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Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

We greet you in the name of our King, Jesus Christ.

In this way the DRC would like to open our hearts to our brothers and sisters of the URC. Our history of trauma, injustice and separation indeed causes us so often to struggle to hear each other's hearts and minds.

The talks between the two Executive Committees of our churches on general synodical level always bear the witness of sincere love and kindness. This enables us to discuss tough questions together, to reflect profoundly about difficult issues and to jointly seek the will of God. To us this is always an enriching experience and we are grateful for each such event.

Our joint journey, also with the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and the Reformed Church in Africa, on the writing of an Interim/Provisional Order, was a deep spiritual experience for us. We saw the hand of God in the movement and was touched by the manner in which you have participated from an inner conviction, provided guidance and took responsibility for the unity of the church. We learned a lot from the process and our confidence in the integrity of the URCSA's commitment to the unity of the church was confirmed. We trust that the General Synod of the URCSA will in October this year give support to the Provisional Order as well as to the process that can be unlocked by it.

As you know, the DRC continues to reflect and to work on how we can make the Confession of Belhar part of our confessional base. This was indeed the decision that was taken by our General Synod in 2011. Our Church Order complicated our decision making process. For many reasons, the proposed, and well-intentioned, amendment of Article 1 of our Church Order was not approved.

For many, the choice for or against the proposed Article 1 was not a choice for or against the confession. On the one hand, people voted to accommodate others whose

thinking differed from their own. Some have voted against the proposed Article 1, because it did not strongly enough express a decision in favor of the Confession of Belhar.

In the mean time the General Synod acknowledged the right of its constituent synods to decide on confessions themselves. The decision was also taken that such synods may approve of the Confession of Belhar and can confess it as expression of their identity. There are thousands of members in the DRC who confess and embrace the Confession of Belhar with all their heart. The General Synod decided in 2011 to include this confession in its confessional base, in a church orderly manner.

The General Synod's decision of 2015 indicates that to us this is still a matter of great importance and sincerity. We understand the concern, and rightly so, that this matter has very important implications for our unity with the URCSA. Our discussion about the confession in the first place is about the beliefs it expresses. Unfortunately, there are thousands of members in the DRC who do wholeheartedly share and practice the beliefs expressed in this confession, but who have not endorsed the confession as such. We must always again and again make sure what the reasons are why these members take this position. Obviously we fear that an attitude of superiority and prejudice will play a role in their assessment of the confession's status – and we assume that for some members such bias does play a role.

The reality is however, that members also have reservations about the importance of confessions, are not informed about the formation of confessions, misunderstand the meaning of the confession (Belhar), "want to close the books on the past" and therefore do not want to think about the sad time of apartheid any more, believe that the confession is temporal, think that the confession only addresses whites, etc. The Moderamen of the General Synod undertook many special efforts in recent years to introduce the Belhar Confession within the DRC and to put it in perspective and will continue doing so. We are currently creating church orderly space for the acceptance of the confession by synods and hope that the meaning of the confession will increasingly receive greater recognition.

The media's reporting on the anniversary of events fifty years ago with the demolition of District 6, as well as the anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprising 40 years ago, renewed our sensitivity in these days about the history of our country. We realize that there is hardly any town or city where forced removals had not occurred on a smaller or larger scale. We again realize how people were humiliated and displaced and how faith and character-forming communities were destroyed. We hear stories of families and relatives who were divided in this process. We are also aware of places where in the process churches had to move and where the life of congregations was terminated.

For us it is very clear that the many untold and undocumented stories of injustice and trauma on personal and collective level are not conducive to the healing of our land.

Too many people wanted to close the books on the past too quickly. We also understand that the privilege and prejudice of people today have continuing implications for people and communities. We wish to commit ourselves to a process of listening to these stories of injustice and inequality. We are grateful for the Season of Human Dignity that designs processes to assist us to listen with honesty and vulnerability, across boundaries, to get to know each other better, and to understand the impact of our history on all of us. We sincerely hope that this will assist us to respectfully and in a healing way deal with our past.

With this communication we want to again confirm the DRC's commitment to the organic unity of the two churches. We've done this before with official decisions, but we would like to reiterate to you that we need you to be a church in accord with God's heart. Through our unity the world will know that Christ is Lord. Our divisions have very bad implications for our witness, especially in a time like this, where suspicion and division plays such an important role. We also need your insights, expertise and skills. We need your presence in many places, so that in those contexts we may jointly bear witness to the love of our God. But above all, we need your love to live as whole and healed people in South Africa. At this moment we need our brothers and sisters of the URC's love and embrace, as well as your profound understanding of justice for all people.

We can attest that when we work together and know each other, there is an abundance of affection and appreciation and love. Among many of our ministers and members there is deep frustration about our inability to further our unity with you. We continue to pray that the Lord will now show us a way to true unity.

We pray the blessing of the Lord on you as church. May He use you to take the lead in the establishment of a new community of believers that may be much more than we can even dream about. May his Spirit strengthen you and lead you when you have to prophetically face the demands of every day in this tumultuous time in our country. And may He use you generously in his movement to the world.

With great respect and appreciation

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nelis van Rensburg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Nelis Janse van Rensburg
On behalf of the Executive of the DRC