowledge of the tradition of the church. His Orthodox background helped bring new insights and perspectives on the theme of the last WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. He stressed the Trinitarian dimension of the assembly theme, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity" as well as its cosmological relevance to our understanding of the entire creation and our approach to ecology.

As thousands of Christians converged in Karlsruhe for the assembly, Fr Ioan repeatedly affirmed that the churches' response to the hardships of our times needs to be rooted in the urgency of realizing that we need one another, we depend on one another, and we can advance only if we walk together, not separately.

In his capacity as acting general secretary, he has strengthened the relationships of the WCC with the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. He visited churches affected by war, conflicts, and tensions in Russia, Ukraine, Syria, and the Holy Land, being guided by a strong belief in the power of dialogue on the path towards reconciliation. He recognized that challenges facing the ecumenical movement today include dealing with tensions and divisions “within” the same family of churches, instead of “between” families of churches. This makes a fundamental difference that the ecumenical movement needs to take very seriously into account.

Finally, to quote Father Ioan himself “If there are still people who may have doubts about the holistic nature of theology and about the ecumenical formation which is a life transforming reality and growth into a new identity which assumes the richness and the otherness of the others as expressed above and as lived in Bossey, I will gladly extend the invitation with the biblical and liturgical words: "**Come and see!**"

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pillay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay General Secretary
World Council of Churches