

Lutheran World Information

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Augusta Victoria Hospital's second medical team left for Gaza on 4 August. Photo: LWF Jerusalem/M. Brown

LWF Augusta Victoria Hospital Sends Medical Teams, Supplies to Gaza to Treat Injured

“Massive Stories of Sorrow, Pain and Loss”

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – “Heavy engagement, shelling, bombing. We are attending to 11 severely injured casualties in the ICU at Nasser Hospital but cannot move them anywhere. It is too dangerous” Dr Tawfiq A. Nasser, Chef Executive Officer of the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem relays a report from Gaza. By the beginning of the week, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)-run AVH had sent two volunteer medical teams, totaling six doctors and six nurses, to Gaza to care for the increasing number of people injured in the ongoing conflict with Israel.

“Sending the medical teams to Gaza is part of the hospital’s service to the Gaza

Strip. This action comes in response to the extreme needs identified by the medical staff in Gaza and rises out of AVH’s determination to serve the injured due to the Israeli shelling and bombing,” Nasser said, adding that reports from Gaza indicate that many people have sought refuge at hospital grounds in the Gaza Strip, as these are considered to be the safest places in the city.

The people seeking shelter add even more pressure to the hospitals’ capacity. “The hospital grounds are full of tents and make-shift houses. It is the safest place



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Global Young Reformers Network – Website Launched

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Global Young Reformer’s Network has launched their website. Under the URL <http://www.youngreformers.net/>, youth from the Lutheran communion worldwide are invited to connect and engage in discussions and projects.

The Global Young Reformer’s Network is a program facilitated by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). A global network of young Lutherans, it is meant to engage youth who are active in shaping the life of the Lutheran churches. “As we journey towards the 500 anniversary of the Lutheran reformation in 2017, we want to empower young people to be engaged in all aspects of church and communion life. The Global Young Reformers Network will show what it means to be an “ecclesia semper reformanda” – a church in on-going reformation”, Caroline Richter, the LWF Youth Secretary, explains.

The Website provides information on the activities of the Global Young Reformer’s Network leading up to the 500 years reforma-

tion anniversary 2017. Activities include the Virtual Conference on reformation Day (31 October) 2014 and the “Workshop Wittenberg” in Germany in August 2015. It also informs about the Steering committee, representatives from the 7 LWF regions who will prepare program themes and guide the network building process. The network is part of the LWF activities surrounding the 2017 reformation anniversary.

Youth from all over the world are invited to sign up to the dedicated Young Reformers social network and exchange good practice examples, projects and ideas about church life today. The first activity will be to share experiences around the question: “What are you freed from/ freed to by your faith?”

“This is *your* space to meet, discuss, be informed Lutherans and become Lutheran communion,” LWF Youth Secretary Caroline Richter says. “I invite you to discover it, use it and make it your own!”

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in the city. People keep arriving. I do not know how much more the hospital can hold. It is one big refugee camp,” the AVH medical team writes from Gaza.

“There are people sleeping all around us in the hospital, on the floors, in the corridors, homeless, hopeless, with no families. Volunteers in the hospital do nothing but mop spilt blood covering the floors. The smell of blood is the only odour. The atmosphere is overwhelming as you encounter the massive stories of sorrow, pain and loss,” Nasser further relates the situation in Gaza as described by his team, which is working under stress and very difficult conditions. All forms of infrastructure—including electrical stations, schools, hospitals, water and sewage systems, and homes—have sustained damage.

“We started feeling the pain and agony around us and we cannot escape it. A child is sleeping on a piece of cardboard next to his father who is severely injured,” one of the medics writes. “Every time I pass, the child is

asleep but peaking an eye on his dad to make sure that his dad is still next to him and alive. The child does not want to become an orphan and be left alone”.

Gaza Healthcare Collapsing

The AVH team includes specialists in emergency medicine, intensive care, surgery, internal medicine and pediatrics, with accompanying specialty nursing. The team also brought in much-needed medical supplies and medicines. Five hospitals and 34 clinics have been shut down in Gaza due to the insecure situation. The AVH is planning to send at least 10 missions to Gaza in the next three months. More than 9,000 people have been wounded in the conflict.

“Recently, due to the prolongation of the war, it was clear that the medical teams working in Gaza were overwhelmed and in need of assistance. When a brief window opened up due to a humanitarian ceasefire on 1 August, AVH rapidly responded to this need by sending a team from AVH,” said Department for World Service

Regional Representative in Jerusalem Rev. Mark B. Brown.

“Reports from the field indicate that the healthcare system in Gaza is collapsing and the medical teams there are unable to cope with the number of war casualties. Even with all the significant amounts of supplies and technology that may eventually arrive into Gaza, the healthcare system will not be able to respond without adequate human resources,” he added.

The AVH, which receives and treats cancer patients from Gaza on a regular basis, has also prepared a department with 12 additional surgical beds and 4 ICU beds to serve injured casualties and cancer patients trapped in Gaza, whose medical conditions are worsening. The hospital predicts that it will take six months to bring Gaza cancer patients who missed treatment back to a normal routine.

The LWF is calling for donations to sustain the support to victims of the Gaza conflict: www.lutheranworld.org/content/donate

Bishop Younan Leads Delegates Consoling Gaza-Injured in Jerusalem Hospitals

Augusta Victoria Hospital Offers Medical Team Support and Supplies

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – As the number of civilians caught in the conflict between Israel and Hamas increases, the Holy Land Lutheran Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and representatives of church organizations in Jerusalem consoled patients seeking treatment at the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) and other hospitals caring for the conflict-injured from Gaza.

“We pray that God will give them healing, for all people, since it is our responsibility to care for all who are hurting. I told the patients to continue in their faith and to trust God, who is a God of love. We pray that justice will prevail in this country,” Younan said after 1 August visit to wounded children, men



Bishop Munib Younan speaks to an injured boy in the Intensive Care Unit of St. Joseph's Hospital.
Photo: D. Hudson/ELCJHL

and women who have been brought to Jerusalem hospitals in recent days.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)-run AVH is among hospitals in East Jerusalem that have increased their capacity to support health institutions in Gaza, which are overwhelmed by the increasing number of casualties from the ongoing conflict.

In addition to its healthcare services including specialized treatment at its cancer, diabetes and pediatric centers, AVH has recently set up a special ward for the injured from Gaza. It has also dispatched a team of four doctors and seven nurses along with medical supplies to the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza to provide additional support in patient care, and another

team of volunteers is preparing to leave soon.

“Sending the medical teams to Gaza is part of the hospital’s service to the Gaza Strip. This action comes in response to the extreme needs identified by the medical staff in Gaza and rises out of AVH’s determination to serve the injured due to the Israeli shelling and bombing,” said AVH Chief Executive Officer Dr Tawfiq Nasser. The conflict’s impact is evident in the pain and agony of patients arriving at AVH, Nasser said.

He added that reports from Gaza indicate that many people have sought refuge at hospital grounds in the Gaza Strip, as these are considered to be the safest places in the city. As people keep arriving, the grounds fill up with

tents and make-shift shelters, adding more pressure to the hospitals’ capacity.

Younan, who is also LWF president, said the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) will continue “to pray for all people who are victims of this war. We continue to call for a ceasefire anchored in an end to the siege and a peace process,” he said, reiterating recent calls by both the LWF and ELCJHL

During the visit to Jerusalem hospitals, the ELCJHL bishop was accompanied by delegates from the Caritas Hospital, Pontifical Mission, Apostolic Delegate, Catholic Relief Services and the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center that represents both the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches.

“We need a miracle. We need peace”

LWF President Bishop Munib A. Younan Reflects on Prayer for Peace in the Middle East

ROME, Italy/ GENEVA (LWI) – On 8 June 2014, Pentecost Sunday, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan joined the prayer for peace in the Middle East with Pope Francis, Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The invitation was issued by Pope Francis on his visit to Jerusalem. Younan, who is Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, is also the President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“It was a good initiative,” Younan said. “Religious leaders do not bring peace to the Middle East, but peace also cannot be achieved without them. We have a deadlock in the negotiations, the Americans called for a pause. It was good to take the time and pray together.”

The prayer was held in Hebrew, Arabic, English and Italian. Both, Peres and Abbas added their personal prayers to present their reality, Younan recalls. “I was very moved when I saw that Mahmoud Abbas hugged and kissed Peres,” he said.

Although it was a special sign of unity, Younan also recalls a tense atmosphere. “Such a long conflict does

not go without fear, insecurity, hatred, hurt and wounds,” he said. “This was reflected. They were carrying the hurt of their people under their skin.”

“Fear and insecurity lead to extremism,” Younan added. “I am afraid that if we don’t have peace soon, the consequences will be very dangerous. We need a miracle. We need peace.”

“The problems we have are very serious. The prayer was a symbolic

gesture, it showed that peace is possible,” Younan said. “This is a power of spirituality. Through the exercise of prayer we see the image of God and are able to mutually recognize each other’s humanity. Only then the Holy Land can become the Land of Milk and Honey for both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis.”



LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan (right) attending the prayer for peace in the Middle East at the Vatican. Photo: Osservatore Romano

Faith Communities Forced to Flee in Northern Iraq

LWF Condemns Extremist Actions; Explores Ways to Stand with Internally Displaced in the Region

MOSUL, Northern Iraq/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge has strongly condemned the discrimination against Christians, Shiites and other religious and ethnic minorities in Northern Iraq by the Sunni Muslim militant group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

Thousands of Christians are fleeing Northern Iraq and communities they have lived in for almost 2,000 years following ISIS' ultimatum last week that they convert to Islam, pay a tax, or be killed for their faith. Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, had 60,000 Christians at the time of the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, and the Christian population still numbered 35,000 in June. Mosul is the birthplace of Assyrian Christianity, one of the most ancient Christian communities. Other faith communities are also targeted and have been forced to flee.

"What we see in Northern Iraq is an outrageous development. It pains us to hear about the suffering of people whose basic rights are being taken away. People who have a right not to be discriminated because of their faith, and who in fact have been living peacefully side by side for generations with people of other faiths – many of them forced to flee as well," Junge said.

ISIS, which has taken control of Mosul and much of the surrounding region, has declared the establishment of an "Islamic state" or "Caliphate" on the territory of Iraq and Syria, where they have also been active. Many Christians, Shiites, Yezedians (Zoroastrians), and Kurdish ethnicity communities have fled to the Kurdish-controlled section of the Nineveh plain to the east and north of the Mosul



One of 170 Iraqi Shia and Zoroastrian IDP families from Mosul sheltering in Christian village of Bandaywa. Photo: LWF/D. Poppe

region, and further on into the Kurdish Region, where there are already more than 200,000 Syrian refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria.

"As the LWF, we are additionally pained because the majority of those affected are our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We abhor the fact that, because of extremist views, invoking the name of religion, Christians, as well as other faith communities in minority situations, are affected by these extremist views," Junge said.

Church organizations in Mosul, whom the LWF has spoken to, report that ISIS militants have seized all churches and monasteries in the city, many of which have been burnt, looted, destroyed or converted into mosques. ISIS has also destroyed at least 24 shrines in Mosul, including a mosque that contained a shrine believed to be the tomb of Jonah – who is revered by Christians as well as Muslims and Jews.

The LWF is looking into ways to stand with the displaced and affected

people in Northern Iraq. In the past few days, ISIS has cut off water supplies from central pumping plants on the Tigris in Mosul to the Kurdish controlled areas of the Nineveh plain. Together with its partners in the ACT Alliance, the LWF is appealing for funds to ensure clean, emergency water supplies for 12,500 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities, and to guarantee an additional two-months' food security for 2,500 IDP families. The LWF is also seeking to offer psychosocial services to 5,000 vulnerable individuals, who have experienced psychological and physical trauma.

While many of the initially displaced population of Sunni Arab ethnicity have returned to their homes in the Mosul area, displaced minority groups of Shiite, Christian, Yezedians and Kurdish ethnicity remain fearful for their future under ISIS, and seem most likely to remain in the Iraqi Kurdish Region or the area of the Nineveh plain for the medium term.

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LWF President keynote speaker at Martin Luther Forum Ruhr

“Separating politics and religion is neither wise nor desirable”

GLADBECK (Germany)/GENEVA (LWI) – Speaking at the Martin Luther Forum Ruhr in Gladbeck (Germany), LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan called for commitment to peace and justice in the Middle East and opposed an artificial separation of politics and theology. The Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) said that separating both areas was neither wise nor desirable, as he knew from his home region, the Middle East. Politics must leave room for religions and the churches must critically accompany the governments, he declared.

Younan was visiting Germany on the invitation of the Martin Luther Forum Ruhr. On the afternoon of 26 June he met with the mayor of Gladbeck, Ulrich Roland. They conversed on questions of integration and peaceful coexistence of religions, and then Younan signed the Golden Book of the city. Afterwards the bishop joined in the traditional summer festival of the Martin Luther Forum that had attracted 200 people. OKR Detlef Mucks-Büker, the chair of the board of trustees of the Martin Luther Foundation Ruhr, was the host for the

program. This included greetings by Prof. Dr. Reinhard Klenke, the chief administrative officer of the district, and the OKR Norbert Denecke, executive secretary of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation.

The role of religion in the public arena

Younan began his lecture by asking to what extent political and theological systems could harmonize with one another. Often he as bishop was advised to completely separate them, he noted. However, he could not accept this. “I come from a context in which religion and politics cannot be separated [...] Separating politics and religion is neither wise nor desirable.” In addition, this approach did not correspond to his Lutheran theological tradition, Younan stated. He explained this with reference to Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms and the way it had been taken up again in the 1930s, among others by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Against this background, the bishop of the ELCJHL gave an analysis

of the situation of religion and politics in the Middle East. A series of failures had led to the present crisis situation in the region, he stated, even to the curtailing of religious freedom. “The suppression of religious impulses led to unprecedented waves of religious fanaticism once dictatorial controls were removed,” Younan explained. He therefore rejected all demands to remove religion completely from public life. This would lead precisely to the disastrous events mentioned, he said.

Bishop Younan linked this with the political commitment of the churches. The Middle East was continuing to look for models of good governance. The churches could not be silent on this matter: “The crisis of government [...] demands that local churches revisit their approaches to political engagement.” On the tension between religion and politics he stressed: “We do not want to ‘Christianize’ politics, we seek to improve society through political engagement.” At the same time Younan rejected constitutions that had the holy texts of one religion as their main source of authority: “Before the law, all religions are equal; we therefore seek freedom of religion and freedom of religious expression.”

The LWF President underlined that the Lutheran churches share this concern with many religious communities. On the question of what role religion can play in the public arena, the LWF launched a three-year program on this issue in January 2014 consisting of four conferences in different parts of the world, co-organized with partners from other religions. Two of the conferences have already been held: the first in January 2014 in Münster (Germany) in cooperation with the Centre for Islamic Theology and one in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) with 60 religious and civil society leaders from Africa.



LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan speaking at the Martin Luther Forum Ruhr.
Photo: LWF/GNC

On the situation in Israel-Palestine, the LWF president highlighted the engagement of Lutherans in Palestine and worldwide for a two-state solution with a shared city of Jerusalem.

“Heavenly cross” for Luther Garden

After his keynote lecture, the organizers had a surprise ready for Bishop

Younan. They presented him with a model of the sculpture “Himmel-skreuz” (heavenly cross) by artist Thomas Schönauer. The cross of the Luther Rose – the central place in the Luther Garden in Wittenberg – is to be designed on this model in the next few years. The initiator of the Luther Garden, landscape architect Andreas Kipar, recalled that the Martin Luther Forum Ruhr had planted a trumpet

tree (catalpa) in Wittenberg in 2010. With its partner tree, he said, Gladbeck was linked to the Luther Garden in Wittenberg and also to the many other places all over the world where partner trees with those in the Luther Garden were now growing.

“Don’t let our gifts be outside the pilgrimage”

Lutherans Voices at WCC Central Committee Meeting

GENEVA (LWI) – The first full meeting of the new Central Committee (CC) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a chief governing body of the organization, took place between July 2 and 8 in Geneva, Switzerland. Among thematic plenaries, deliberations, prayers and statements on public issues, there were confessional meetings, in which participants shared impressions with brothers and sisters from their own denominations.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed 35 people at the Ecumenical Center chapel and shared updates about its internal process of reflection on the communion’s self understanding, preparations towards the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and youth participation in LWF’s advocacy work.

The audience, comprising Lutheran CC delegates, advisors, observers, stewards and staff members of the WCC and LWF, was encouraged to share insights about the Lutheran contribution to the “pilgrimage of justice and peace,” a call issued by the 10th Assembly of the WCC, held in the Republic of Korea in 2013.

Reflecting on the meaning of walking together, the WCC President for Europe, Archbishop emeritus Anders Wejryd from the Church of Sweden, pointed to some Lutheran theological understandings as helpful tools in the pilgrimage. “Our Trinitarian theology



Church of Norway pastor Rev. Tore Johnsen (right), at the Lutheran confessional meeting during the WCC Central Committee. Photo/WCC Marcelo Schneider

allows us to engage in cooperation with one another without compromising our confessional statements,” he said.

Wejryd also addressed the singular value of Christians’ involvement in advocacy and humanitarian work. “Churches are not NGOs, we are something more and we have to remind people of that,” he stated.

“Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine helps us bringing out basic elements of our advocacy work: we are not only committed to the solutions of the world’s problems through the sharing of resources, but we are also always receiving the gifts from God from our neighbors,” concluded Wejryd.

During the meeting, small group discussions produced a series of dif-

ferent insights to the pilgrimage from a Lutheran perspective. “We highlight advocacy and diakonia,” said Thomas Kang, WCC executive committee member, from the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. “We have to act. We will be prepared to receive gifts from others, but have to prepare to also give away and share resources,” he added.

“Maybe we are the ones who can help make sure that the issues important for women and indigenous people are fully included in the pilgrimage,” said Rev. Tore Johnsen, from the Church of Norway, as he reminded the participants of the Sami people expression, “we are on the move and this is better than always staying at the same place.”

For Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and director of the Department for Theology and Public Witness, the meeting held under the WCC Central Committee agenda was a good opportunity at this early stage of the work of the new CC to collect

Lutheran insights for the joint pilgrimage within the ecumenical family.

“As Lutherans, we do have gifts to offer, amongst them our understanding of both men and women serving equally in the ordained ministry of the church, and our witness through diakonia. But we also have gifts to

receive from others. What these would be is something to be discussed in the future CC Lutheran meetings,” Hintikka added.

(Written for LWI by Marcelo Schneider and Marianne Ejdersten, WCC Communications)

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Baptism and Unity Continues

Joint Commission Meets in Italy

GENEVA (LWI) – Lutherans and Roman Catholics continued their dialogue on what kind of unity might arise out of their shared understanding of the Christian sacrament of Baptism in meetings held 20-28 July at the Monastery of Bose in Italy.

The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has been the main forum of dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on a global level since 1967. This meeting was its second in a study process focusing on Baptism and the growth in communion between the two Christian traditions. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) organize the commission’s meetings.

Begun in 2009, “Baptism and Growing Communion” is the fifth study in which the commission has been engaged. The process had been interrupted so the commission could publish *From Conflict to Communion*, which relates the story of the Reformation from the point of view of both traditions

The document was published in 2013 to help the two traditions reflect on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the 50th anniversary of the commission itself, both of which will be commemorated in 2017.

“The present dialogue process on Baptism is very much aware of both

what is the joint history of the Lutherans and Catholics as well as what understandings have been reached already during the almost 50 years of theological discussions,” noted Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations and director of the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW).

Holding the most recent meetings of the commission at the Monastery of Bose, which has a long history of supporting the ecumenical movement and the quest for Christian unity, gave participants an opportunity to participate in the prayer life of the community and gain support for their work, she said.

Hintikka added that the commission works in a “good and fruitful” atmosphere that would not have been possible without the long-term committed theological dialogue between the Lutheran and Catholic participants, which has produced among other documents, the landmark *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

The commission’s recent meeting was based on brief thematic papers prepared by members. Its co-chairs are Bishop emeritus Eero Huovinen of Helsinki, on the Lutheran side, and Bishop William Kenney of Birmingham, United Kingdom, on the Catholic side, who was attending his first meeting in this position.



Members of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. Photo: PCPCU/LWF-DTPW

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A Mighty Blessing to the Church

Britain's Lutherans Celebrating Church of England Decision on Women Bishops

LONDON, United Kingdom/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran leaders in Britain are rejoicing that women will be able to serve as bishops in the Church of England, saying it will be a sign of hope to sister churches around the world as they discuss gender justice issues.

The Church of England's General Synod voted on 14 July to allow women to become bishops for the first time in its history. It came more than 20 years after women were first allowed to be-

come priests. The first woman could be appointed bishop by the end of the year.

In a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, James Laing, General Secretary of the Council of Lutheran Churches, said the leaders of Britain's 183,000 Lutherans were confident the move would enable the gospel of Christ to be proclaimed with renewed vigour and clarity.

"Women ministering as bishops will also strengthen and deepen the unity

that we enjoy as Lutherans and Anglicans in this nation, which is in many ways one of the most natural inter-church relationships," Laing wrote.

Both the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and the Church of England are members of the Porvoo Communion of Lutheran and Anglican churches in Europe, who have signed an agreement to share a common life in mission and ministry.

Laing said the approval of women bishops by the Church of England would enable a fuller expression of the churches' unity in Porvoo, something that is celebrated by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its member churches worldwide.

In his letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Laing said that he recognized that the Church of England's decision has come after long and difficult deliberations accompanied by much prayer and earnest theological reflection.

Still, he added, "We are confident that the new measures will be a mighty blessing to the church." He concluded: "We pray that God will help us to build upon the blessings of diversity that we share."



The Archbishop of Canterbury and officials at the Church of England General Synod.
Picture by: Keith Blundy | CofE

Over 5,000 Christians from Central and Eastern Europe in Wroclaw

"Free in Christ" 25 Years after the Fall of the Iron Curtain

WROCLAW, Poland/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge called for responsible use of freedom during a worship service in Wroclaw, which concluded a gathering of Christians from 12 countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Preaching in the Mary Magdalene Cathedral on 6 July, Junge urged the congregation not to fear the challenges that come with freedom, 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. "It is time to

hold on to freedom and to continue to move forward, not backward," he stated.

The general secretary said in his view, it was the abuse of freedom, and not freedom itself that is responsible for difficult social situations such as mass unemployment among young people, conflicts among nations or the threat to creation. From a Christian perspective, freedom only finds its true nature "when it is linked to the ministry of love for our fellow human beings," Junge underlined.

"Free in Christ"

Over 5,000 people from 12 countries attended the 9th Days of Encounter for Christians from Central and Eastern Europe, 4-6 June in Wroclaw. The theme "Free in Christ (Gal 5:1)" was developed against the background of changes in the region since the fall of communism. The Days of Encounter are intended to enable an "exchange of opinion among different local traditions," explained Bishop Ryszard Bogusz from the host



Over 5,000 people from 12 countries attended the 9th Days of Encounter for Christians from Central and Eastern Europe in Wrocław from 4 to 6 July. Photo: LWF/Florian Hübner

church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, during the opening service.

Featuring discussion, singing and prayer, the encounters took place in numerous workshops, interactive programs and youth concerts. There was a spirit of mutual understanding that crossed language barriers in and around the Wrocław Centennial Hall. Activities included concerts, a sports program for teenagers and a market of opportunities for the many visitors. Participants came from neighboring countries and from further afield. The Polish church was particularly pleased to welcome so many ecumenical participants, representatives of foreign diplomatic missions and guests of honor.

Bible Studies, Lectures, Discussions

The second day began with Bible studies on the theme of the Days of Encounter. Saxony's Lutheran Bishop Jochen Bohl took the opportunity to criticize the pressure to perform that sometimes accompanies freedom. "Instead of accepting the gift of God's salvation, people make huge efforts to earn it," Bohl asserted. However, he said that freedom is also a gift of God and must be "lived out with responsibility."

A highpoint of the meeting was the keynote presentation by Jerzy Buzek, former Polish Prime Minister and former President of the European Parliament. He underlined the historical achievement of the churches during the political transformation in Eastern Europe. "Our continent was torn apart and civil society was without any institutional backbone. Often the only institutional support was given by the church."

European integration is a unique process bringing peace, freedom and prosperity, he said, underlining that the churches played an important role at the time providing a moral compass, and they still do. For Buzek, the current European crisis is not just an economic crisis, but also a crisis of values. "Freedom without moral rules can be harmful," Buzek declared and pointed to situations in which the prosperity of a few has excluded others from general well-being in society.

Women of the Reformation and Today

The program of the encounter days was deliberately varied and lively. In one discussion forum on the topic of "Women of the Reformation," participants in historical dress portrayed women from the Reformation period presenting their extraordinary achievements.

The LWF general secretary, who attended the session, emphasized the significance of women in the Reformation period with the message: "In 2017 we do not just want to concern ourselves with *his*-story of the Reformation but also with *her*-story. Thank you for presenting *her*-stories today." A similar comment came from Agnieszka Godfrejow-Tarnogorska, coordinator of the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) network for the region. She underlined that in a church where the Reformation was ongoing, "the role of women [...] is not just a question of the past but also of the present."

Ecumenical Questions

Junge took part in a panel discussion on the ecumenical perspective of the 2017 Reformation anniversary. He said he did not agree with the attitude that the differences between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church were almost insurmountable: "The dialogue document *From Conflict to Communion* contains more topics that have been worked through than open questions," Junge underlined. The two sides are continuing to work on the unresolved issues of ministry, the Eucharist and the understanding of the Church.

"We are concerned for unity. We must be concerned for unity," he added, summing up the LWF's ecumenical commitment.

During the 9th Days of Encounter, the LWF Vice-President for the region, Bishop Tamás Fabiny from Hungary, Junge and LWF Europe Secretary Rev. Dr. Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, met with the LWF National Committee in Poland. They expressed appreciation for the committee's work in interpreting and promoting LWF's activities at the national level.

Hungary to Host 2016 Days of Encounter

On 6 July the Days of Encounter ended with a concluding service in Wrocław

as well as seven services conducted as the participants made their way home.

Churches from the region have been holding these days of encounter

biannually and the number of countries and visitors has significantly increased in the last few years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hun-

gary has issued an invitation to the 10th Days of Encounter in Budapest in 2016.

Taking Stock 25 Years after the Fall of the Iron Curtain

Conference of Central and Eastern Europe Church Leaders in Wrocław

WROCLAW, Poland/GENEVA (LWI) – “Twenty-five years ago we only had dreams of freedom and no realistic expectations of what might come,” said Synod Leader Joel Ruml of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, summing up the period in eastern Europe since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Ruml was among church leaders from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Central Eastern Europe (CEE) region, who met in Wrocław city, 3-4 July, to reflect on the changes over the last 25 years and the challenges the new-found freedom brought for the churches. The region includes 14 LWF member churches. Hosting the event, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, was happy to welcome LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge as the chief guest.

No Easy Development

Discussions at the meeting revealed how different the experiences in the region’s churches have been. Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec of the host church explained that the fall of the Iron Curtain had ended the drain on membership that had occurred during communist times: “When everyone was granted their own passport and allowed to keep it, the wave of emigration to the West stopped.” Today the Polish Lutheran church adds 250 to 300 new members each year. By contrast, other churches, such as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, have suffered a significant loss of members due to emigration, particularly since the



In front of the new Reformation logo of the Polish Lutheran church: (left to right) Bishop Jerzy Samiec, LWF Council member Iwona Baraniec and LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge. Photo: LWF/Florian Hübner

opening up of relations with the West after 1989.

However, Samiec also highlighted the challenges facing the Polish church in the coming years: “We intend to empower the laity in the church and strengthen youth work, in order to counteract the secularization of society.” The bishop added that he was determined to continue dealing with the question of ordaining women as pastors. “We want to discuss this issue in terms of its theological, economic and ecumenical implications in the social context of Poland.” The matter is also controversial inside the Lutheran church, he said. So far women have only been ordained as deacons, but not as pastors or bishops.

Hungary: Admitting Where the Churches Fell Short

Bishop Dr. Tamás Fabiny, LWF Vice-President for Central Eastern Europe,

emphasized the need for the painful process of coming to terms with the period of dictatorship. “We want to get to know the activities of our churches both in the brown (Nazi) and the red (communist) dictatorships. Where they fell short must be recognized and admitted,” he said.

He added that in his church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, informants had cooperated with the state security apparatus, including Bishops Zoltán Káldy and Ernő Ottlyk. The church has thoroughly investigated these cases and published the results in a two-volume work titled *Háló* (Network). At present Fabiny, who is bishop of the Northern Diocese, sees the church as called to work for those who have been marginalized by the changes in Hungarian society. He reported that the northern part of the country had especially experienced an increase in poverty, fear and violence as well as extremism against the Roma people.

Military Dictatorship in Chile

Junge broadened the conversation by bringing in the perspective of his home country, Chile. Twenty-five years ago there had been a similar break with dictatorship and turn to democracy that had reconnected the country with the world. “But the freedom we had sought for so long came with challenges,” he underlined. One challenge was the church’s identity crisis and uncertainty about its new role. Under the military dictatorship the church had openly criticized the government for human rights violations, Junge recalled. This had clearly defined the church’s role, but “we also paid a high price for that.” After the fall of the

Pinochet regime the church at first had problems finding a role for itself in the new society, he added.

Moreover, the military dictatorship had led to the splitting of the Chilean Lutheran church. Even 25 years after the end of the military dictatorship, the two Lutheran churches were still working on coming closer and reuniting. In view of this bitter experience, the general secretary appealed to all church leaders present to “keep in mind how easy it is to fall apart and how hard it is to come back together. Two or three years are enough to split up, but you need 40 years to reunite.”

In addition to the bishops from Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany,

Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic and Ukraine, the 28 participants at the conference included LWF Council members, synod representatives and those with regional responsibility. LWF Council member Iwona Baraniec (Poland), Council advisers Elisabet Pöder (Estonia) and Anastasiya Piddubskaya (Ukraine) also attended. Agnieszka Godfrejow-Tarnogorska represented the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) network in the region.

The conference organized by the LWF Europe Secretary Rev. Dr. Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, preceded the Days of Encounter for Christians in Central and Eastern Europe.

Raising Awareness for HIV/AIDS in Indonesia

Building Capacity Among Youth

MEDAN, Indonesia/ GENEVA (LWI) – “You are only in middle school. Why do you need to know about HIV and AIDS?” Elisabeth Purba asks. It is late morning in the village of Desa Bulu Cina, and a group of about 40 teenagers sits in the shade under a roof outside a local youth center. Together with three fellow students from Medan, Elisabeth is giving a presentation about the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

The workshop in Desa Bulu Cina is a follow-up to a capacity-building workshop Elisabeth and about 30 other students attended in May 2014. The workshop was organized by the LWF National Committee in Indonesia. “We identified three topics,” Elisabeth Purba explains, “Climate Justice, Interfaith Relations and HIV/AIDS”. Together with seven fellow students Elisabeth decided to learn more about the immune deficiency disease and share her knowledge in a society where HIV positive people face widespread discrimination. The visit to Desa Bulu Cina is but one of many that the students devote a good portion of their free time to.

The setting is full of contrast: The virus infections are a taboo in Indonesian society, and even more so in small villages like the one two hours from Medan where the workshop takes place. Many of the

girls are wearing the traditional headscarf, except for 2 pupils all of them come from Muslim families. For 3 years, the Korean organization Good Neighbors International has been running a small youth center as part of a project against poverty. The staff has a Christian background; the contact was made through the university student organization.

“More open-minded”

It is not a group that most teachers would happily volunteer to assist.

Twelve to 17-year-old girls and boys sit apart and shoot glances at one another; the boys hiding in the hoods of their sweatshirts despite the humid tropical heat. Mostly they just listen as Elisabeth and her colleagues explain the difference between infection and disease. There is a lot of giggling when it comes to the transmission of the virus. Health education in public schools is rudimentary at best, Liberson Frain, a student of social science, later explains.

The students, who have by now divided the local teenagers into smaller



Elisabeth Purba (center) explaining about HIV/AIDS in Desa Bulu Cina, Sumatra, Indonesia. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

groups, share in the laughter, and expertly move the discussion to accidents and blood transfusions. Seconds later they change back into teacher mode: One by one, the teenagers sitting in a circle have to name a way HIV is or is not transmitted. “It is easier for us to relate to young people” Liberson says, as the atmosphere loosens up and the village youth start asking questions and sharing stories. “We can talk to them in their own language, because we are not much older, and they are more open-minded than adults. Also, they will share what they hear in their peer groups”.

Liberson and Elisabeth received the material for their presentations in the capacity-building workshop, and spent many more hours researching on the internet. Currently Elisabeth is looking into the latest research on HIV transmission via breastfeeding. It is a question some of the girls ask, as being able to live a “normal” life in Indonesia is closely linked to the ability to have a family and raise children. Being from a similar context,

Liberson and Elisabeth are mindful of cultural sensitivities. “I do not tell them about condoms” Elisabeth says. “For us, the main issue is to make them aware that HIV positive people are not contagious and should not be treated as outcasts”.

“Bring your friends”

The test to the village youth comes at the end of the morning, when Manior Sihombing gives her testimony. She is HIV positive. “You don’t have to be afraid” Elisabeth advises her pupils as the woman who until now stayed in the background starts shaking the teenager’s hands. Not all of them look entirely comfortable, one or two hide their hands in the sleeves of the sweatshirts. Sihombing was infected by her husband, who had extramarital relations. “When I learned about my infection, I asked for a divorce, but he loved me so much that he would not listen” she says.

Her husband and one of her children have passed away. Her daughter

did not contract the virus. Still the family faced discrimination. Sihombing moved to a different community, she changed her workplace and her church. “Some time ago the doctor told me I have tuberculosis,” she says. “I do not have much time left, and I want to use it to make a difference”.

The boys and girls she is telling her story to are clearly impressed. For most of them, it is the first time they see a person with the much talked-about infection. “I did know about AIDS before”, 14-year-old Nanda says. “But I did not know that you could just touch the people and share food with them”.

16-year-old Endang, an attentive girl with a black headscarf, asks the students to come back. “I want to learn more about HIV/AIDS” she says. “We will come again,” Elisabeth promises, “and you will bring your friends!” When Elisabeth later repeats her initial question, Endang is the first to answer. “Because we are tolerant”, she proudly says. “We are Indonesia”.

Malaysia: LWF Supports Malay Speaking Christians in ‘Allah’ Controversy

Appeal to Court Against ‘Allah’ Ban Rejected

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia/ GENEVA (LWI) – Following a court ruling on the use of the word ‘Allah’ in Malay Bibles, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has reaffirmed solidarity with and support to Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) speaking Christians to practice their religion and worship according to their tradition.

“We are reaffirming LWF’s solidarity with the Christian churches of Malaysia and support for their freedom to practice their religion and to worship God,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said. “We urge the Malaysian authorities to recognize that there is no threat or disrespect to Islam when persons of other faiths use the word *Allah*.”

“We know that this is true from the ages-long use of the word *Allah* by Christians in the Arabic-speaking world,

as well as by the long experience in next-door Indonesia, where *Allah* is used by Christians in the Bahasa Indonesia language without any controversy,” the general secretary added.

“A Very Hard Decision”

On 23 June 2014, Malaysia’s High Court rejected an appeal by the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia, which challenged a government ban on the word ‘Allah’. According to a High Court ruling in October 2013, the Arab term for “God” may only be used by Muslims. Malay speaking Christians challenged that ban, claiming that the word had been used in Malay Bible translations since the 16th century, as it is the word for “God” in the local language.

The legal dispute is focused on the Catholic weekly *Herald*. Published in the four languages commonly spoken by Christians in Malaysia—English, Tamil, Chinese and Malay—it had been using the term in the Malay-language section until the Minister of Home Affairs ordered the *Herald* to stop using the word in January 2009, limiting its use to Islam.

The main argument in the legal battle which followed was that the use of that word in Christian literature would confuse Muslims and accidentally convert them. Converting from Islam or proselytizing Muslims in Malaysia is a serious offense.

The Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia challenged that court order and won at the High Court in December

2009. The Minister then appealed, and in a decision in October 2013, the Court of Appeal overturned the High Court ruling banning the use of 'Allah' for anyone but Muslims. The High Court panel determined that the use of the word 'Allah' in the Christian reference to God is "not an integral part of the faith and practice of Christianity." An appeal by the Catholic Church challenging that ruling has now been rejected.

"It is hard to accept this decision. This term was used by Bahasa-Speaking Christians for hundreds of years. Can you stop a Christian from using the word 'God'?" Aaron C. Yap, Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia (LCM), says. He fears that while the court decision only restricts the use of 'Allah' in the Catholic weekly *Herald*, as the government assured immediately after the Court's decision, the court decision might be misused by a certain group of people as precedence, and may have far-reaching consequences to Christian faith and practice in Malaysia. "This is our religion, our belief," Yap further states. "We are good citizens and respect the law. At the same time, we also uphold the freedom of religion and belief; this is part of our constitution, which we expect all people to respect too."

Power-Struggles Clothed in Religion

In a statement issued on 23 June 2014, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) voiced "extreme disappointment" with the decision, calling it "critically flawed in so many respects" as "many incorrect and inaccurate statements and observations (...) led to its decision." The CFM statement also raised concern about the "serious repercussions for the freedom of religion for the Christian community in Malaysia," maintaining that the "Christian community continues to have the right to use the word 'Allah' in our Bibles, church services and Christian gatherings (...) as we have done all this while."



LCM Bishop Aaron Yap shows a 16th century Bible. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

While the ban of 'Allah' for anyone but Muslims appears to be a religious issue, many church leaders claim that the controversy is being used as a vote-winner for the ruling party. Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM), is convinced that the case against the Christian newspaper is used for ethnic affirmation, to "divert attention from internal party battles" and win votes from the more conservative Muslim opposition party.

Muslim by Default

The country's constitution from 1957 names Islam as the official religion. Article 3 however guarantees "complete freedom of religion" to other groups with "no hindrance on the practice of other religions." The population of Malaysia is mainly Muslim (60 percent), with Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Chinese religions making up the remaining 40 percent. Ethnic Malays however are by default considered Muslims.

The four LWF member churches in Malaysia mostly have immigrant roots: Tamils, Indians and Chinese, but also the aborigine Malaysians called Orang Asli. They use Bibles in English, Chinese, Tamil and Malay. As Indonesia and Malaysia use almost the same language, many Bibles are imported

from neighboring Indonesia, where the use of 'Allah' is common and undisputed.

Having witnessed an "Islamization process" in Malaysian schools, universities and public venues over the past years, the CCM general secretary fears that the religious issue has also become an ethnic issue. He fears the court ruling will affect relations between all religious groups in the country. "We have arrived at a stage where it becomes crazy," Shastri says. "This decision will be very difficult to uphold and implement. It is for us to decide how we translate Scripture. We will not give in. We will continue to use it."

"Constitution Protects Us"

Meanwhile, Father Andrew Lawrence, editor of the Catholic weekly *Herald*, is facing the difficult task to print the Malay section of the church weekly without the forbidden term. "I cannot use it right now. They could use it as an excuse to close the paper and arrest me," he says. Over the course of the four years' legal battle, the Jesuit priest has received death threats by radical groups, been questioned by the secret police and faced bureaucratic obstacles for communicating his faith, such as having to apply each year for a permit to publish the paper.

Father Lawrence now prepares a review of the rejection. "They are

saying 'God' is not an integral part of Christianity. This is utter nonsense," he argues, and emphasizes that the case is not only targeting the *Herald* but Christian life and religious freedom in the entire country. "This is taking place at all levels," he says.

He still places faith in the legal system of his country despite the adverse judgments. "The church in Malaysia from its infancy stage has been a Malay church," he says. There are Bibles, prayer books and other written materials of earlier centuries to support this

fact. "We are law abiding citizens, we will continue to uphold and defend the Federal Constitution. The Constitution is meant to protect us, but it is being rewritten stealthily," Lawrence adds.

LWF Council Statement Condemns Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa

LWF Vice-President Malasusa: "Being Peacemakers at Heart"

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – On its 2014 meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the LWF Council adopted a public statement against the violence in Central Africa. "We strongly and unreservedly condemn violence irrespective of who the perpetrators are", the statement says. It specifically addresses Boko Haram to release the captured school girls, the Al-Shabaab militia and its allies to "desist from using violence as a vehicle to air and articulate their grievances", Seleka and Anti-Balaka militia to abstain "from killing their fellow citizens" as well as combatants in South Sudan for displacing people during the planting season, thereby causing a famine in the country.

The statement calls on African governments as well as UN member states, LWF member churches and faith groups in the region to unite against violence. Such a statement issued by a faith-based organization bears great importance in the region, LWF Vice-President Bishop Alex G. Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) says. "In Africa, everybody is religious. Everybody goes to a mosque or a church or worships in a traditional religion. Any statement taken up by the church is considered very important and likely to be taken up," he says, adding that "through this statement people will

see the strength of the church and of the Lutheran communion".

Although Tanzania is not a conflict zone, the violence in the neighboring countries is affecting Tanzania, Malasusa says. "We have had 4 incidents, two of them in Lutheran churches" he tells. "People are terrified that the peace we preserved for a long time in Tanzania is going away no. The violence in other countries is violence in our country".

While some of the incidents were directed at Lutheran churches, Malasusa emphasizes that violence and fundamentalism are not limited to certain

religious groups. "When the blast in the Lutheran church happened, everyone thought it had a Muslim background, but a good Muslim would never do that" he says. "We have been living together peacefully for lifetimes, there has been intermarriage and good friendship. It is important not to generalize".

The Bishop encourages faith groups to take a stand against the violence and Christians not to be afraid of attending worship. "It is essential to preach the gospel in this situation" he is convinced. "Let's play the role of being peacemakers at heart".



Bishop Alex G. Malasusa.
Photo: LWF/H. Putsman-Penet

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South Sudan: LWF Condemns Aid Workers' Killing, Evacuates Maban Staff amid Growing Insecurity

Temporary Suspension of Assistance to Sudanese Refugees and Host Communities

GENEVA (LWI)— The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has strongly condemned the targeted killing of aid workers in South Sudan's Maban county, as fighting escalates between militia groups in the country's Upper Nile State.

Speaking on the security situation in Maban county, the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) Director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler said the deteriorating insecurity has compelled the LWF to evacuate its staff from Upper Nile State, and to temporarily suspend the current humanitarian intervention work there.

"We reiterate LWF's strong condemnation of the loss of all civilian lives in the current fighting. At the same time, we strongly object the targeted killing of aid workers—the very people who are providing emergency assistance to South Sudanese communities and Sudanese refugees," he said.

According to United Nations sources, at least five aid workers were killed on 5 August in Bunj, in Upper Nile. LWF provides educational support to an estimated 20,000 Sudanese in refugee camps in Maban, as well as assistance to host communities. Hitzler expressed LWF's commitment to continuing ongoing humanitarian and community development work in South Sudan, but noted this mandate can only be upheld in situations that do not impede meaningful intervention.

"While we strongly uphold our mandate to serve the vulnerable people caught in the conflict, the recurring insecurity, especially since last December, poses major risks. That is why we have taken the decision to temporarily evacuate all South Sudan program staff from Maban county and suspend our work there for now. We are closely monitoring the situation, assessing when we can resume assistance even on a reduced scale."

He said the DWS South Sudan humanitarian work will continue in Jonglei and Unity States, where LWF's assistance currently targets an estimated 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Hitzler noted that with no immediate solution in sight to the ongoing political negotiations for peace, "the potential is extremely high" for a worsening humanitarian crisis including famine in South Sudan. "A majority of the over 1 million IDPs are in remote areas, and the fear of recurring attacks prevents them from returning home to resume agricultural and other livelihood activities that they had to abandon," he added.

The DWS director reiterated LWF's previous appeals to parties to the current conflict in South Sudan "to put an end to the fighting, and consolidate their efforts in building peaceful co-existence in this young nation."



LWF Offers Education and Protection to Sudanese Refugees in Volatile South Sudan

EU 'Children of Peace' Initiative Helps Students from Conflict Zones

AJUONG THOK, South Sudan/GENEVA (LWI)— It has been over two years since 17-year-old Walid Awad Majir and his two brothers settled in neighboring South Sudan, fleeing conflict at home in

South Kordofan, Sudan. He recalls the date—30 December 2011—when military planes bombed Koda village in Iban county, killing three family members—"our mother, father and a baby sister."

Majir and his younger brother Mowe were at school and Kur, 21, was also not at home during the attack.

With support from relatives and neighbors, the siblings left home on



Walid Awad Majir outside a classroom in Ajuong Thok refugee camp, Unity State, South Sudan. Photo: LWF South Sudan/Birhanu Waka

1 January 2012 and headed towards Yida refugee camp in South Sudan's Unity State. Majir recalls the frustration and pain of losing their parents and sibling, coupled with the challenging journey to safety.

"It took us a total of 17 days to be able to reach Yida camp. We had to hide for a number of days in some locations. We were fired at by [the military planes] and passed many villages that were being bombed. It was the most difficult period of my life," he says.

Today, the three brothers live in Ajuong Thok refugee camp in Unity State, which together with the Upper Nile State are hosting over 211,000 refugees from Sudan. Since 2012, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been providing access to education as part of its emergency assistance to Sudanese refugees in both states and other regions of South Sudan.

Since March this year, Majir has been attending classes under the LWF-coordinated accelerated learning program (ALP). The education program is supported by the European Union (EU) Children of Peace project, which was established after the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. The goal is to offer children and young people affected by conflict access to schools where they can learn in a safe environment, and also receive

psychosocial support to heal from the traumatic experiences of war.

Like thousands of 12-17 year-old refugees here, Majir comes from a traditionally marginalized state in Sudan, where conflict has led to the collapse of the education system. He can now learn in a safe school environment and catch up with his peers. "I am a very happy person in Ajuong Thok," he adds.

Intensive, Integrated Process

The Children of Peace project under LWF's implementation in South Sudan was inaugurated in December 2013, but the conflict that started in South Sudan the same month disrupted its starting schedule.

In an emergency context, the program offers an intensive, integrated process that caters to the most disadvantaged refugee students. It provides optimal learning conditions aimed at resulting in higher retention and attainment levels.

A total of 3,500 Sudanese students in Yussif Batil and Kaya refugee camps (Maban county, Upper Nile State) and in Ajuong Thok, will benefit from the ALP initiative. In addition, teachers have been recruited for the program. The host community students who are already participating in LWF's primary

and secondary school programs will also benefit from much-needed school equipment including desks.

The ALP students will not only gain increased educational awareness about the dangers of armed conflict and issues surrounding violence and protection, but they will also have greater access to child/youth protection mechanisms. LWF's additional support includes help desks and child rights clubs as well as training opportunities for teachers to be able to respond more effectively to child protection incidences within the camp.

As part of the South Sudanese ALP curriculum, HIV and AIDS awareness, human rights, hygiene promotion and environmental education are taught alongside academic subjects, with a goal to mainstreaming life skills education into the program.

Current Conflict Poses Major Risk

Still, the learning project could be jeopardized by the ongoing fighting in South Sudan, which has displaced nearly 1.5 million people since December 2013, and pushed over 400,000 refugees into the neighboring countries. There is a growing shortage of food, with the World Food Program estimating that 3.9 million people are at high risk of food insecurity.

While LWF continues to assist South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries and internally displaced persons (IDPs), humanitarian intervention is hampered by insecurity in several areas, the current rainy season and inadequate funding. In the context of conflict and insecurity, there is high potential for tension between the host communities and the IDPs and refugees over resources.

(The interviews with ALP students in Ajuong Thok were conducted by Birhanu Waka, team leader for the Unity State operations of the LWF World Service program in South Sudan.)

LWF and Namibian Lutheran Churches Drought Intervention Made a Huge Difference

Program Coordinator Diehl Talks of Learning Opportunities

GENEVA (LWI) – Mr Harmut Diehl says he looks back with deep gratitude at the generous solidarity from the global Lutheran communion to thousands of Namibians, still slowly recovering from the devastating drought between 2012 and 2013.

Diehl made these remarks recently in Geneva, when he addressed staff of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on the impact of the joint drought intervention by the LWF and the three Namibian Lutheran churches, which he coordinated as a volunteer between September 2013 and May 2014.

The drought affected around 800,000 people, who faced a shortage of basic food, diminishing pastures for their livestock, and reduced availability of water for domestic use. Crop harvests were down 42 percent from 2012 and 4,000 livestock had died.

He said appreciation for the emergency cash transfer program (CTP), which involved payout of 100 Namibian dollars (USD 10) per family member over the nine-month critical period, was expressed by several beneficiary families. Some 4,500 vulnerable people in four communities were able to purchase food, medicine or goats to boost their livestock,

pay school fees and buy uniform for their children, among other basic needs.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia jointly coordinating the drought response program, under the United Church Council of Namibia Evangelical Lutheran Churches (UCC/NELC). An appeal for funding was requested through the ACT Alliance network. The LWF Department for World Service (DWS) provided technical support through its regional hubs in Eastern and Southern Africa. The cash was issued on a debit card through a partnership with the service provider Nampost, which also met 50 percent of the administration fees.

Three Meals per Day

Citing a monitoring visit earlier this year to Amperbo, 300 km north of the capital Windhoek, Diehl told the story of one woman who explained how the 100 Namibian dollars had helped her “pay her debts, buy food for the family, catch up on contributions to the church, and

even managed to save enough to buy a goat so that she could increase her herd.”

In Windhoek, an 84-year-old woman pensioner taking care of her four orphaned grandchildren said the additional 200 Namibian dollars two of the youngsters received under the CTP enabled her “to give the children three meals a day,” Diehl noted.

Lessons Learned

The CTP also provided learning opportunities, the coordinator explained. One of the reasons why there was huge acceptance of the program was its criteria of targeting the most vulnerable people in a community irrespective of their faith affiliation. “It was important that anybody could qualify irrespective of church membership,” Diehl noted.

Concerns had been raised about potential resistance to the program’s choice of women as the cash recipients in a society that considers the man as the head of the family. “Throughout the implementation period, there was huge acceptance of the woman’s role as the one who would take care of the needs of the family,” Diehl said.

In a political context that opposes cash handouts with the argument that they encourage laziness and alcohol consumption, the CTP did not receive support from the government, which was distributing food to those affected by drought. “But in our monitoring, we did not come across any case of alcohol abuse from the beneficiaries. In fact, many of the village chiefs gave strong support for the program,” he noted.

The churches appreciated Nampost’s support and collaboration with the Namibian Red Cross Society, Catholic Church agency CARITAS, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Diehl said.



Mr Harmut Diehl speaks at the meeting with LWF staff at the Geneva Communion Office. Photo: LWF/P. Mumia

“We must nurture these relationships to learn and share experiences, problems in preparedness for future emergencies such as droughts and floods, as these will happen again.”

This was the first time the three Lutheran churches had worked jointly on an issue of mutual benefit for the communities, Diehl said. “It helped to

affirm the value of unity under UCC. “This is especially important as the churches start preparations for hosting the 2017 LWF Assembly in Windhoek,” he said.

The churches also decided to maintain the steering committee for the CTP, with the aim to follow up on membership in ACT Alliance.

Expressing gratitude to Diehl and to the Namibian Lutheran churches for their crucial role in the drought response initiative, DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler noted that this was a good experience of anchoring LWFs diaconal work in the local churches.

Passing on Skills to Enhance Food Security in Rural Mozambique

LWF Supports Community Empowerment Projects

CHOKWE, Mozambique/GENEVA (LWI)—Sergio Banze is a primary school teacher in Tingonhamene village, Chokwe district, in Mozambique's southern province of Gaza. In March this year he participated in a community-based training session on food conservation, something quite new in this rural area, which normally experiences food shortages over the dry period from August to November each year.

After the five-day training, he had learned how to conserve most of the vegetables and fruits grown on the family land—onions, cassava leaves, cabbage and tomatoes—and how to prepare jam from tomatoes, pineapples and carrots.

“Processed like this, the foodstuff can be conserved up to one year. This is a solution towards hunger reduction within households in this community during the months of scarcity,” he says of the training conducted for 25 community members by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) program in Mozambique.

The training involves age-old practical, simple and cost-effective traditional food drying methods that are no longer commonplace, explains Constantino W. Malate, planning, monitoring and evaluation officer for the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) country program in Mozambique.

The vegetables to be dried are first washed, cut up into small pieces and spread out on a net suspended under a shade. Salt and a few onion slices are added, and the vegetables are turned



Sergio Banze prepares green vegetables for conservation in Tingonhamene village, Chokwe district, southern Mozambique. Photo: LWF Mozambique/Gilberto Banze

every two or so hours, to ensure maximum exposure to sunlight. After about eight hours in the open, the vegetables are collected and left to air indoors. For green leaves, typically used for stews, the drying process is repeated the following day to ensure all the moisture has been extracted. They are then placed in clean, well dried bottle jars, and are ready to be stored indoors for later use. Vegetables such as carrots may require a longer drying period, Malate adds.

As most households also keep small livestock and poultry, the LWF training includes skills for preparing and storing fodder for use during the dry months. The process involves storing grass and/or chopped food plants such as maize in a rectangular pit lined with plastic

sheets. Small measures of salt, sugar and water are added to each consecutive layer of fodder until the hole is filled up. It is then covered with a plastic sheet and sand is poured on top to keep it dry and air tight. After three weeks, the silage is ready for animal feed. The LWF trainers teach farmers how to identify and treat common animal diseases, and take better care of their animals for milk and manure production, among other benefits.

For Banze, who teaches Portuguese, social science, mathematics and art, the food conservation training has also been about passing on knowledge and changing perceptions about gender roles. With his newly acquired skills, he trains his students

to make use of available resources to enhance the variety and availability of food at household level.

He feels honored to give students something he never had in his childhood. “I grew up seeing my mother throwing out tomatoes and green leaves during the harvest period because we could not eat all them, yet during the dry season we did not have stew for meals. Now I can confidently say that my students will face a different scenario,” he says. As the school curriculum includes food conservation as one of the topics in social science, Banze sees “this as an opportunity to teach them [students] how to improve their diet through conservation of vegetables. This is also an opportunity to equally reach boys and girls with the same message and skills,” adds the teacher, who is also a member of the Tingonhamene community development committee (CDC).

Taking part in the training was also a personal effort to influence attitudinal change. In the community, food preparation and conservation are tasks

that are associated with predominantly women’s roles such as fetching water from the river or borehole, cooking, cleaning the house, and providing care for family members. That the LWF trainings involve both women and men participants in animal husbandry, has made many people realize that the strict traditional gender-based task division can be broken, notes LWF community officer Malate.

As LWF’s intervention responds to the needs identified by the community, the respective projects integrate the necessary awareness raising and ensure equal gender representation on the CDCs and in the training sessions.

The food conservation training sessions target groups of 25 male and female farmers, and the CDCs ensure monitoring among the households represented. By the end of the project cycle in 2015, LWF Mozambique expects to have trained at least 3,340 households in 24 communities in Gaza province.

In Nhampimbe village, a community with about 30 orphans and vulnerable

children due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic and other factors, 15 vulnerable children will receive school materials such as bags, exercise books and pens from the LWF-supported savings and loans group or IR-VICOBA. The group members also act as guardians to the children, and encourage some of the older ones to engage in small-scale farming to support their families, says Emilio Bonifacio Eduardo, LWF Mozambique community development officer.

“The LWF community empowerment projects have been successful in many crucial areas that improve the lives of the rural poor, including community-based response to disaster risk reduction, improving food security and preventing diseases like malaria. It is encouraging to see an increase in the participation of women, especially in regions with a high level of illiteracy,” adds Katja José, LWF representative in Mozambique, and head of DWS work there.

(DWS project staff in Gaza and Sofala contributed to this feature story.)

LWF Second Virtual Conference on Diakonia to Link Participants on September 18

The Lutheran World Federation’s (LWF) second Virtual Conference on Diakonia in September will connect some 500 congregational leaders, pastors and diaconal workers from around the world to share experiences and explore subjects such as mission in context, transforming conflict, gender justice and climate change.

The theme of the conference, which takes place on September 18 and is organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), is “Called to be Transformed and Transforming.” It will include workshops and presentations, and also enable live video responses to questions from participants and video commentary.

“Transformation engages and changes all who are part of it. In that manner, transformational diakonia helps to overcome so-called helpers’ syndrome, practices and relations that separate

“we” from “they,” said DMD Secretary for Human Resources Development Abebe Yohannes Saketa.

Participants of the first virtual conference in 2013 are invited for further reflection and learning, with the aim of enhancing the contextual and thematic understandings achieved last year. Invitations will also be extended to first-time attendees who can access videos and reports as part of their preparations.

The DMD plans to hold follow-up virtual conferences in 2015 and 2016, focusing on relevant themes that help to promote peace and justice in society.

LWF Virtual Conference on Diakonia – Called to be transformed and to be transforming: www.lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-virtual-conference-diakonia-called-be-transformed-and-be-transforming

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