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Annual Council delegates vote to adopt compliance document

World Church Executive Committee approves steps recommended by Unity Oversight Committee

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Following more than five hours of presentations and discussion, delegates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church's annual meeting of its full Executive Committee approved a recommendation from the church's Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) to create a new compliance process to assist with the need to implement church policies and voted actions.

Today's action, expressed in a vote of 185 to 124, with two abstaining, approved a document entitled *Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions*. The decision was an extension of a vote by the General Conference Executive Committee at its October 2017 meeting. That action referred an earlier proposal, made in 2017 by the same Unity Oversight Committee, back for further study.

The Voted Document

[The document outlines a process](#)

[\(fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/news/documents/113G_Regard_for_and_Practice_of_General_Conference\)](#) for addressing matters of non-compliance within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In summary, the process begins with perceived non-compliance being reported to the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter. The document emphasizes the need for "Christian due process" including prayer and dialogue and "a supportive atmosphere." As part of the process, the non-compliant entity would be asked to provide evidence of compliance or a plan to "achieve sustained compliance."

If no resolution is reached at the closest administrative levels, the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) may refer the matter to one of five advisory committees. These committees, termed "compliance committees" had earlier been endorsed by ADCOM.

After studying the matter, the compliance committee may make recommendations to ADCOM for disciplinary measures. ADCOM may then refer the recommendations on to GCDO and the Executive Committee. The document next outlines a process of appeal as well as disciplinary measures.

These disciplinary measures may only be voted by the Executive Committee, and may include official warnings and public reprimand. In the event of persistent non-compliance, potential removal from Executive Committee membership by a two-thirds majority vote is allowed according to the Bylaws of the General Conference Constitution.

The Discussion on the Floor

The afternoon session began with Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who chaired the afternoon session, reminding attendees "the origins of the document come from you. It's your document. It's in your hands. It is not my document."

Wilson clarified there would be no recommendations coming from the compliance committees at this year's Annual Council meeting.

Wilson then asked for all to participate with a "sweet spirit and a Christlike demeanor. We want a very open kind of setting. We want to move ahead with an open and gracious spirit. We are here to do the will of the Lord."

Michael Ryan, chair of the UOC, introduced the history of the document and presentations by David Trim, director of Archives, Statistics and Research; Karnik Doukmetzian, lead counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and Hensley Mooroooven, Adventist world church undersecretary. Ryan moved the adoption of the document and Mooroooven subsequently read the document aloud.

Seventy-one delegates and invitees lined up at five microphones to address the proposed document.

"This afternoon we are experiencing the church at its best," said Mark Finley, well-known evangelist and retired GC vice president. "It's healthy for a church when leaders speak their mind openly and honestly. What I see this afternoon is a church wrestling with an issue."

Finley went on to speak in favor of the document, saying "the document does not lead to or foster kingly power. In fact, it presents safeguards against kingly power." He affirmed the role of policy in a united church: "Policies are mutual agreements, but they do govern our actions as church leaders. And I pray that we will support it together."

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church isn't going to fail," said Dan Jackson, president of the Church's North American Division. "God is going to lead His church to a glorious conclusion." Jackson however, cautioned about approving the document: "I believe adoption of this document will change relationships within the church. It runs contrary to the pioneers, and to sound business practice. The atmosphere of this document will not unite. North American Division members will feel they have been pushed to the periphery of the church."

"Faith without freedom is only a chain, a colorless flower," said Tamas Ocsai, president of the Adventist Church in Hungary. "Freedom of conscience is important for Adventists. My serious concern is—'Do we really want to use our recent document to hurt the unity of our beloved church family?'"

"I'm in favor of this document," said Esther Abayo from the East Central Africa Division. "All of us believe that compliance is necessary. The only fear I see is people afraid of consequences coming from non-compliance."

"I think most people in the local church are thinking more of advancing and fulfilling the mission of the church," offered Adan Ramos Lagos from the Inter-American Division. "I believe we have enough working policies and we should be abiding by them."

"We will be more successful in our mission and our relationship will be much deeper because here we learned to understand each other in spite of the difference of opinion," added Mikhail Kaminskiy, president of the Church's Euro-Asia Division.

Mario Ceballos, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries for the world church, the last delegate to speak, offered a pastoral perspective: "The greatest test of faith is when you don't get what you want, but still you are able to say, 'Thank you, Lord.'"

Concluding Remarks

Wilson expressed appreciation to the Executive Committee members for the good spirit exhibited during the afternoon. "I am extraordinarily impressed with your patience. I also want to express my deep appreciation to you as a body as to the way you have spoken. That speaks volumes."

"As we leave here tonight," concluded Wilson, "let us leave united in shedding light on all those who need to know about Christ's soon return."