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To: South African Member Churches in the REC and the WARC

Re: The current and future position of the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NHKA) in the REC and WCRC

Dear Friends in Christ,

We write to you now following an intense discussion at the consultation in Johannesburg last month, a consultation sponsored by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to prepare material on the global economy and the Accra Confession for next year's Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids.

At that meeting, several of your representatives raised the painful question of the membership of the NHKA in the REC. In particular, you asked why the REC did not consult you when we accepted the NHKA into its membership in 2005. As a result, you wondered whether the REC was serious about the unity process that will, God willing, lead the REC and WARC to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches next year.

We are very grateful that you have brought this painful experience to our attention again. We know this was not an easy thing to do. We write now because of promises made at that meeting by our President, Dr. Peter Borgdorff, that the REC would take some action.

We would like to tell you now that we deeply regret that we did not take more time in 2005. While we were technically correct in our process – there was no requirement or precedent for either WARC or REC to consult the others' members about a new member – we should have known better. We should have widened our consultation process to include you.

We had been discussing apartheid at every single REC meeting since 1953, and we should have known that none of us could easily forget the deep effects of that system, which may take years or generations to be cleansed from us. We, the current members of the REC, were all present at the 2005 Assembly for that decision, and we were not careful or wise enough in our actions. For that, we apologize to you.

We knew then that there were still difficulties in the written and official positions of the NHKA. We also had warm assurances from the NHKA leadership at the time who fully supported our views on apartheid and who worked hard to satisfy the demands placed on them under the terms of their suspension in the WARC.

After the NHKA General Assembly of 2007, which refused to accept the declaration formed by their leaders and the WARC team, the REC sent the NHKA a letter urging them to correct this situation before the formation of the WCRC. We asked them to inform us of the process they hoped to follow in resolving their issues with the WARC. The NHKA has not yet responded.

In 2008, the REC-WARC Joint Working Group inserted a phrase in the proposed constitution for the WCRC: “A church that is under suspension in either preceding body at the time of the formation shall remain under suspension in the World Communion of Reformed Churches.” The only church this applies to is the NHKA, and the REC members unanimously agreed with this proposal. Under this proposal, the NHKA will still be a member of the WCRC, but under suspension.

In the short time before the formation of the WCRC, this is the strongest position the REC can take. Because of our own history, we have instituted very careful procedures for suspension of members, to give due process to any member charged with an offense and to give ample time for defense. Those constitutional restrictions prevent us from suspending the NHKA at this time or prior to our next Assembly because of the short time available. Therefore, we are required to seat them as delegates at the next REC Assembly, which is the two-hour meeting on Friday morning, June 18, 2010, after which their representatives will be observers for the remainder of the UGC. Their presence in the REC Assembly next year is a technical matter about membership, and we write it only so that you will not be surprised next year.

Again, we wish to thank you for bringing this to our attention. In any reconciliation process, it is a courageous act for those who were directly affected to raise their voices. It is hurtful to raise harms from our past, because in doing so, we experience them again to some degree. It is natural to wish to leave the old wounds buried. But until you spoke, we were not aware of the degree of the pain still present. For our lack of awareness, and for our lack of due consultation in our past, we offer our regrets to you.

This letter also goes to the NHKA. We know you are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we know that some among you are in agreement with us. For those who disagree, we profess our willingness to continue to engage with you, to discuss, to witness, and to be willing to hear with open hearts of your own journey as you deal with your history.

Yours in Christ,

Peter Borgdorff, President

Richard L. van Houten, General Secretary

On behalf of the REC Executive Committee and Advisors

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