

# Lutheran World Information

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On 16 June, Day of the African Child, Malian girls cheer their football team at the LWF-run Mbéra refugee camp, southeast Mauritania. © LWF Mauritania/Rokhaya Kamara

## World Refugee Day: "1 family torn apart by war is too many"

### LWF World Service Director Hitzler Underscores Commitment to Children's Education and Protection

**GENEVA (LWI)** – On the occasion of World Refugee Day, observed on 20 June, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) affirmed its commitment to providing a secure environment for families, especially children fleeing conflict in their home countries.

"1 family torn apart by war is too many," is the theme the United Nations dedicated in 2013 for events highlighting the plight of refugees and internally displaced people around the world.

In a statement on 19 June, Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS), said this theme "resonates in the faces of mothers, children, elderly men and

women seeking immediate shelter, protection and safety" in refugee camps managed by the LWF in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"We are reminded of just how quickly a family's life can be torn apart by war, changing the lives of children and parents forever," Hitzler added.

A report released on 19 June by the UN refugee agency indicated that by the end of 2012, more than 45.2 million people were in situations of displacement, compared to 42.5 mil-



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### “With passion for the church and for the world”—LWF Annual Report 2012

“With passion for the church and for the world” is the theme of the 2012 Annual Report of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge says the report captures in a poignant way critical aspects of LWF’s identity as identity as a communion of churches. The report, he notes in the foreword, “speaks to our unwavering commitment to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” and also documents “our strong ecumenical engagement with the biblical call to become one.”

The LWF’s passion for the world is ignited by God’s call for justice, peace and reconciliation, Junge says. “As a communion of churches the LWF is passionate to participate in actions that allow human beings to enjoy justice,



peace and reconciliation as concrete realities in their lives,” he adds.

The 2012 report highlights LWF’s areas of work over the past year including care for refugees and for people suffering in the midst of humanitarian emergencies. It affirms the Lutheran communion’s commitment to see all human beings exercising their fundamental rights. It gives glimpses of LWF’s determination to provide opportunities for different churches, faith groups, civil society and the United Nations to work together so that all people might enjoy an abundant life.

**“With passion for the church and for the world”—LWF Annual Report 2012: [www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWF-Annual\\_Report-2012\\_0.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWF-Annual_Report-2012_0.pdf)**

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#### Lutheran World Information (LWI)

is the information service  
of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

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lion at the end of 2011. The UNHCR Global Trends report cited war as the major cause for this growing number of refugees or internally displaced persons, the highest recorded since 1994.

For the LWF, the conflicts in Syria, Sudan and South Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo “have been, and still remain a major concern for our global humanitarian response,” Hitzler noted.

Children make up around 50 percent of refugees and displaced

people around the world. LWF’s response incorporates a special focus on children, with schools that provide a secure learning environment including child-friendly spaces and psychosocial support, Hitzler said.

The DWS director underlined gratitude to churches and people around the world for their continued support to “LWF’s commitment to provide hope for families torn apart by conflict.”

He added, “Reaching out to families torn apart by conflict remains a practical expression of LWF’s commitment to serve people in need irrespec-

tive of religious affiliation, race or gender. Every life, each family counts. As Christians we want to protect children and their rights for a future in dignity.”

World Service is LWF’s international humanitarian and development arm, with operations in more than 30 countries across the world.

**The full text of the statement by DWS director Eberhard Hitzler:**

[www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/World\\_Refugee\\_Day\\_2013\\_DWS\\_Hitzler\\_Statement-EN.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/World_Refugee_Day_2013_DWS_Hitzler_Statement-EN.pdf)

## Youth Inaugurate Series of Reformation Anniversary Events in India

### “Give Us Space” to Contribute to Church’s Renewal

**CHENNAI, India/GENEVA (LWI)** – Youth participating in inaugural series of events to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in India, urged church elders and leaders to “give us the space” to contribute to the renewal of the church and society.

On 16 May, Young Minds Rendezvous (YMR) 2013 kicked off events that will lead up to the 2017 Reformation anniversary celebrations in India, coordinated locally by the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI). Nearly 100 young people from Lutheran and other churches around the Tamil Nadu capital Chennai, discussed the theme, “Aspirations: Yearning for Love, Justice and Peace.”

The UELCI comprises 11 churches, all members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Greeting the YMR participants, UELCI Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Augustine A. G. Jeyakumar said the Reformation anniversary in 2017 “is not merely a celebration but a call to reform ourselves and our churches.”

In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church in Germany, an event widely regarded as the beginning of the



UELCI Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Augustine A. G. Jeyakumar (far right) lights a lamp to inaugurate the YMR 2013 conference in Chennai. Others joining in the symbolic action included (from left to right) Augustina Gerson, Ms Vasuki Jesudoss, Mr J. S. Anbu; and Annes Brida Rose. © UELCI

Protestant Reformation. Reformation is not a one-day event as it involved centuries of committed hard work for Luther and other reformers. Neither is it a one-time event, but “a process that needs to continually happen in our churches,” said Jeyakumar, a member of the LWF Council and chairperson of the Committee for World Service.

At the international level, the LWF is planning how best to mark the anniversary in a way that recognizes the

global aspect of the Reformation, its ongoing relevance and gifts, and that it is ecumenically accountable.

### Aspiring for Justice and Peace in Society

In his keynote speech to the YMR participants, Mr J. S. Anbu, executive director of the Christian Institute of Management in Chennai, encouraged the youth to “aspire for greatness.” He



emphasized that “a church that gives preference to the views of the youth and children will thrive.”

Bishop Dr M. Prakash, chairperson of the State Minorities Commission of Tamil Nadu, also addressed the gathering, describing young people as the most vibrant and dynamic segment of every society. “They are not only future leaders but can also be leaders of the present if space and opportunities are given to them,” said Prakash, who represents the Christian community on the government commission.

In India, Christians are mainly Dalit and tribal people, consisting of nearly six percent of the population of over 1.2 billion people.

Reflecting on the YMR 2013 theme, UELCI Youth Secretary Rev. Cand Christida Nithyakalyani said, “We [youth and children] make friends and build relationships irrespective of caste, color or class. We see others as ourselves.

This is one of our characteristics that illuminates us to aspire for renewal and to yearn for love, justice and peace in our churches and society.”

Joshua from the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) emphasized youth contribution to initiatives that promote peace and justice in church and society. “We believe in building bridges and not walls. [Hence] it becomes natural for us to aspire for things that unite people,” said the 17-year old.

### Potential Leaders but Aspirations Are Silenced

Jeyakumar had noted that many churches today “lack peace and the struggle for power and positions have taken center stage,” a concern that the youth discussed further.

“It will be memorable to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. But, it is sad that

our churches are still entangled in the clutches of power and politics. It is time we need another Martin Luther and I wish the youth would take up his role of renewing and transforming the churches,” said TELC member, Hannah Sheeba.

More often than not, youth aspirations are silenced in church and in society, said Annes Brida Rose, Arcot Lutheran Church. “We lose our confidence and the interest to be productive when we are silenced. [While] we aspire for peace and justice in the church, we are unable to achieve our aspirations,” she added.

The UELCI youth secretary concurred, saying, many young people become discouraged when they hear remarks such as, “You are not grown enough to speak here [in church meetings].” She stressed the need for church leaders to respect the dignity of youth and their perspectives.

*(Written for LWI by UELCI)*

## Advocacy Strengthens Diaconal Actions in Fighting Injustices

### LWF General Secretary Junge Commends African Churches’ Action Plan against Poverty

**NAIROBI, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge commended African churches’ relentless efforts to fight poverty and economic injustices in the continent, and encouraged them to learn from the many good practices across the Lutheran communion.

At the bi-annual Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation (ALCLC), held 20-25 May, in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, Junge noted that “the problem of poverty today challenges the church leadership to respond not only through diaconal action, but to also advocate by talking to powers and governments to address issues of injustice, which are the root cause of poverty.”

Junge’s address to the heads of churches, women and youth leaders, and representatives of theological



*LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge addresses the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation in Nairobi, Kenya. On the left, Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa, LWF Vice-President for Africa, and (right) Rev. Dr Wakseyoum Idosa, President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwilli*

institutions from the 31 LWF member churches in Africa focused on church sustainability and Lutheran identity.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church jointly hosted the

meeting attended by 65 participants under the theme “Towards a sustainable church: Africa regional expression remembering the past, embracing the present, and looking to the future.”

Citing good practices from a global communion perspective, the general secretary affirmed the “Youth for Eco-Justice” program co-led by LWF Youth, as a platform that supports initiatives that promote a sustainable environment and care for the creation. Young people express their “wish to leave the world in a better place than we found it...,” he said, quoting Mike Langa Lulanga from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, a participant in the eco-justice initiative.

Junge emphasized that the LWF is a strong communion as it moves forward to the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary in 2017. He underlined the need to strengthen the theological identity and values of the Lutheran communion “in order to live out our calling to holistic mission as we proclaim the gospel, serve the neighbor and advocate for justice in our fragmented world.”

## **Environmental Stewardship and Food Security**

Key at this year’s ALCLC was the approval of an action plan developed by the LWF Task Force on Poverty (TFP). It defines specific strategies and activities that will strengthen churches’ approaches as they seek to holistically transform local communities to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

The plan targets four key outputs: food security and environmental stewardship; institutional sustainability;

gender justice; and leadership competence and good governance.

In its preliminary work from 2011, the TFP underlined that while numerous initiatives by churches and civil society, including partnerships with governments across Africa have moved entire communities from dependency to economic empowerment, more concerted effort was needed to address the root causes of poverty and injustice. Land, the group noted, is the main source of livelihood for the continent but food insecurity remains one of the major drivers of poverty.

According to the African Development Bank, the continent’s economies grew by 4.7 percent in 2012, double the rate of the global economy. But, the consultation heard, this growth has not translated into tangible results on the ground, with huge sections of the population still lacking access to sustainable livelihoods, and services such as health and sanitation.

## **Access to Land**

Presenting the action plan to the ALCLC, TFP member Ms Sibongile Baker urged churches to speak out against land injustices on the continent. “What we have observed is that churches have stood by as governments appropriated land in one way or another, sometimes in good ways and not so good ways. We are asking for strong advocacy from the church,” said the director of Lutheran Development Service, an associate program of the LWF Department for World Service in Zimbabwe.

The action plan will support African Lutheran churches in engaging their re-

spective governments on access to land and its efficient use so that the poor and vulnerable can address food insecurity. As part of the churches’ diaconal work, farmers will be linked to agricultural research and technological institutions for information to help improve food productivity. Equal opportunities will be promoted for youth and women by ensuring their representation and participation in church work and structures, as well as allocation of resources.

In his keynote speech, Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and LWF Vice-President for Africa noted that in the 1970s “it was not foreseeable” that newly independent countries in Sub-Saharan Africa “would experience immense poverty and suffering” resulting from unjust social, political and economic institutions.

“I have a feeling we haven’t been aggressive enough to come out with pragmatic theological discourses to address [these] challenges,” said the LWF vice-president.

## **Address Unnecessary Church Conflicts**

Malasusa welcomed the action plan and urged the Lutheran leaders to also address the “unnecessary conflicts especially at the church and diocesan levels where a lot of human and material resources are spent for mediation.” He noted that many of these conflicts “are purely based on individual interests and not productive for God’s mission.” These are “signs of bad governance and lack of accountability in the churches,” he added.

# **Marangu Jubilee Celebrations to Launch Reformation Events in Africa**

In 2015, celebrations for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ever gathering of African Lutheran churches in Marangu, Tanzania, will launch activities to mark 500 years of Reformation in Africa.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa endorsed plans to commemorate the 1955 historic All Africa Lutheran Conference at their bi-annual meeting in the Kenyan capital Nairobi.

In his keynote address to this year’s Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation (ALCLC), LWF Vice-President for Africa, Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT),



*(Left to right) Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure (LWF); Bishop Thomas J. Barnett, Ms. Phyllis Brewah (Sierra Leone); and Rev. Dr. Peter Bartimawus (Nigeria), during a sub-regional presentation at the ALCLC in Nairobi, Kenya. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili*

emphasized the strong link between the inaugural gathering of Lutheran churches and the Reformation anniversary. “There is a strong need for the revival, revitalization and sustainability of the church in Africa, long-discussed in Marangu,” Malasusa said.

“As we look forward to the 2017 Reformation anniversary, we should also be thinking about evaluative tools that will enable us to look into the past critically,” he told the ALCLC participants.

## From Marangu to Wittenberg

In November 1955, heads of Lutheran churches in Africa met together for the first time in Marangu, northern Tanzania (then Tanganyika), and envisioned to work for a “self-sustaining church.” At the time, only two churches—in Madagascar and [then] Northern Tanganyika—were LWF member churches.

“From Marangu to Wittenberg: Theological Education and Leadership Formation and the Renewal of the Lutheran Church in Africa,” will be the theme of the Marangu jubilee celebrations. The events leading up to the Reformation anniversary will have a major focus on strengthening Lutheran identity in the region.

Participants identified a series of activities that will precede the Marangu

commemorations. This includes sharing information, resources and best practices as well as exchange visits for learning. Leadership and theological consultations are also planned.

This year’s ALCLC focused on church sustainability and Lutheran identity. LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge shared his insights on both topics from a global communion perspective. He encouraged churches to learn from the many good practices on sustainability in the Lutheran communion, and to support each other in carrying out God’s mission.

## Dealing with Challenges

The participants heard about churches’ efforts in carrying out God’s mission in their respective countries, which has resulted in growth among Lutheran churches in the region. Still, they noted, there are several challenges such as the increasing number of religious sects, charismatic and Pentecostal movements.

“Are we not Pentecostal and charismatic?” remarked Bishop Dr. Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia during discussions on Lutheran identity.

Kameeta, a member of the LWF Council said the process of reformation of Lutheran churches must

reclaim being Pentecostal and charismatic, attributes which he said, the churches have lost. This would make the dialogue with other groups meaningful, he added.

Reformation is also a charismatic movement, but in a structured and spiritual manner, said Rev. Luke Mwo-lolo, general secretary of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Africa desk at the LWF Department for Mission and Development organized the church leadership meeting. Speaking about the relevance of theological education in Lutheran seminaries on the continent, Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure, LWF area secretary for Africa, emphasized the need to “review seminary curricula and contextualize methodologies in order to strengthen the link between classroom teaching and life in the congregations.”

## Intensified Teaching

Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) noted that intensified teaching will help the Lutheran churches confront the challenges posed by charismatic groups and sects.

“It will not be enough to see our believers on pews only on Sunday. We need to go into prisons and teach our people the theology we have. When our children visit Pentecostal churches, the next day they bring to us the worship they experienced. They often tell us it is important to modernize our worship,” noted Idosa, an LWF Council member.

Still, there are many positive impacts of church ministry in Ethiopia, he said, citing a program on Christian - Muslim relations that the ECCMY has been running for 45 years. The initiative has enabled the church to train and teach community-based evangelists who promote relationships that strengthen co-existence between people of the two faiths, Idosa added.

*(By LWI correspondent Fredrick Nzwili)*



# A Sign of Mutual Trust and Commitment

## Lutheran-Orthodox Preparatory Meeting to Discuss Ordination Rites and Women's Ministry

**SIBIU, Romania/GENEVA (LWI)** – Liturgical texts on the rites of ordination, women's ordination in Lutheran churches, and the role of women in Orthodox churches, will be the topics for the next preparatory meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission in 2014.

Members of the dialogue group agreed on these topics at the Commission's second preparatory meeting, held 24-29 May, in Sibiu, Romania. Discussions focused on the understanding of ministry/priesthood in the Lutheran and Orthodox traditions, which will be the main topic for the 16<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the commission in 2015.

In Sibiu, the 15 theologians representing The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Orthodox Churches identified areas of agreement between the two traditions

on ministry, as well as a considerable number of open questions and differences. It was agreed the third preparatory meeting would be necessary to better understand the different issues.

Lutherans and Orthodox have been committed to joint dialogue since 1981 through the commission to which members are appointed by the LWF and churches of the Eastern Orthodox tradition respectively.

"Being able to address the topic of ministry is a sign of mutual trust and commitment for the process of learning and joint witness, which is based on a process of 30 years of dialogue," said Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations and co-secretary of the joint commission.

At Sibiu the Lutheran and Orthodox theologians also discussed the Lutheran understanding of ministry during the period of the Reformation, and apostolic succession and ordination from a historical, patristic and canonical point of view.

"The atmosphere was constructive, despite the challenging topic," Hintikka said.

The Sibiu meeting was co-chaired by Bishop Dr Christoph Klein of Romania, representing the LWF, and Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, from Turkey, representing the Orthodox.

Hintikka noted that hosting the event was an important occasion for the LWF member church, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania. The gathering, she added, offered an appropriate setting for the ongoing dialogue since the Lutheran and Orthodox traditions have co-existed in the Transylvania region where the commission met, since the Reformation.

The commission's members also attended services and vigils in Orthodox and Lutheran churches respectively, and visited with local church leaders and parishes.

The LWF will host the 2014 preparatory meeting.



Members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission at the preparatory meeting in Sibiu, Romania.  
© LWF

The full text of the communiqué from the 2013 preparatory meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission: [www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Lutheran-Orthodox-Communique-Sibiu-2013.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Lutheran-Orthodox-Communique-Sibiu-2013.pdf)

# Good Reason for Lutherans and Catholics to Worship Together

## Joint Working Group Begins Preparations for 2017 Liturgical Material

**WÜRZBURG, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)** – Lutheran and Roman Catholic liturgists are a step closer to making available

worship materials for joint ecumenical commemorations of the 2017 Reformation anniversary.

An eight-person liturgical working group of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Vatican's Pontifical

Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), held its first meeting, 28-31 May, in Würzburg, Germany. The group includes four members from each organization, with Rev. Anne Burghardt and Monsignor Dr Matthias Türk as co-secretaries for the LWF and the Vatican respectively.

The group is charged with creating worship materials that would help the two Christian traditions to commemorate together the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary, which coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue.

The inaugural meeting preceded the launch of the report, "From Conflict to Communion" by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity at the 13-18 June LWF Council meeting in Geneva. The publication

marks the first time that Lutherans and Catholics are jointly telling the history of the Reformation. The LWF governing body also approved the report of the LWF Special Committee on "Luther 2017 – 500 years of the Reformation," which proposes values and principles on how to mark the Reformation anniversary, and mentions practical details of processes that are already underway in the Lutheran communion. The LWF will mainly concentrate its activities on the three years from 2015 to 2017.

In Würzburg the members of the working group agreed on a broad structure for ecumenical worship services, and also identified some principal readings from the Bible.

The worship materials being prepared are intended to offer sugges-

tions for joint commemorations at the global and local levels, said Burghardt, LWF study secretary for ecumenical relations.

"The LWF has declared that the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation should be ecumenically accountable. As the year 2017 does not only mark this anniversary but also 50 years of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, there is good reason for holding joint worship services between Lutherans and Catholics," she emphasized.

"The worship materials being prepared for Lutherans and Catholics to use together in 2017 will express joy over the fruits of decades of ecumenical discussion in the search for Christian unity, as well as recognition that through baptism both Lutherans and Catholics have received Christ's call and are called to common witness in the world," Burghardt noted.

"Still, repentance should also have its place in the worship to express pain over a divided church, and regret that the churches have not always remained true to their baptismal calling," she added.

The working group will hold its next meeting in December in Tallinn, Estonia. The goal is to have the proposed ecumenical liturgical materials ready by the end of 2014.

See related stories and reports on the LWF Council page at

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/council-2013>



Members of the LWF-PCPCU liturgical working group at their first meeting in Würzburg, Germany. © LWF/A. Burghardt

## Diaconal Work Offers Hope to the World

### LWF "Stand Up and Walk" Virtual Conference: Diakonia Is Gospel in Action

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Service to the marginalized offers hope to the world. This was the message from the 5 June virtual conference of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on diakonia [church-related social services] involving hundreds of church activists around the world.

"Diaconal work gives clear proof that there is hope, real hope for human

kind," said Mami Brunah Aro Sandanaina of the Malagasy Lutheran Church. The LWF Council member from Madagascar was among 400 pastors, congregational leaders, professional diaconal workers and volunteers from 64 countries who participated in the LWF Internet-based conference that involved speeches and online discus-

sions in English, French, German, Spanish and Indonesian.

The conference on the theme "Stand Up and Walk" was based on the story about Jesus healing a paralytic. It is part of a series of events by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) aimed at supporting member churches' capacity



to undertake diaconal ministries and connect diaconal workers globally.

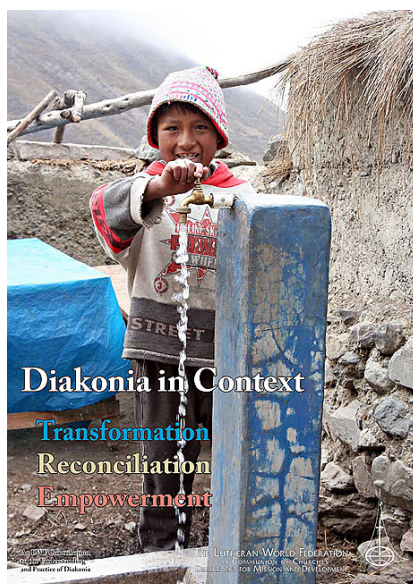
For those without hope, crippled by poverty, looking for enough food to eat every day, the church's diaconal service offers evidence of a loving God, added Sandaniaina.

"The Christian love of the church in communion, which can find the means to help them, is proclaiming practically by diaconal work the existence of the eternal God and God's goodness, whether on this earth or in the kingdom that is yet to come," she said.

In a keynote address, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge noted that holding a virtual conference made it available to many more participants while significantly reducing its ecological footprint.

"It is important to live and to work together so that we are also mindful of the ecological challenges that the human family is facing," Junge said.

Through God's grace, Christians are called into relationship with their suffering neighbors, the general sec-



© LWF

retary said. "Diakonia is ultimately and from the very beginning grounded in a theological understanding of how we are the church in our world, how we are Christians, how we live out our baptism in this world."

Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, professor of diakonia at Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo, Norway, noted in

his keynote address that diakonia is the gospel in action.

"The term diakonia reminds us of Jesus' service, of his care and healing and his view and care for marginalized people and the way he included and also empowered them for participation in mission," said Nordstokke, a former director of DMD.

"In the end we are all included in God's diakonia, transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. That is how we experience God's grace and at the same time we are each called to participate in that same diakonia by God's grace for the healing of the world," added Nordstokke.

An assessment of the virtual conference is underway but initial reports indicate that a lively exchange took place, with some 600 comments logged. Participants included numerous individuals and sizeable groups from Bolivia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Indonesia, Myanmar and the North American region.

## LWF President Endorses Faith Leaders' Historic Affirmations to "Welcome the Stranger"

### UNHCR Initiative Supports Refugees' Protection and Promotes Interreligious Cooperation

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan endorsed a historic code of conduct declaration that calls for faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities to enhance efforts to embrace and support millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people, and to stand united against xenophobia.

"I fully endorse the 'Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders,'" Younan told over 150 participants including religious leaders, diplomats and representatives from 25 faith based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the 12 June "Affirmations" document launch. The event was hosted by the United Na-



Left to right: Rabbi Nav Hafetz, Rabbis for Human Rights, Israel; LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan; and Dr Volker Türk, UNHCR director for the Division of International Protection, during the panel presentation. © UNHCR

tions High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, Switzerland.

The declaration is the culmination of a High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection convened last December by UNHCR chief, Mr António Guterres, and attended by representatives of major faith groups and academics. It concluded with a recommendation for the development of a code of conduct for faith leaders, initially suggested by the LWF president and subsequently backed by all participants.

This was followed up with the drafting of the "Affirmations" between February and April by a coalition of faith-based organizations and academic institutions which included, among others, the LWF, Jesuit Refugee Service, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the World Council of Churches, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

The text of the declaration draws upon principles and values of welcome that are deeply rooted in all major religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. It is expected to be used worldwide to foster support for refugees and other people displaced in their communities.

## Common Values for Co-existence and Protection

Commenting on the declaration, Younan, who is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), said the fundamental principles refer to many religious traditions. "I believe this is significant, in our quest to find common values of co-existence and protection. Religion should be part of the solution," he added.

The ELCJHL bishop emphasized that the religious reasons for welcoming and helping strangers in need "are not at their core about charity or alms giving. They are about respect for human dignity. We are called upon to help out of compassion because we share the same humanity. Our welcome and our compassion should have no ulterior motive."

Dr Volker Türk, UNHCR director for the Division of International Protection, described the dialogue on faith and protection as "an interesting journey of mutual discovery" also for the UN as a secular organization that does not necessarily have "the openness to engage with faith communities, despite the fact that the origins even of the 1951 Refugee Convention and actually our statute, is firmly rooted in fundamental religious values."

James D. Thompson of ACT for Peace, and co-moderator of the session, emphasized that "faith actually plays a huge role in the daily lives of people, but that was not consciously recognized by secular humanitarian actors, who perhaps go into a situation without being fully conscious of faith beliefs, or values and sensitivities around some issues."

lems, he noted that the voice of civil society coming from faith communities and faith leaders was going to be "a very important" and influential one.

Rabbi Nav Hafetz of Rabbis for Human Rights, Israel, said she believed the importance of the affirmation document "resides in the fact that for the first time, we put aside theological differences between our respective faiths, and focus on the common ground in order to deal with a huge and challenging issue that all humanity is facing."

For Younan, the initiative by the UN High Commissioner to bring religious leaders together to talk about faith and protection "is important not only for the protection of refugees but also as a practical way of promoting inter-religious cooperation and understanding. It focuses not inwardly on us, but



*The need to provide child protection and education remains a priority in LWF's care for refugees across the world. © Paul Jeffrey*

He said "faith-blind" is the term used, and can lead to significant harm in the sense of polarizing communities. A lot of faith literacy and operational guidance was needed, Thompson added.

## The Right Thing to Do

Türk said putting "faith and protection at the forefront" was the right thing to do. With regards to protection prob-

outwardly on the vulnerable human being in need."

*(By LWI correspondent John Zarocostas)*

**The full text of the "Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders": [www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming%20the%20Stranger.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming%20the%20Stranger.pdf)**





Children playing at the Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan © LWF/R. Schlott

## FEATURE: Going Back Home Is Not Yet an Option

### LWF Prioritizes Children's Needs among Syrian Refugees at Za'atri Camp

**ZA'ATRI, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI)**—Asia (15) and Fatimah (13) are two sisters from a village in Daraa region, southern Syria. Their family—father, mother, three younger brothers and their paternal grandmother—arrived by car at the Za'atri refugee camp in northern Jordan in May 2013. Like so many others, the family fled their village due to continuing violence and destruction in the civil conflict that has lasted over two years now, forcing over 1.6 million people to seek refuge in neighboring countries including Jordan.

The family lives in two tents at Za'atri: one for the parents and children, the other for their grandmother also named Asia. It is dusty inside the tents, and there is sand in the drinking water they draw from the communal water tanks, which are quite a distance away. There is only one shared kitchen and bathroom per street of up to 80 tents.

The intensified fighting is only pushing more Syrians out of their country. In Jordan, home to over 470,000 refugees from Syria by June, the influx puts a major strain on support provided by The Lutheran World

Federation (LWF) and other organizations collaborating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Jordanian government.

Through an emergency relief program coordinated by its Department for World Service (DWS), the LWF has been supporting refugees at Za'atri camp since August 2012, when the numbers there were as low as 25,000. LWF's camp management services currently cater to more than 142,000 people. Other assistance includes distribution of basic food and non-food items, education for children, child protection, and mental health and psychosocial care.

#### Other Family Members

As World Refugee Day was marked on 20 June, returning home was not an option Asia's family was ready to consider, barely two months after the ordeal of escaping through back tracks and indirect routes, telling government soldiers they were simply moving to another village in the region, says the girls' grandmother. The

family witnessed fighting along the way, saw many destroyed houses, and heard graphic stories of violence and psychological trauma, "stories of people dying of fear," she adds. They stay in touch with family members who are still in Syria by mobile phone communication, but the news they hear is often all bad.

Settled at Za'atri for now, they have a ration card but the food quantity is limited, and the heat in the camp at this time of the year is unbearable. While the family yearns to return home, they do not see any end in sight to the crisis. "I am so lonely, I cry every day," says the younger Asia. She adds that her friends from home are spread across the region, as far as Turkey and Lebanon.

"The refugees we work with express their hope for an end to the conflict so that they can go back and begin rebuilding their homes and lives. The longer the forced displacement situation lasts the higher the toll on every individual, especially children and youth," says Roland Schlott, DWS program officer for the Asian region.



## Child Protection and Psychosocial Care

Children under the age of 18 years make up 55 percent of the Syrian refugee population. “The destruction of many schools in the conflict and the subsequent displacement of families disrupt children’s formal education for months. In some areas it has stalled for two years now because of the impact of the intense fighting,” adds Nader Duqmaq, coordinator of the LWF emergency program in Jordan.

At Za’atri, there are only about 10,000 children benefitting from formal education, out of approximately 36,000 children of school-going age. Asia does not attend any school in the camp, and has not made any friends since the family arrived. She spends her days cleaning the tent and fetching water with her mother and grandmother. She says she wants to be a computer engineer. But there are no computer science classes in the few schools at the camp.

Fatimah goes to a school run by the UN Children’s Fund, which is relatively



Syrian refugee community representatives participate in an LWF-led skills training session to mitigate and prevent conflict among families living at the Za’atri refugee camp. © LWF/R. Schlott

close to the family’s tents. She proudly tells LWF staff that she has made many friends in her school and would like to be a doctor when she grows up.

Door-to-door visits by LWF staff provide families like Asia’s with information about refugee support services offered by the different humanitarian organizations in the camp.

## Constraints

Schlott notes however that LWF’s work at Za’atri faces severe constraints because of the lack of financial resources to expand the ongoing operations.

He underscores that LWF Jordan will continue addressing the needs of refugees in the camp through psychosocial support services such as counseling, joint activities for children and adults, as well as training for peace building and conflict mitigation. Plans in the coming weeks include distribution of clothes suitable for the warm weather, sandals as well as beddings.

*(Heather Patterson, LWF/DWS Program Assistant in Jordan, contributed to this article.)*

**World Refugee Day message by DWS director Eberhard Hitzler and slideshow at [lutheranworld.org/content/world-refugee-day-2013](http://lutheranworld.org/content/world-refugee-day-2013)**



Members of an LWF partner organization display a carpet woven through a project supporting Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees around Al Mafraq in northern Jordan. © LWF/R. Schlott



Published and distributed by:  
The Lutheran World Federation  
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