

Lutheran World Information

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LIBERATED
BY GOD'S
GRACE

2017 - 500 YEARS OF REFORMATION

Connect, Participate and Contribute to the Lutheran Reformation

LWF General Secretary Invites Churches to 2015-2017 Process

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge is inviting churches in the Lutheran communion to “join, connect, participate and contribute” to a three-year LWF process of global and regional initiatives to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

In this year’s Reformation Day letter to all LWF member churches, Junge invites churches to reflect together on LWF’s theme for the anniversary “Liberated by God’s Grace,” which is also the theme of the LWF Twelfth Assembly to be held in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 2017.

The LWF Council decided that the LWF would focus its processes and events regarding the Reformation anniversary during the years 2015 to 2017. Under the anniversary theme and sub-themes, various initiatives will take place with a commitment to express the global nature of Lutheran Reformation and keep churches moving in an ongoing process of reform. Events will also affirm LWF’s ecumenical accountability, so that the 500th anniversary does not undo what has grown from decades of ecumenical relations, but builds on it.



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

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Churches can join in any of the events outlined in the *2017 – 500 Years of Reformation* leaflet. These include processes to celebrate the leadership of women in ongoing Reformation, the contribution of young “Reformers” to the anniversary, and a hermeneutics process on Lutheran

reading of Scriptures, among others. The leaflet also features a map showing milestones of the global Reformation since it started in 1517.

Junge invites LWF member churches to consider using the 500th anniversary logo, including its short explanation available online at www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-2017-logo

The 2014 LWF Reformation Sunday liturgy is also available online in English, French, German and Spanish at www.lutheranworld.org/resource-lwf-sunday-2014-liturgy

The leaflet can be downloaded at www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lutheran-world-federation-reformation-2017-flyer

LWF President Bishop Younan Receives Canadian Award for Peace Work

2014 Civis Mundi Award

JERUSALEM, GENEVA (LWI) – Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), says an award he received in Canada for dedication to building peace in the region, is recognition and appreciation for the efforts of both the ELCJHL and the global Lutheran communion in bringing peace based on justice.

On 22 October, the ELCJHL bishop and President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) received the 2014 Civis Mundi Award in Waterloo, Canada. It was created by the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary (WLS) to recognize people who are role models for others especially for young people on their responsibilities as global neighbors and citizens.

“It [the award] tells us, ‘Don’t grow tired. Continue your good work to bring peace based on justice, to combat any types of extremism, and to continue to strengthen Christians in this county,’” Younan said prior to the event.

Those working for peace in the Middle East, he noted, must ally themselves with moderate voices. “We cannot allow the extremist voices to overpower us. If we remain quiet and complacent, it will be the moderates who allow extremism to grow and take hold.”

Religion, Younan added, must be part of the solution to the problems of the Middle East. “Don’t use the Bible, the Torah or the Quran to transform a



A teacher and students at Dar al-Kalima Evangelical Lutheran School in Bethlehem, West Bank. Photo: ELCJHL/Elizabeth McHan

political disagreement into a religious conflict.”

The WLS is an educational institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. National Bishop Susan C. Johnson said the recognition of Younan’s work is a sign of the ongoing partnership between the two churches and of their relationship as sister churches in the LWF communion.

“Advocating for peace and justice is part of our ongoing commitment both in our country and around the world,” said Johnson, who is also the LWF Vice-President for North America. As people of faith and Christ’s disciples, Christians must speak prophetic truth

to power. “Where we can speak together with ecumenical or interfaith partners we can have a stronger voice,” she added.

The seminary’s Principal-Dean Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer noted that Younan’s perspective can help the Canadians “understand the constructive role Christians and people of faith can play in supporting” the Holy Land peace process.

After receiving the award, Younan addressed faculty and students of two local universities, the Lutheran community and the public on “Building Peace in the Holy Land – The Contributions of Christians and People of Faith.”

2014 Nobel Peace Prize: Honoring Dedication to Freedom and Education

LWF Congratulates Joint Winners Malala Yousafzay and Kailash Satyarthi

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes recognition of the critical role of “education for all” in the naming of Pakistani education activist Malala Yousafzay and Indian child rights advocate Kailash Satyarthi as the joint winners of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize on 10 October.

“Education as a right for all girls irrespective of the risks involved was the mission a young Malala undertook so courageously in Pakistan when extremists shot her. We give thanks to God that she has become such a strong advocate for children’s access to education,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

Junge noted LWF’s commitment to education as an evangelical call. “As we look forward to celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is important to recall Martin Luther’s exemplary action of setting up primary schools so that children could learn instead of only doing manual labor.”

Lutherans have continued this tradition through thousands of public schools—including children’s education in conflict zones—and higher institutions of theological and other studies around the world. Skills’ training through churches’ diaconal work is a crucial part of education and empowerment, the general secretary added.

For LWF Youth Secretary Ms Caroline Richter, “Malala as co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize at only 17, is an encouragement for LWF’s funda-



Malala Yousafzay, Kailash Satyarthi. Photo: Torbjørn Kjosvold / Senado Federal do Brasil under Creative Commons, Share-Alike (CC-SA)

mental value that youth participation and leadership are part of our identity. We recognize that there is great value in providing space for young people to take initiatives. That is why youth in the LWF are leading initiatives such as the climate justice campaign.”

However, Richter noted, leadership can only be nurtured in a supportive environment. “The biblical citation ‘Let no one despise you for your youth ... (1 Tim 4:12)’ encourages young Christians to dare to do great things. It is important that we continue in the LWF to provide space to listen to what young people are saying and wishing, and respond appropriately.”

Junge said the work of the Indian activist Satyarthi resonates well with LWF’s focus on human trafficking. The

World Service programs in countries such as Nepal are working with civil society organizations to provide alternative livelihoods for freed bonded laborers such as the Kamaiyas, he said. “Freeing and rehabilitating child and adult laborers through education restores their dignity and empowers them to become responsible citizens in their respective contexts,” he said.

Junge added that the Nobel Peace Prize winners were announced on the eve of the International Day of the Girl Child [11 October] with the theme ‘Empowering Adolescent Girls: Ending the Cycle of Violence’. “What a remarkable coincidence, as we honor two individuals who have dedicated their lives for freedom and education.”

LWF and UNHCR Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Humanitarian Cooperation

“Delighted to see the scope for our joint work expand”

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, extending over 50 years of close col-

laboration in providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

“We are witnessing record levels of forced displacement globally, and this makes it all the more important that we and faith-based organizations work together for the sake of the world’s refugees and internally displaced,” Janet Lim, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner, said. “LWF is a long-standing close partner, and we’re delighted to see the scope for our joint work expand.”

“This MoU between UNHCR and LWF is not just about our two organizations” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge emphasized. “It is about a dramatically increasing number of refugees and migrants that require concerted efforts and strategic partnerships as the one we have signed today.”

“This is a time to show who you stand with” Junge added. “With this

signature the LWF stands with people suffering from persecution, oppression and hunger. The LWF stands with its longstanding vocation to be among those contributing towards peace, justice and reconciliation in this world.”

“Tremendous Commitment to Serving People”

“This strategic partnership identifies us in clear ways as a faith based organization engaged in humanitarian work and adhering to international humanitarian standards. It expresses the expectation that we will work together on how to build on the potentials of faith-based organizations in protecting refugees. I look forward to exploring together with UNHCR and faith-based actors engaged

in the humanitarian field the concrete value we add to humanitarian response in our world today,” said Junge.

Junge referred to the MOU between the LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) signed in August to cooperate in humanitarian work. It is the first official cooperation between a global Christian and a global Islamic humanitarian organization.

The LWF and UNHCR will collaborate in coordinating and managing camps and settlements, and in community-managed peace and protection interventions for children and other vulnerable groups. Additional areas of cooperation include distributing non-food items (NFI), water and sanitation as well as promoting climate justice, environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods.

“As the LWF, we appreciate the incredible work of the UNHCR and the important operational challenges facing UNHCR in the face of significant humanitarian needs, “ said LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Michael Hyden. “In the face of these changes, UNHCR has shown tremendous commitment to serving people, with increasing emphasis on the principles of partnership at the highest level of the organization. This MoU with the LWF is a test of this commitment.”

The MoU replaces a global Framework Agreement for Operational Partnership signed between the two organizations in December 2000.



UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner Janet Lim (left) and LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge signing the MoU. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

LWF Solidarity with Churches and Communities Affected by Ebola Crisis

Lutheran Churches in Liberia and Sierra Leone Reach Out

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) invited churches throughout the Lutheran communion to join in solidarity prayers on Sunday, 28 September, for churches and communities affected by the Ebola crisis in Central and West Africa.

The prayer invitation through the LWF Department for Mission and Develop-

ment (DMD) supported a recent message by the LWF Vice-President for Africa Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa, encouraging Lutheran churches impacted by Ebola to “find comfort in knowing that your brothers and sisters are praying for you.”

The prayer day was also an opportunity to make a financial contribution to

support the diaconal and disaster preparedness capacity of Lutheran churches in the most severely affected countries.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 2,900 deaths from the Ebola virus disease (EVD) had been confirmed in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone by 21 September 2014.

Liberia: Dealing with Ebola Consequences

In Liberia with more than 1,670 EVD deaths and more expected, Bishop Dr Jensen Seyenkulo of the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) emphasized the church's collaboration with the government and other religious and international organizations. He pointed out that one of the consequences of the Ebola outbreak is that there are far too many other deaths from curable diseases, which the over-stretched health system is not able to prioritize in the current emergency.

Seyenkulo shared his deep appreciation for the ongoing prayers from churches throughout the world. He, however noted, "Everyone of us has in one way or the other been affected. We continue to lose either friends or relatives and this is so scaring and traumatizing too."

The LCL continues to raise awareness through its "Stand Against Ebola" campaign, launched on 7 September to sensitize community members about the disease. "Reports coming from the

districts have been very encouraging," he says, of the initiative.

LCL has received medical supplies from its partners abroad for the church's health institutions including Phebe and Curran hospitals. Phebe, which has been operating at a limited capacity, officially opened at full scale on 15 September. While its Ebola Holding Center being constructed through support from the ACT Alliance is incomplete, "the good news is, the government-owned Ebola Treatment Center near Phebe in Bhong County, is now in operation," Seyenkulo added.

Sierra Leone: Helping Quarantined Households

In neighboring Sierra Leone, with nearly 600 deaths to Ebola according to WHO, Bishop Thomas J. Barnett of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone (ELCSL) said despite the euphoria following a recent three-day nationwide shut down "we are yet to

be appraised of any gains regarding the Ebola disease itself." Yet, he added, "We give thanks to God for sparing mercies and for the knowledge that there are others out there who continue to be with us in prayers."

The ELCSL is collaborating with the government and other organizations to raise awareness about Ebola and support community members. At the Incarnation Lutheran Church in Kenema, congregation members have formed committees that distribute basic food supplies to quarantined households and Ebola survivors, with financial support from the Lutheran church partners. "These items have been received with joy," said the congregation's pastor Rev. Victor Mbomah Fabbah.

"Ebola is one of the most serious calamities that have befallen inhabitants of the region in recent times in human history. It will take time for the pains to be healed and the tears to be wiped away," Fabbah added.

Pain in the Entire Communion

Reflecting on the situation of LWF churches and other churches and communities in the Ebola-affected countries, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge emphasized that prayers, financial support and other forms of solidarity are much needed in this challenging health crisis.

"As we explore collaborative ways of supporting our brothers and sisters in these countries, let us continue to uphold them in our prayers. When one part of the communion is sick, mourning, suffering and distressed, this pain is shared by the entire communion."



Sign pointing to the newly opened Ebola Treatment Center near Phebe Hospital. Photo: LCL

LWF Participates in New York Interfaith Summit on Climate Change

Lutheran Delegates Host Fast at UN Summit Parallel Event

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) continues its advocacy on climate change as "an urgent matter of

social and economic justice" with events around the United Nations Climate Summit on 23 September, in a two-day Inter-

faith Summit concluding today, and the "Peoples Climate March" held yesterday, in New York, United States.

The LWF Vice-President for Asia Ms Eun-hae Kwon is representing the LWF at the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, 21-22 September, jointly organized by the World Council of Churches and Religions for Peace. The conference has brought together 30 religious leaders discussing the specific contributions of faith traditions to the global climate debate. It concludes with a statement to be presented to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who has convened world leaders to the UN Summit to push for climate action ahead of the 2015 Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“We ask for intergenerational justice in the climate debates. It is also a responsibility of the young generation to be at the table of the negotiations,” noted Kwon, ahead of the meetings.

The LWF delegation to the annual COP meetings is made up of seven young representatives including Mr Martin Kopp (France) and Ms Tsiry Rakoto (Madagascar). Kopp participated in the people’s march on 21 September, described as the “Largest Climate March in History.” Organized by a coalition of over 1,400 organiza-



Martin Kopp (right), LWF delegate to the UN Climate Conference (COP19), speaks with Christina Figueres, director of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Photo: LWF/ Sean Hawkey

tions including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, it was joined by Ban Ki-moon, and supported by thousands of similar events around the world.

At a parallel event to the UN Summit on 23 September, Kopp and Rakoto, will host a one-hour fasting vigil, aimed at drawing attention to the [Fast for the Climate campaign], initiated by the LWF delegation at the 2013 COP in Poland. The campaign, which includes other faith and civil society organiza-

tions, features a once-a-month fasting action in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable people who are adversely affected by climate change.

Through COP sessions and other related meetings, the LWF delegation to the climate change conferences engages the Lutheran communion and its member churches in sharing knowledge and learning about climate change across the different generations and other faiths.

‘Here We March, We can do no other’ Religions’ Visibility Matters in Historic Climate March

NEW YORK, United States/GENEVA (LWI)– The historic “People’s Climate March” on 21 September in New York, was a successful and unique event that also affirmed the important contribution of faith organization to the struggle for society’s common good, says Mr Martin Kopp, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegate to the event, preceding the 23 September United Nations Summit.

“We are an important voice in the chorus that constitutes ‘the people’ and it matters for religions to be identified as allies in the fight for the common good,” Kopp told *Lutheran World Information*. He represented the LWF and the interfaith “# Fast for the Climate” campaign in the march, which organizers say

drew more than 400,000 participants to New York City, in addition to over 2,600 related events around the world.

Kopp said the event, considered as the biggest climate march in history, was a success, not only because of the huge number of marchers demanding action on climate change across the globe but also because of the wide array of organizations participating in the US, and the coming together of civil society. “It managed to get everyone on board: environmental organizations, scientists, religions [...] and that is new, unions. It achieved its goal of mobilizing ahead of the Heads of State Summit.”

Kopp said “The People’s Climate March is considered by some as the

birth of a true climate social movement. And it is true that on the contrary to the Copenhagen mobilization, today the civil society was united.”

The visibility of faith organizations in New York highlighted the need to reflect on crucial questions about “the meaning of our lives and societies” in the midst of scientific and technical discussions on emissions’ reduction, financing and a concrete action plan for adaptation, he said.

The “#fast for the climate” campaign consisting of faith and civil society organizations including the LWF is an important expression of solidarity with the poor and marginalized who are most severely affected by climate change. It helps to



The LWF delegation to the New York Climate events participated in the “Largest Climate March” in history, held 21 September, in New York City. Photo: #Fast for the Climate: Nikola Taylor

“point to what lies behind the material contingencies of people’s lives: what do we live for? why do we live together? what is our goal as a society? what do we want to achieve?” Kopp noted.

A member of the LWF delegation to the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) to

the UN climate change conferences, Kopp said the participation of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in the march was “a strong sign of the utmost importance he gives to the climate change issue.” However, more political will is still needed for a far-reaching climate agreement.

Still, the huge mobilization towards the march was “a first reason to hope” in anticipation of the 2015 COP. “I believe it is realistic to consider that political decisions cannot be made without a clear position and push from the public. [...] And the People’s Climate March sent today a clear message in that regard,” Kopp noted.

The LWF delegate hopes that through the #Fast for the Climate initiative and other platforms, religious organizations and civil society will continue to engage different stakeholders in demanding an ambitious but also fair climate agreement to limit the rising of mean temperature to 2 degrees.

Other Lutheran delegates in the march included staff of the Lutheran Office for World Community at the UN headquarters. Referring to Martin Luther’s citation, one of them remarked, “Here we march, we can do no other.”

A Spiritual Message of Hope for Climate Justice

LWF Representative Kwon Offers Highlights from New York Climate Change Summits

NEW YORK, United States/GENEVA (LWI) – While the recent Interfaith Summit on Climate Change emphasized politicians’ urgent responsibility in taking action to limit global warming, it also challenged religious leaders to help “maintain the ark of faith and the ark of love” ahead of the 2015 United Nations climate change conference, says The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) representative at the summit.

Ms Eun-hae Kwon, LWF Vice-President for the Asian region said the keynote speech by the United Nations official Ms Christiana Figueres “was a moment where you could feel how earnestly the society today is longing for a spiritual message of hope—hope that it is possible to change, and for ethical principles of care for creation and love of our neighbor.”

In her keynote address to the 21-22 September religious leaders’ gathering jointly organized by the World Council of

Churches and Religions for Peace, Figures, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stressed the role of interfaith collaboration in climate justice initiatives.

At the end of the summit, Kwon was among the 30 faith leaders representing nine religions who signed a statement *Climate, Faith and Hope: Faith Traditions Together for a Common*



LWF Vice-President Ms Eun-hae Kwon, introducing LWF’s interfaith approaches in advocating for climate justice, at a session of the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change in New York. Photo: LWF

Future, presented to the UN Climate Change Summit on 23 September.

In the statement, the religious leaders urged politicians attending the Heads of State Summit to make the right and difficult decisions “for the sustainability of the earth and its people.” They called for commitment towards a far-reaching global climate agreement at the UNFCCC meetings in Paris next year.

For Kwon, the religious leaders’ gathering was “a historic moment, a milestone but not yet the destination,” as interfaith collaboration and other initiatives on climate justice must persist at local, national and global levels. “This is part of our shared responsibility for creation and our neighbor,” she noted. Religions, she added, “are building blocks and not stumbling

stones for a just future for the human family and our common world.”

Fasting: An Opportunity to Step Back

On the interfaith “Fast for the Climate” campaign started at the UN climate conference in Poland with LWF’s leadership, Kwon said the invitation to fast on the first day of each month offers “an opportunity to step back, pray and reflect” in the midst of necessary technical and political discussions.

Despite the different backgrounds—Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, indigenous traditions and other faith traditions—fasting has a strong spiritual meaning for all. “We can all join in this common experience as one powerful

tool of working for climate justice together,” the LWF vice-president explained.

On youth participation and leadership in the climate change discussions, Kwon noted that the all-young-people composition of the LWF delegation to the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings sends a strong message that “in the LWF, climate change is an issue of intergenerational justice.”

Young people across the world are very concerned about the kind of planet we will inherit from those who make decisions today. “That is why we have to be at the negotiating table. And, this was reiterated at the interfaith summit.”

[Read more and download the statement at http://interfaithclimate.org/](http://interfaithclimate.org/)

Meeting People Where They Are

Junge’s Russia Visit Focuses on Mission of the Church Today

ST PETERSBURG, Russia/GENEVA (LWI) – The General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Martin Junge has cautioned that the Church must not turn away from the world as it faces the fast-changing complex realities of the 21st century.

Speaking on the opening day of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia (ELKR), 16-19 September, near St Petersburg, he urged delegates to not merely focus on the survival of the Church.

“In Jesus Christ it is clear that God has set out to meet people where they are, in their daily life contexts, with their joys and sorrows and contradictions, dependence on love and forgiveness, hope and peace,” Junge told ELKR clergy and lay members meeting at the Theological Seminary in Nowosaratowka.

Junge cautioned that the Church can have no other purpose than to participate in God’s mission of love and caring for the world. “Therefore the Church is not an end unto itself that should focus on its own security,” he said.



Visiting a sacred place near St Petersburg: (left to right) ELCIR Bishop Arri Kugappi, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Europe Area Secretary Rev. Dr Eva Sibylle Vogel-Mfato at Keltto cemetery, a safe worship space for Ingrian Christians during Communist rule. Photo: Pekka Mikkola/FELM

“How is it that the Church wants to turn away from the world over and over again? If God so loved the world, where does this often so deep contempt and aversion for the world come from that we see in church votes and attitudes?”

Junge said a Church that participates in the mission of God cannot turn its back on the complexities of today but

must stand up to them as an expression of God’s merciful and forgiving love.

The general secretary noted that God’s mission, revealed in Jesus Christ, is to the whole person, whether alienated from self because of sin, marginalized because of origin, lifestyle or gender, or suffering from hunger or disease.

“It is about providing a life in abundance, comprehensive reconciliation, justice and peace,” Junge emphasized.

“Not every church can afford immense diaconal institutions and projects, and also not every church can offer a response to sometimes very complex social problems. Yet they should not underestimate how much they can do when it comes to loving their neighbor,” he added.

Reconciliation and the 500th Reformation Anniversary

The general secretary also met with leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) in St Petersburg, participated in devotions at St Mary’s Cathedral, and visited the graveyard at Keltto, where Christians secretly met during the Soviet era.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 was the main focus of discussions during Junge’s meetings with ELCIR Bishop Arri Kugappi, and the ELKR leaders Archbishop Dietrich Brauer and Bishop Otto Schaude, as well as the governor of St Petersburg Georgij Poltawtschenko.

Junge stressed LWF’s commitment to reconciliation among people and among churches, and that the anniver-

sary celebrations will not focus on “divergences as discussed 500 years ago” but on what Reformation means today. The Lutheran churches, he added, strive to be bridge builders instead of becoming stumbling blocks.

Church Rebirth

Outlining ELKR’s preparations for 2017, Brauer said the plans include renovation of the cross on the Petri Church as a symbol of the church’s rebirth following years of repression, the building of a new organ at the church and the publication of a book about a Lutheran pastor’s daughter. He also thanked the governor for support in building a square where St Mary’s Church (Marienkirche) once stood, as a memorial to people’s sacrifice and survival during the city’s siege in the Second World War.

“Through these educational components, the Reformation anniversary shall become our internal celebration, connecting to our own church context,” he said. The archbishop also noted the growing relations with the Roman Catholics, which he said the Lutherans want to strengthen.

Bishop Kugappi spoke of plans to renovate St Anne’s church, with poten-

tial support from the city as part of the ongoing collaboration in social endeavors. “In our engagement for suffering people, we came to know each other better, especially in our plans to build two homes for the elderly,” he said.

Cornerstones of Human Values

Governor Poltawtschenko said the city’s foundation was closely connected with the establishment of several confessions and currently supports the over 400 congregations in St Petersburg. Many “people of Lutheran faith have worked here, in science and other occupations in public responsibility, [which is] important for the city, [and] the Lutheran parishes are well known and active in educational and humanitarian work,” he said.

Responding to a request about the city’s collaboration with the Lutheran churches in marking the Reformation anniversary together with other churches in the city, the governor expressed his support, adding that “the churches today should become cornerstones of human values and nourish human beings against their interior struggles.” He emphasized further support in conservation of other church buildings.

Synod on Family: Emphasis on Urgency and Space for Open Conversations

Reflections by LWF General Secretary Junge and ELCSA Bishop Phaswana

VATICAN/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) sees the recent Catholic bishops’ synod on the family as not only underlining the urgency of discussion on this topic but also emphasizing the need for space to have such open conversations.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed appreciation to the Vatican for inviting the LWF as a “fraternal delegate” to the 5-19 October Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, focusing on the pastoral challenges of the family in the context

of evangelization. Presiding Bishop Dr Ndanganeni P. Phaswana of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) delivered LWF’s greeting and attended sessions of the assembly.

Greeting the special synod, Phaswana explained the LWF churches’ agreement to use the “Emmaus conversation” approach to engage in mutual prayerful dialogue when considering the diverse theological and ethical interpretations within the Lutheran communion around the issues of family, marriage and sexuality.

Phaswana told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* the special synod had offered a platform for sharing and listening to different interpretations on the question of the family, including issues that need further discussions between Lutherans and Catholics.

On eucharistic communion or lack of it in inter-confessional families, Phaswana said, “Without hurrying anyone it is important to come to a common understanding and acceptance of our baptism, which will lead to acceptance into Eucharist.”



ELCSA Presiding Bishop Dr Ndanganeni P. Phaswana at a past meeting of the LWF Council.
Photo: LWF/H. Putsman-Penet

He said the challenges of polygamy and homosexuality are issues that churches face in their respective contexts. “Church leaders and pa-

risoners should intensify the art of listening with the intent to understand [and] not to respond.” In addition, pastoral formation should be adequately

equipped to deal with matters of family and human sexuality.

For Junge, the synod had confirmed what we as a Lutheran communion know very well: “how important it is to create spaces to talk to each other, to listen and reflect together; yet also how difficult it is to reach a common understanding on the complex matters of family, marriage and sexuality.”

He said the ongoing process in the Catholic Church “resounds with our ongoing ‘Emmaus conversation’ process of dealing with complexity while eagerly counting on Christ’s revealing presence as we journey together.”

“I appreciate Bishop Phaswana’s readiness to represent the LWF at the synod. I am sure we can only be enriched by granting ecumenical openness to our discernment processes,” Junge added.

Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue Moves Closer on Peace Issues, Future Cooperation

LWF Task Force on the Mennonite Action to Present Report at LWF Council in 2015

UTRECHT, Netherlands/GENEVA (LWI) – Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites initiated at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Eleventh Assembly has brought the two traditions closer on peace issues and future cooperation, says the chairperson of the LWF Task Force on the Mennonite Action, Rev. Michael Martin.

At its third meeting, 28-31 July, in Utrecht, the LWF Task Force which forms part of the ongoing process between the LWF and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), focused on the meaning of the 16th century Lutheran confessional writings in the 21st century, particularly those that had expressed historical hostility towards Anabaptists, who Mennonites regard as their predecessors.

“Both the future behavior of Lutherans with their confessional tradition and possible incentives for cooperation between Mennonites and Lutherans

locally and in different regions throughout the world formed a key part of the discussions,” Martin said. “It was especially important that the Lutheran Task Force included Prof. Dr John Roth

Goshen, a Mennonite member. This ensures that the continuing work of both Lutherans and Mennonites on the common path toward reconciliation is inextricably linked together.”



During the Assembly 2010 reconciliation action, the Mennonite World Conference presented the LWF with a pine foot-washing tub as a sign of commitment to a continued process of healing of memories. Photo: LWF/Erick Coll

A report on the series of meetings between the LWF and MWC will be presented to the LWF Council in 2015 and will be linked to the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017, including the principle of ecumenical accountability and being part of a broader “healing of memories” process with other Christian world communions.

Through the Mennonite action at the LWF Assembly in 2010, the LWF

apologized for Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century, the ignorance towards these actions till the present day and for inappropriate and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists by Lutheran authors. The Assembly prayed for healing of memories and reconciliation between Lutheran and Mennonite sisters and brothers. The task force is seeking ways to implement the promises locally, regionally

and globally, particularly in light of the Reformation anniversary.

The task force emphasized that reconciliation with Mennonites continues and that it will look at ways to nourish this in LWF’s pastoral training, and find opportunities to allow grassroots expressions of reconciliation, particularly during the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

Make the Economy Contribute to Peace

Junge Participates in Sant’Egidio Gathering of Religious Leaders

ANTWERP, Belgium/GENEVA (LWI) – Structural injustice in the economy is fuelling growing discord worldwide, was a key message from the General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Martin Junge at an international gathering of religious leaders.

Speaking during two panel discussions at the 28th edition of the international meeting “People and Religions” hosted by the Community of Sant’Egidio, at Antwerp, Belgium, 7-9 September, Junge urged church leaders to see their ecumenical efforts as a response to God’s call for justice and peace. The theme of the meeting was “Peace Is the Future: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue 100 years after World War I”. Participants reflected on the futility of war and dedicated themselves to finding lasting peace.

During a discussion on “Economy in the Service of Peace,” Junge, a Chilean theologian, noted that people, communities and regions are excluded from fair access to the world’s resources and wealth. “Disparities are growing, gaps are widening, even among societies with a traditionally strong socio-economic cohesion. Injustice in the way the wealth is distributed is mounting,” the LWF general secretary emphasized.

“If there isn’t room in minds and hearts for a different, thereby *inclusive, respectful, sustainable and solidarian* individual and collective life project, obviously there won’t be any room for engaging in required change,” he said.



The final ceremony of the 2014 Sant’Egidio “People and Religions” meeting in Antwerp, Belgium.
Photo: Saint’Egidio

“With no change, though, the economy will increasingly become a source of conflict, rather than a contribution to peace,” Junge concluded.

The general secretary also participated in a panel discussion on “Unity of the Church and Peace”, where he questioned whether churches have become too used to their fragmentation.

Reflecting on LWF’s reconciliation with Mennonites, he added that the quest for unity among churches is part of their call by God to a wider mission of “compassion, reconciliation, justice and peace for the whole world.”

Junge said eucharistic hospitality offers the ecumenical movement a way to model God’s inclusivity. “In a world characterized by so many fragmenta-

tions, how long can we afford adding even one more, more so if it is about the table that doesn’t belong to any of us, but to which we are all invited?”

The conference was attended by a number of European leaders and cultural leaders and religious authorities from all over the world including the President of the European Council; the founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio, Prof. Andrea Riccardi; the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II; the Patriarch of Babylonian Chaldeans Louis Raphael I Sako; and the Grand Mufti of Egypt Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Allam. It concluded with faith groups holding separate prayer sessions then joining in an inter-religious procession and together making a proclamation for peace.

LWF Hermeneutics Conference Discusses the Gospel of Matthew

Addressing issues relevant to our contemporary context

CHICAGO, United States/GENEVA (LWI) – Forty-four biblical scholars and theologians from around the world are meeting at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 4-10 September 2014 for the third Lutheran World Federation (LWF) International Hermeneutics Conference.

Based on the Gospel of Matthew, the conference aims to create space for a shared reading of the Bible among Lutheran scholars on the road to the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

Presenters have framed issues informed by global and local contexts ranging from matters of healing to caring for the environment and interfaith relations as a lens through which to read the Gospel of Matthew, said Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, LWF Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice.

“In each case, their perspective is informed by the reading of Scripture and attention to their own life situations. In conversations it has become clear how profoundly our contexts shape our perceptions and how crucial it is for us to listen to one another,” Mtata added.

As Mr Bruk Ayele Asale of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) remarked, “Martin Luther and the other Reformers addressed the issues of their time on the basis of the eternal Word of God. The Word of God is dynamic, as they made clear. Like Luther and the Reformers we need to address the issues relevant to our contemporary context, using the dynamic Word of God, which is the same then, now, and forever.”

Mtata of the LWF’s Department for Theology and Public Witness

(DTPW), noted that the Lutheran scholars focused both on the extent to which context can inform the way in which Scripture is read, and that how Scripture is read can and should also transform context. “This emphasizes the critical role and significance of dialogue,” Mtata said.

Referring to the biblical scholar Mercedes Garcia Bachman, Brazil based theologian Dr Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli stated that “the plurality of voices and interpretations is exactly what constitutes the identity of our plural Lutheran communion, which still confesses the *One Faith*, but differently.”

Mtata emphasized that as participants continue their deliberations, they are deepening their affirmation that while such contextual sensitivity is central to the appropriation of the Scriptures today, there remains a need to find shared interpretive resources informed by the Reformation.

“This will not put an end to particularity shaped by context but rather strengthen the Lutheran communion in its efforts to bear a common witness to the world in areas that are of concern to all, and to increased solidarity on issues that are peculiar to some,” Mtata said.

According to Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer, it is “the permanent task of theological hermeneutics” to draw attention to the tension between particularity and universality “in a reflected and responsible way.”



Mr Bruk Ayele Asale speaking at the Hermeneutics Conference. Photo: LWF/ I. Benesch

In Brazil, LWF President Younan Urges Church to Proclaim Equality and Dignity for All

Bishop Younan Visits Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil

RIO CLARO, Brazil/GENEVA (LWI) – The President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A.

Younan has pointed to the “good news” of Latin American liberation theology in urging the Church to remain prophetic

in the midst of oppression. Addressing the 29th General Council of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession

in Brazil (IECLB), Younan said the voice of liberation theology in Latin America never ceased because the Church believed in the God of justice.

“From Brazil, I call on the Church of God to be prophetic. The power of the Church is never in its prosperity, the numbers of its membership, its bank account or good works. The power of the Church is in transmitting the will of God and the love of Christ to its people and to the world,” he said in his sermon based on Jeremiah 29:7.

“The power of the Church is prophetic when it proclaims equality, dignity and abundant life to all,” said Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

The theme of the General Council, 15 -19 October, was “Lives in Communion.” IECLB President Rev. Dr Nestor Friedrich told the 500 delegates that the aim was to ensure unity and common action in the church.

“By confessional and ecclesial unity, I understand the harmony and understanding of the commitment by grace and freedom of all members in the Church’s mission. It is basic to express faith and affirm identity coming from the Scriptures and the confessional writings,” Friedrich said.

In an address on “Faith, Gender Justice, and Peacebuilding in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” at the Lutheran School of Theology [Faculdades EST] in São Leopoldo, Younan urged

faculty and students to counter religiously-sanctioned political extremism.

“The best way to counteract extremism is to persist in proclaiming the core of our faith: God’s love extends to every human being, regardless of gender, ethnic identity, or creed. No matter who you are, you are loved by God and loved by us,” he said.

Palestinians and Israelis inhabit each other’s lives but that does not mean they need to be in conflict. Jews, Christians and Muslims are all part of the fabric of the Middle East and they must not remain silent in the face of oppression.

He noted that the ELCJHL schools have educated girls alongside boys for decades, demonstrating in the daily lives of Muslim and Christian Palestinians that there is no difference between the genders nor limit in any one’s capability.

“We must together build a peaceful coexistence in the land Holy to all of us,” Younan said. He challenged the students to greater commitment in understanding the real causes of the conflict, to pray for Palestinian Christians and to engage in peace building efforts.

In conversations with the EST Gender Research Group, Younan heard that the faculty is in the process of developing its own gender justice policy based on the one by the LWF, which has been well received by the Women and Gender Justice Network of the churches in Latin America.



LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, with members of the EST Gender Research group in São Leopoldo. Photo: EST/ Adriana Gastellu

Guatemalan Lutheran Church’s Álvarez on the Importance of LWF Membership

Greater Visibility of Advocacy and Human Rights Work

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) accepted the Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA) into membership at the June 2014 Council meeting in Indonesia, bringing the total number of churches in the global Lutheran communion to 144. The LWF has a long history of close accompaniment

of the churches and people of Central America and an active Department for World Service program in the region.

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information*, ILUGUA General Coordinator Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera talks about the importance of membership in the LWF and the church’s role in defending and

advocating for human rights in the Central American country. ILUGUA is a member of the Ecumenical Christian Council of Guatemala, an alliance of Catholic, Episcopal (Anglicans), Evangelical and Reformed churches, which collaborates in several areas of work including advocacy on human rights at regional and international levels.

What difference does full membership in the LWF make to ILUGUA and its congregations?

The ILUGUA is a diaconal church, whose main task is to accompany and support indigenous and peasant communities in the eastern region of Guatemala and to defend human rights. For this work, ILUGUA is persecuted, threatened, vilified and criminalized. In ILUGUA, we feel very happy to be accepted as members of the global communion of Lutheran churches. This is of great strength, faith and hope for our work, and gives security and protection to our lives and our diaconal mission.

We are also an open and inclusive fellowship in the region of Guatemala and LWF membership opens up many possibilities and opportunities to be united in prayer, in faith, in the sacrament, as well as solidarity and communication with churches that are also members worldwide. We are an ecumenical church and membership in the LWF reaffirms our Lutheran identity in the Latin American context within which urgent actions and initiatives of a prophetic church are required to defend life, promote peace and seek justice. LWF membership means that we are not alone in our mission; we are accompanied and supported jointly by the global communion.

Are there additional benefits to membership?

Firstly, our diaconal work is recognized and supported by the global Lutheran communion. Communications, campaigns, and prayers reach us and we are listened to and valued



ILUGUA General Coordinator Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera. Photo: LWF/M. Haas

in our spirituality. We are recipients of solidarity and the same source of solidarity for life, justice and peace.

Membership also strengthens and legitimizes our task as human rights defenders within rural and indigenous communities who resist peacefully in defence of life, land and natural resources in the territories we inhabit. Another benefit is that it makes our pastoral work much more visible to the world and the work of advocacy, which is very important in developing our work in defending human rights, and in this way, deters threats and risks to our lives.

As a former affiliated LWF church, why was full membership so important to you?

Our church has been an affiliated member of the LWF and seeking membership was a process that took several years. ILUGUA has worked on the recov-

ery of historical memory and systematization of the violations of human rights in the region of Zacapa. We also work hard in the defence and protection of the “Granadillas” mountains in the highlands of Merendón, and have denounced for years the destruction of forests and water sources for communities.

We are working on the bill for the mountains of Granadillas and other mountains of the massif of Merendón to be protected as Protective Springs Reserve. ILUGUA, under the protection of human rights to food, also develops processes for sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty and water rights. For this work, our pastors and church members are being criminalized, threatened, maligned, intimidated and imprisoned. This is why ILUGUA sought membership with greater intensity, and requires the protection and solidarity of the global Lutheran communion.

Respect the Rights of Nicaragua’s Indigenous People **LWF Presents Joint Statement at UN Human Rights Council**

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has warned the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that multiple human rights violations against indigenous people living on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua violate their economic, social and cultural rights.

In an 19 September statement to the council on behalf of the LWF, the Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and the Humboldt Center, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, urged

Nicaragua to respect the rights of indigenous people.

Submitting the statement on behalf of the three organizations, the LWF representative said Nicaragua had failed to deliver on the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and

reform the country's electoral act to help indigenous peoples better participate in the country's electoral process by taking into account their traditions and customs.

"The current government maintains absolute hegemony in all spheres of power, creating paperwork procedures that hinder indigenous people [from attaining] the political participation in the political process," said the joint statement to the UNHRC 27th regular session, taking place in Geneva, 8-26 September.

The LWF intervention came during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Nicaragua, a time for states to articulate what progress they have made in the area of human rights. Eight non-governmental organizations raised questions on the rights of women and children, gender-based violence and torture.

The submission was the only one focusing on the voices of indigenous peoples. Representatives from various nations commended Nicaragua for its commitment to ending poverty, improving education and the rights of women. Nicaragua's report was adopted by the council.

The LWF official said, however, that the indigenous people of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua continue to suffer harassment and intimidation by non-indigenous people who are encroaching on indigenous land and exploiting their natural resources.

The government of Nicaragua, the statement added, has announced the start of a number of mega-projects including the Grand inter-Oceanic canal

project that will have a major impact on indigenous territories.

The UPR session heard that "These projects were carried out without prior, free and informed consent from the affected indigenous peoples."

As a consequence of the human rights violations against them, the "indigenous peoples of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua today are living under harsh economic conditions characterized by impoverishment, segregation, marginalization, assimilation, oppression and exploitation."

The LWF called on the Nicaraguan government to stop the "process of demarcation and titling of indigenous territories" and the illegal activities in the territory that are infringing on the rights of indigenous people.

The statement also urged Nicaragua to implement the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which calls on governments to respect the collective rights of indigenous people, in compliance with the national laws and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Nicaraguan government stated that it has a broad framework that ensures human rights in the country, rejecting challenges made by indigenous people and their supporters that their rights are being violated.

The LWF works in Nicaragua through the Department for World Service regional program in Central America, and through its member church, the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope.



Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, before the start of the UPR session on Nicaragua, 18 September, in Geneva. Photo: LWF/M. Spangler

Democracy Is Important for the Future of Hong Kong

Lutheran Bishop Decries Wide Gap between Authorities and Youth

HONG KONG/GENEVA (LWI) – As pro-democracy activists occupy key parts of Hong Kong city for a third week in efforts to implement reforms in the territory, Lutheran Bishop Ben Chun-wa Chang says "democracy is very important at this moment" in the region, and it would lead to a healthier society.

China, which controls Hong Kong, argues that its ruling party will vet

candidates for the 2017 election of the territory's chief executive. Opposing the directive, demonstrators led by students have been staging protests, taking to the streets in thousands and outside government headquarters, in what is also referred to as the "Umbrella Movement." Clashes have erupted in recent days as police began removing barricades and using pepper spray on protestors.

Chang, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong (ELCHK), said his church understands the protestors' discontent with the lack of universal suffrage in the 2017 elections. However, he noted, the ELCHK also understands the government's attitude.

"But, if the Chief Executive Election is in control of some people, then the society will go downward and back-



ELCHK Bishop Ben Chun-wa Chang. Photo: LWF/W. Chang

ward, in a sense, too,” Chang said. There is a wide gap between the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities and the people of Hong Kong, particularly the young people.

The narrowing of this gap is critical for the future of Hong Kong, the bishop emphasized.

While student protesters led by the Hong Kong Federation of Students and

Occupy Central, have made up the bulk of the pro-democracy demonstrations over the past weeks, Chang said the protestors also include a larger group of middle-aged people.

In 1997 the United Kingdom handed back Hong Kong to China under a 1984 agreement that was to give the territory a high degree of autonomy for the next 50 years. However, in 2004 China said it must approve any changes to Hong Kong’s election laws.

In June and July this year, pro-democracy activists held an unofficial referendum on political reform with both sides holding large rallies.

For the ELCHK bishop, the current protests do not amount to an anti-government movement that would spread to other parts of China as some commentators have wondered. “It’s just a local democracy movement,” he said.

Indonesia: Credit Union Makes Start-Ups a Success

Church Initiative Helps Small Businesses and Unites Farmers

PEMATANG SIANTAR, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI)

– It is not a good time for idle chit-chat with Elfrieda Turnip. The owner of a small motorcycle shop is busy. Three young men with motorcycles are standing in front of the entrance, there are repairs to be done, one is asking for a special spare part. Two mechanics kneel on the floor and turn screws with oily hands. The smell of motor oil and metal fills the hot summer afternoon. Business is going well.

Still, Ms Turnip takes the time to explain how she came to be a successful businesswoman. The motorcycle shop existed for years, like many others on the street. There are a lot of motorcycles in Indonesia, and repair shops like hers line the streets. What’s different though is that Ms Turnip has a storage room full of spare parts. A loan from the Credit Union Modifikasi (CUM), a bank belonging to the Simalungun Christian Protestant Church (GKPS) enabled her to buy them in advance instead of ordering when the need arose. “I have more customers now, because they know we are well

equipped”, she says. “We can afford to stock the expensive parts, so we can use them immediately. Customers do not have to wait until we have ordered them”.

Ms Turnip is a member of the local GKPS congregation, but that was not the only reason she was given a loan. Apparently her business plan

convinced the management, as Rev. Liharsan Sigiro, the CUM Manager, explains “We have loans for consumption – when people need to pay school fees or buy a motorcycle – and for starting a business. We do a survey on how the applicants will use the money before we give loans”.



Elfrieda Turnip and her daughter Joanna used the CUM loan to boost their motorcycle repair business. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

The CUM work in a typical Credit Union scheme. People usually make a deposit and become members of the CUM before they are able to apply for a credit themselves – up to 15 million Indonesian Rupiah, which is less than 150 Euro. They pay one percent interest. Still, it makes a difference. “It is not like a bank” Elfrieda says. “For a bank we need a lot of complicated documents. Here I can get the loan easily because I have the deposit. We are treated very well”.

Opening an account is not mandatory, but Ms Turnip is very satisfied with her investment. “We also get interest on the deposits” she says. “The money increases every month!”

Credit Unions seem to be a success story for the churches as well. GKPS according to Sigiros has four similar enterprises, “and ours is not the biggest of them”. Their target is to win 20 percent of the 220,000 GKPS members. Most of them are small or medium-scale farmers, and this is where the CUM sees its main value. It joins small farmers into a collective for selling and buying seeds. “Normally each farmer would sell his crop separately. They would negotiate the price each for himself”, Sigiros says. “By joining together, they can receive a better price for selling their good”.

The CUM collects rice and exports it to Australia. “It ensures stable prices

and consumers”, Sigiros says. “Also, the consumer side has better quality control”.

The CUM which started in November 2006 now has 9,730 members. The main building is a storage room similar to Elfrieda’s shop, where shelves with green and purple folders fill most of the office space. Most of the customers are members of the GKPS church, but not all. Manager Sigiros claims they also belong to other denominations and about one percent are Muslim. “We do not care about their faith as long as they follow the rules” he says.

Moving Forward with Hope in the DRC

Interview with Lutheran Church Secretary General Nkasa Talwa

LUBUMBASHI, Democratic Republic of Congo/

GENEVA (LWI)—The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is scheduled to hold municipal elections between October and November 2014, provincial polls in 2015 and presidential elections in 2016. Lutheran church leader Mr Gilbert Ilunga Nkasa Talwa says civil society including churches must do their utmost to encourage citizens to exercise their right to choose political leadership that can build sustainable democratic processes in a context largely marred by poor governance and conflict over the country’s vast mineral resources.

In this interview with *Lutheran World Information* (LWI), Talwa, Secretary General of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (EELCO), talks about the major issues facing DRC and EELCO, in a “young democracy still struggling with hope to build credible structures and institutions.”

What are the main issues that the Lutheran church is currently working on, and why are they important in the DRC context?

Firstly, let me say that the DRC and the Lutheran church are moving forward with hope despite the obvious internal conflict that has besieged the country

especially in the eastern part for nearly two decades. It is unfortunate that conflict, displacement and resettlement have become major preoccupations for millions of civilians in one of the world’s wealthiest countries. However, our current plight is also about our own failure to elect political leaders who can nurture democracy including accountable leadership at all levels. That is why churches including EELCO are currently working with civil society partners and seeking government’s support to conduct meaningful civic education. This will enable eligible citizens participate in choosing local, provincial and national leaders who can move this country forward.

One cannot ignore the complexity of the DRC conflict—outside powers’ using proxy “political” groups and our [Congolese] own failure to manage our resources. However, the vicious cycle of violence to resolve conflict can be ended. I am convinced that by actively engaging CENI (Independent National Electoral Commission), religious communities and civil society can reach communities with the message that “voting and independent choice are democratic rights.” This will take time in a country that only held its first multiparty elections in 2006.

Contentious as these might have been, and that questions about credibility were also raised about the 2011 election, the ballot is the only credible process and EELCO will continue to support that. We are a young democracy still struggling with hope to build credible structures and institutions.

For several years now, EELCO has had a leadership crisis that caused division in the church. Are the efforts to resolve the differences bearing fruit?

I started by saying we are moving forward with hope despite our struggles. The leadership crisis in EELCO since 2003 has caused a lot of pain in the parishes, between pastors and among congregation members, indeed 12 dark years. But thanks be to God, and the persistent accompaniment of our brothers and sisters in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA) and our partners in Germany, this conflict over church governance and properties is now over.

The two sides recently met again in Lubumbashi, this time under the mediation of a Lutheran Member of Parliament, and we have finally agreed to reconcile and reunify our church.

The mutual forgiveness and reconciliation took place and we signed an agreement, committing ourselves to start working together for a bright future of EELCO. Our respective groups were led by the Presiding Bishop René Mwamba Sumaili and Bishop Nkulu Ngitu Yenda from the other side.

We also met with the Provincial Minister of Home Affairs and the Mayor of Lubumbashi, both of who expressed deep appreciation for our reconciliation and encouraged all of us to move forward together. The immediate steps included the 5 September official re-opening of the Cathedral of Epiphany in Lubumbashi, which the government had closed for four months due to the church conflict. This was followed by a public celebration of reconciliation and reunification on 7 September, conducted jointly by Presiding Bishop Sumaili and Bishop Yenda. Similar services were conducted in each of EELCO's five dioceses.

How is EELCO approaching the Reformation anniversary in 2017?

For EELCO, the Reformation anniversary is an opportunity to re-evaluate the church and its future with respect to the Lutheran doctrine and DRC context. This includes analyzing how we can best use our human and material resources to strengthen our bonds of fellowship for a strong united Lutheran church. We plan to engage clergy, lay members and youth in the process.

EELCO collaborates with other Protestant churches under the ecumenical Church of Christ in Congo and with



EELCO Secretary General Mr Gilbert Ilunga Nkasa Talwa visited the LWF Communion Office in July 2014. Photo: LWF/S. Galloway

the Roman Catholic Church. We will reflect together on the church's role in DRC and globally, and explore areas to strengthen collaboration or initiate new joint activities. While Christianity is the main religion for 80 percent of DRC's population [over 65 million people], Muslims represent about 10 percent, and there are other religions too. Therefore we need to think together how religious organizations can help consolidate lasting peace in the country.

EELCO has been accompanying the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Burundi, why is this important?

The Congolese Lutheran church is a mission church of the ELCT, and a member of LUCCEA, both of which continue to provide spiritual and other important accompaniment. We accepted LUCCEA's request to support

the emerging church in neighboring Burundi in order to strengthen relations between the Lutheran churches in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda. Together, we can support peace building in Africa's Great Lakes region, which has experienced serious political leadership crises.

What does it mean for the Congolese church to be part of a worldwide Lutheran communion?

We are proud to be part of the LWF which EELCO joined in 1986. Being part of the global Lutheran family is an assurance of support when we feel isolated and weak. Although we are less than 200,000 Lutherans in DRC, we feel that we are an integral part of the 72 million Lutherans throughout the world. Our joys and struggles in DRC are all the more important, because we are part of this global Lutheran communion.

Church of Sweden's First Female Archbishop Antje Jackelén Reflects on Her First 100 Days in Office

Stresses LWF Engagement in Climate Change, Sustainability and Ongoing Reformation

STOCKHOLM, Sweden/GENEVA (LWI) – Antje Jackelén became the first female archbishop of the Church of Sweden at a ceremony in Uppsala in June 2014. German-born Jackelén, a bishop in Lund in southern

Sweden, was elected to the post last October after winning 55.9 percent of the votes cast in the first round to choose a successor to outgoing Archbishop Anders H. Wejryd. Jackelén is a member of the

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council, and serves on its Committee for Theology and Ecumenical Relations. The Church of Sweden is LWF's largest member church, with over 6.5 million members.

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information*, Jackelén speaks about her first 100 days in office and some of the opportunities and challenges facing the Church.

How would you reflect on and describe your first 100 days in office as the Church of Sweden's first female archbishop?

Admittedly, at least 35 of those were vacation, packing and relocation. Still, it has been an intense start. From many parts of society, I have experienced positive anticipation, which is also reflected in the large number of requests for interviews from the media. Ecumenically, I have been warmly welcomed as Church of Sweden's new archbishop and we have intensified the preparations for the Reformation jubilee. Internationally, the world has seen a terrifying development in Syria and Iraq and a humanitarian crisis that we must respond to.

Is it very important to you personally to see the Church of Sweden and the Lutheran World Federation taking the lead on issues such as climate change and sustainability? And how, in your opinion, should these issues be viewed from a biblical perspective?

It is indeed very important but from a theological rather than a personal perspective. No Lutheran can ignore the strong notions of justice and compassion in our tradition. This is precisely what the questions of sustainability and climate change are about: justice, both in relation to the poor and marginalized who too often are the first victims of climate changes, and in relation to future generations. In terms of a biblical perspective, the integrity of all living



Archbishop of Sweden Antje Jackelén. Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON

things and our responsibility to care for the poor and needy are strong both in the prophetic tradition and in Jesus' teaching in the gospels.

As a prolific social commentator who is also Sweden's first twitter bishop and the writer of a micro blog about your work and beliefs – how important do you believe social media is for the Church of Sweden as a tool of engagement within not only the church, but also with wider society?

It is one important tool among others. For any church, it is central to build relations and to preach the Gospel in words and deeds. Neither of these tasks can be performed without communication. In Sweden, statistic polls show that mass media and social media significantly shape people's image and knowledge of our Church.

Two common themes in your books and articles are the relationship between science and faith, and the role

of religion in society. How do you see the interaction between both?

We cannot credibly engage in the intellectual debate in society unless we reflect on our theology in the light of the best knowledge available today. This is not something new, in every age theologians have developed their thinking in critical conversation with society. However, this goes both ways. Theology also has important insights that contribute to the sciences.

You are a member of the LWF Council. What does it mean to you and why, in your opinion, is it important and relevant for the Church of Sweden to be a member of the LWF?

The church is a *glocal* community. We live and pray locally and yet we relate to the worldwide church globally. Through the LWF we realize that the movement starting in Wittenberg and spreading to the Scandinavian countries by no means is a European phenomenon. Rather, as the LWF reminds us, reformation is *global, ecumenical* and *ongoing*.

LWF Virtual Conference on Diakonia's Transformative Power

Over 200 Participants Join Online Discussion

GENEVA (LWI) – From a key note address that challenged Christians to bring liberation to the poor by questioning

power structures in society to perspectives on the role of the church in post-conflict situations, speakers at

the second virtual conference of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on 18 September discussed how diakonia

can help to transform both church and society.

Over 260 congregational workers, pastors and diaconal workers from 60 countries joined the conference organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), and focused on the theme “Called to be Transformed and Transforming.” It included workshops and presentations, and live video responses to questions from participants and video commentaries.

The church should be recognized as a communion where people not only care for themselves but for all, said keynote speaker Bishop Niels Arendt (Denmark) in his presentation elaborating Lutheran churches’ engagement in diaconal actions.

Speaking about how diakonia can transform society in a post-conflict situation, Liberian Bishop Dr Jensensen Seyenkulo explained how the church’s trauma healing and reconciliation program (THRP) is helping to rebuild trust in society, restore hope and val-

ues, encourage dialogue, and empower people to take initiatives and understand their own rights and the rights of others.

Through several Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) workshops involving community members, security agencies and other actors the THRP has helped people who were traumatized by war, both victims and perpetrators, to “have the power to make things happen instead of seeing themselves as victims, and therefore value themselves and take part in leadership,” Seyenkulo said.

Explaining why the HIV and AIDS epidemic is on the rise in North Sumatra, Indonesia, Erlina Pardede said stigma and discrimination was high and prevalent. “There are many houses of people who are infected, and they are often reprimanded by the local inhabitants and in some cases, stoned or almost burned,” she said. She, however, noted that the churches are able to do prevention work through a “train the trainer” program of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia.

Bolivian Lutheran church leader Rev. Emilio Aslla Flores speaking about the rights of indigenous people, said justice, health and education were the three human rights that are most violated in the country.

On climate justice and the interfaith “Fast for the Climate Campaign”, Martin Kopp (France) emphasized the need to “have a real shift in paradigm, a real shift in our way of lives so that we emit less carbon and lead a more eco-friendly way of life.” One of the calls of diakonia, he noted, “is to change the very essence of society itself when it leads to injustice and impacts on poor and vulnerable people.”

Defining the goal of advocacy in the church, Mr Godfrey Kalugendo (Tanzania) said churches must stand for the marginalized people. “Despite opportunities which are vividly opening up in Africa, with many economies booming, poverty is deepening.”

Rev. Imad M.D. Haddad, (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land) emphasized the role of education in advocacy in order to raise a generation that is able to “understand the other and accept the other and work together work for a better situation.”

“Advocacy is a learning and teaching process. A process that needs a long breath. So do not lose heart and keep advocating for a better life under the guidance of God’s will,” Haddad added.

Diakonia, noted DMD director Dr Carlos Bock, “belongs to the core essence of the church of Jesus Christ. It is about serving people in need, accompanying the sick, the poor, and the suffering on the margins of society.”

The DMD plans to hold follow-up virtual conferences in 2016, focus-



Second LWF virtual conference on diakonia. Photo: LWF/H. Martinussen

Reformation Day Online: Virtual Choir, Critical Theological Debates

Hundreds to Explore Christian Faith and Lutheran Identity in First Virtual Conference of Global Young Reformers

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) “Global Young Reformers

Network” is preparing for its inaugural virtual conference on Reformation Day

in 2014, with participants and organizers anticipating a joyous experience that

will also provide opportunity to discuss critical theological issues for young Lutheran Christians today.

“For me, the stress on young people’s ability to achieve change and make the world a better place is very important. All over the world, youth need to be empowered and encouraged to use their potential and to find hope,” says Karin Rubenson, a member of the Young Reformers’ steering committee. The online network currently has nearly 200 young members from all regions of the Lutheran communion.

Its first virtual conference on 31 October will explore questions of Christian faith and Lutheran identity under the theme, “Freed by God’s Love to Change the World.” One of the highlights of the online forum is a virtual choir that has already registered singers from 20 countries.

From Sweden, Rubenson looks forward to building relations with other young Reformers at the conference and learning from the different speakers. “As young Reformers, we can facilitate international and ecumenical work. We are a generation [that has] grown up in a global community and can reflect this in our churches,” she adds.

Darius Lee, steering committee member for Asia, says the theme relates to issues that he cares about at home in Singapore. “We live in increasingly complicated times with great challenges [and] we struggle with excessive materialism, which leads many people to focus on themselves rather than the needs of others.”

He expects the conference to bring participants together as “the one Body

of Christ” and provide “meaningful and constructive dialogue to build one another up, wherever we are, whoever we are.”

Its theme affirms that “we are freed from our own sinful desires, and are empowered to change our families, community and society through God’s Holy Spirit. No longer are we bound by the love of money, but are freed to show love to the poor and needy in our midst,” Lee notes.

“Drawing from the heroic example of the early Reformers, the young Reformers can be a living testimony to the world and to the community through their uncompromising witness to the gospel,” he adds.

LWF Youth Secretary Ms Caroline Richter anticipates a “joyful Lutheran and online Reformation Day, and a unique meeting space for young Lutherans from all over the world.” But, she adds, “We also expect concrete results: what are the burning issues

of the young Lutherans today? Which questions do we need to tackle in the next years?” The conference will give space to discuss these and vote on priorities for the network.

Speakers include LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, Vice-President for Asia Ms Eun-hae Kwon, and members of the LWF delegation to the UN climate change conferences, among others.

Started by the LWF Youth Desk, the Global Young Reformers Network aims to empower young people (18-30 years) from all LWF member churches to contribute to the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the LWF Twelfth Assembly in 2017.

Those interested in joining the conference are invited to become a member of the Young Reformers’ social network.



Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

IERP: Celebrating Diversity and Life in Communion

United Church Synod Launches Its “Ecological Mark”

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina/GENEVA, 21 October 2014 (LWI) – One of the significant actions from the 2014 synod of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate

(IERP) was the launching of the “Time to Put Hands at Work” foundation that focuses on promoting a prophetic, inclusive and diaconal church.

“The Foundation starts a journey that will help to deepen and enhance our commitment to diaconal work with the most oppressed sectors of our society



The IERP wiphala symbolizes life in communion amidst different cultures and peoples. Photo: IERP

such as indigenous populations and people living with HIV and AIDS,” said IERP President Rev. Carlos A. Duarte.

Over 160 delegates attended the 41st synod and general assembly of the IERP, 9-12 October, the first to be hosted by the Reformed section of the church. It met under the theme “Communion and Engagement in Diversity.”

Duarte said the foundation will help the IERP to focus strategically on strengthening women’s leadership within the church and in society, support congregations to build capacity for leadership, fundraising and strategic use of human resources.

Through its theme “Our Ecological Mark” the foundation highlights issues such as deforestation that affect the Mbya Guarani indigenous people, who inhabit the sub-tropical rainforests of Argentina’s northeastern province of Misiones, which is threatened by deforestation. The theme is inspired by the wisdom of Guarani communities and their conviction that *ivira omè ê tekove* (“from the tree flows life”). Various IERP congregations in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay engage the local people in planting native trees, with a goal to restore their forest-dependent livelihoods.

A Blessing in Different Traditions

Duarte spoke about the diversity of traditions in the IERP as “a blessing and a rich aspect” especially as the Lutheran communion prepares to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the Twelfth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2017.

“In the Reformation anniversary, the IERP celebrates unity in Christ. We are a church grounded in the Scriptures, in the faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, in ecumenical vocation, diaconal service, and the tradition of being a united church of Protestant traditions,” Duarte said.

Women’s Ordination

The synod also focused on progress made and challenges since the IERP approved women’s ordination nearly three decades ago. “Twenty-nine years ago, the IERP church board unanimously approved ordination to the pastoral ministry, open to all who felt called by God to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. Nine years later, the IERP ordained Rev. Silvia Ramirez,” Duarte said.

To date, the church has 20 ordained women pastors and nine deaconesses. Still, “the church is

conscious that discrimination exists in both, society and churches,” Duarte said. However, for the IERP, “it is clear that ordination depends on an individual’s vocation, theological training and gifts for ministry but not on one’s gender, sexuality, race, family name and so forth. Yet, all these characteristics of the rich human diversity must be reflected in our church,” he noted.

“We have equal rights and duties which ensures fairness. Women receive the same salary as men,” remarked Rev. Estela Andersen, a pastor in the city of Bahía Blanca. She noted that while there are many congregations who are ready to work with female pastors, “in some places there is still resistance. We [women] have to show that we can carry out our duties just as the men do.”

Cultural Plurality

Celebrating the church’s diversity and the call to serve all people with dignity, synod participants made an IERP *wiphala* (quilt) with fabrics on which they expressed their thoughts in an artistic way. An Andean symbol, the *wiphala* represents the union of different peoples and cultural plurality.

“This is a symbol that calls the church to live in communion, enriching each other while sharing our diverse ideas, customs, languages and origins,” noted IERP liturgist Rev. Cristian Stephan.

IERP General Secretary Rev. Sonia Skupch emphasized the relevance of communion and diversity in the IERP. “In a world where injustice and war prevails and where differences make daily life ‘crazy,’ we are committed to fellowship in diversity. The best witness the Church of Jesus Christ can give in this context is the richness to walk together, respecting and valuing peculiar characteristics of each part, different shapes and colors, and be a church that is ecumenically committed, both locally and globally.”

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A Tangible Expression of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

LWF General Secretary Junge Stresses Ecumenical Identity at ACT Alliance General Assembly

PUNTA CANA, Dominican Republic/GENEVA (LWI)—The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlined the ecumenical identity of the ACT Alliance as he spoke at the opening of the second General Assembly of the Alliance taking place in Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic.

“The added value and the potential of the ACT Alliance is its rootedness in the ecumenical movement, its being nurtured by the ecumenical heartbeat,” said Junge.

The General Secretary called on the Alliance to “grow further and let ACT therefore truly become a tangible expression of what we do have in mind when we continue engaging in the ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace.”

“My call to all of us: let’s make more out of this ecumenical rootedness, let’s grow further, and let ACT therefore truly become a tangible expression of what we do have in mind when we continue engaging in the ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace,” he said.

The ACT Assembly took place from 20 – 24 October with the theme “Join Hands: Full Life & Dignity for All.” On the agenda is the election of the ACT Governing Board as well as discussion and decision on the ACT Global Strategy 2015-2018.

The LWF is a founding member of the ACT Alliance, which is a coalition of 148 churches and affiliated organizations working together on humanitarian work, development and advocacy in over 140 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people. Members are associated with the World Council of Churches or the LWF.

Addressing the Assembly, Junge also emphasized the increasingly im-



Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, speaks to a plenary session of the second ACT Alliance assembly meeting in the Dominican Republic. Photo: Sean Hawkey

portant role the LWF together with its partners in the global ACT Alliance can play in protecting refugees and other vulnerable people through partnerships with organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other faith-based groups.

Faith and Protection

“A few weeks ago the LWF signed a new memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR in Geneva, a partnership agreement, which incorporated in strong ways the expectation of the UNHCR that LWF, together with other faith-based organizations, including also from other religions, would work together with UNHCR to better understand how faith and protection, how faith and resilience are connected together, and how faith actually can become a source of healing and transformation,” said Junge.

“UNHCR is calling upon us to bring to the table what uniquely and

distinctively drives us to be engaged in the protection of refugees, creation to be taken care of, and human beings enjoying their rights.”

The memorandum of understanding with UNHCR “tells us that in a time when there are as many refugees as after the Second World War—50 million people—secular organizations are looking at the gifts we may offer to work together, in accordance with international standards, so that everybody may enjoy the rights to which they are entitled as human beings,” Junge added.

“At a time in which faith and religion are manipulated and hijacked for purposes of death and violence, I pray that as an Alliance we will become known as those who helped to retain the focus of faith and religion, namely to be a source of healing and life, life in abundance.”

The Lutheran World Federation and Islamic Relief Worldwide Start on Joint Project

Jordanians and Syrian Refugees Work on “Peace-Building and Hygiene Promotion”

AL MAFRAQ, Jordan/ GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) have started their first joint project in Al Mafraq, Jordan. Working with Syrian refugees and the Jordanian host community, the project conducts workshops for 300 people to promote hygiene awareness and peace-building. The first workshop with 25 participants started at the beginning of this week.

Al Mafraq is the host community closest to the Za’atari refugee camp for Syrian refugees. While Za’atari is housing 85,000 people, about half a million Syrians are living in neighboring towns. The co-habitation results in conflicts over resources such as housing and access to education. “They host us very well” Muna, a mother of

2, says. “But we have two major issues: The children have conflicts with local children in school, and the rent increases every year”. Parents tell of long waiting lists for local school, of separate schooling for Jordanians and Syrians and of physical violence between students.

“There is a competition for resources” Dr Gideon Saad, program manager of the LWF country program in Jordan says. “By combining these two very different things – sanitation and hygiene with conflict resolution, we address the problem from two sides: we help people to improve living standards while resolving tensions”.

The project will be running for three months, training men and women of both nationalities in weekly courses

to promote awareness. At the end of the project duration, 25 selected participants will receive a “Train the Trainer” workshop to conduct similar trainings themselves.

“The aim of the project is to increase the level of understanding between Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities regarding their living situation, mentality, values and culture” Elhadi Abdalla Mohammed, Country Director of IRW Jordan, says. “We aim to equip community leaders and parents to mitigate and resolve conflicts in their communities”.

Participants respond well to the workshop. “In the beginning I did not speak to the Syrians who had moved in around my house,” a Jordanian woman who is participating in one of the workshops says. “But then our children began to play together and the Syrian mother began giving my children sandwiches and sending greetings to me. Gradually, the relationship grew through our children”.

Other participants of the workshop expressed how they had now known each other before attending the peace-building training offered by the LWF and IRW. The workshops are run in an inclusive fashion with participants actively and openly sharing their experiences and impressions of the situation in Al Mafraq to build bridges that begin on a personal level and spread to the communities.



Peace-building workshop in Al Mafraq. Photo: LWF/ H. Martinussen

LWF Assists Iraqi Refugees in Jordan

1,200 Displaced Christians Found Shelter in Amman Churches

AMMAN, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI) – Maryam clutches a green Bible. Tightly, as if the little green book would give her stability in a life where everything changed within a couple of months. It’s one of

the few things she has left. The others are her passport, declaring her a citizen of Iraq, and the clothes she was wearing when she left her hometown close to Mosul in a night last June.

Her youngest son was about to complete the school year, when the family heard of approaching ISIS troops. “We did not have time to pack, or to think. We just left” the 58-year-

old woman recalls. On foot and by hitchhiking the family reached Erbil in Northern Iraq.

Maryam and her family belong to the more than 1000 Iraqi refugees sheltered in Jordanian churches. Upon invitation of the Jordanian monarch, they were brought from Erbil (Kurdistan) to Amman, where they are now housed in church centers. The main assistance is provided by Caritas. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is assisting in three places by building the necessary infrastructure like partition walls, toilets and showers and improving electrical installations.

“We have expertise in the rehabilitation work which is needed here,” Josef Pfattner, Interim Leader of the LWF Country Program in Jordan says. “So we are complementing the support Caritas is giving to the refugees”.

“We are housing refugees in 11 places. In each parish a small hall has been transformed to care for our brothers and sisters from Iraq” Wael Suleiman, head of Caritas Jordan says. “The parish youth is doing voluntary work in assisting them. It is an experience of communion”.

The refugees in Amman are Christians from the Mosul area. They tell of

threats, sometimes by former neighbors and of bombings. “IS started attacking on 5 June” Lobna from Mosul recalls. “There was shelling all night, for four days. We were all sheltered in one room. We could only sleep a few hours. On the fifth day we were warned that they would attack homes. So we left”.

Several students were in the middle of completing final exams at university. They do not think they will be able to finish their studies in Iraq at all. For younger children, the school year has started. “Some parents have enrolled

their children in Jordanian schools” Pfattner, says. “The schools in Amman however are not equipped to handle the high influx of students from Iraq”.

The tall partition walls and infrastructure provided by LWF are an improvement to makeshift partitions of blankets and cardboard in many other places, but nobody can tell how long the families will have to live here. Many of them hope for a quick resettlement. They have their next appointment for deciding resettlement in April 2015.



A refugee shows a photo of his house. It has been confiscated and marked as IS property. Photo: LWF/M. Rénaux

Flooded Camps in Ethiopia’s Gambella Region Cause Water, Food Crisis for South Sudanese Refugees

Health Risks from Cholera, Malaria and Hepatitis E

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – Together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its ACT Alliance partners, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has begun providing water and conducting hygiene and sanitation promotion to thousands of South Sudanese in flooded camps in Leitchuor refugee camp in western Ethiopia’s Gambella region.

The rains and floods pose serious public health threats such as cholera, malaria and Hepatitis E because latrines and sanitation facilities have collapsed.

The floods are also affecting the border crossings at Matar and Pagak, the newly established camp of Nip Nip and Pamdong transit center, with many refugees making their way to dryer ground.

Close to 190,000 refugees have fled from South Sudan to Ethiopia, almost all of them to Gambella since conflict erupted last December, bringing the total number of South Sudanese refugees to over 250,000, according to UNHCR. Ethiopia has also overtaken Kenya to become the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa with close to 630,000

refugees mostly from Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

The camps in Gambella are already seriously overcrowded with thousands of malnourished people, mainly women and children, pouring in. The LWF continues to provide essential services including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Leitchuor, but the growing influx of refugees, flooding and slow financial support for the South Sudanese crisis pose significant challenges. A total of 1,490 South Sudanese refugees arrived in Ethiopia



LWF team in the Gambella, Ethiopia, refugee camp. Photo: LWF/DWS Ethiopia

during the month of September, with numbers continuing to increase daily.

“Our priority right now is to help the people in Leitchuor as much as we can and we are focusing on life-saving activities such as the distribution of much needed non-food items (NFIS) such as jerry cans, soap, hygiene kits

for women and babies, buckets and washbasins, accompanied by hygiene and sanitation campaigns,” said LWF Ethiopia Representative Sophie Gebr-eyes. “There is also a shortage of tents, blankets and cooking sets.”

In Leitchuor and Nip Nip, which together hold some 50,000 refugees, the

continuing heavy rains have destroyed traditional tukuls and temporary shelters and other structures and latrines, forcing people to move to higher ground, near the host community of Ning Nang. The situation is most serious at Nip Nip because the floodwaters have made the road impassable and water tankers are unable to reach the camp.

Heavy rains and muddy soil are also hindering water and sanitation teams trying to expand and maintain critical infrastructure, as well as disperse sanitation and hygiene awareness information.

The Ethiopian government and UNHCR have begun to look at possible new sites that are less susceptible to flooding where they can relocate the most vulnerable refugees. A proposal to move refugees from Leitchuor, Nip Nip and Matar to Okugo camp continues to be rejected by the refugees, with refugee leaders citing insecurity as their main concern.

LWF to Support Communities Impacted by Drought, Food Shortages in Central America

Drought Linked to El Niño Damages Bean and Corn Crops

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador/GENEVA (LWI)

– Low rainfall linked to the El Niño weather phenomenon has led to one of the worst droughts in decades in parts of Central America, causing widespread damage to bean and corn crops, the region’s staple foods, and leaving as many as 2.81 million people struggling to feed themselves, according to the United Nations World Food Program (WFP).

Together with its partners in the ACT Alliance, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is seeking to support people affected by the drought with food aid and water harvesting as well as by measures aimed at reenergizing agricultural production. The drought, which is also affecting South America, has been particularly hard on the so-called «dry corridor» of Central

America, which includes southern Guatemala, northern Honduras and western El Salvador.

In El Salvador, an estimated 100,000 families have been affected and 25,000 face critical conditions of food insecurity,



At the lagoon of Alegria, Usulután, El Salvador, water levels have dropped dramatically. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

according to the WFP. The El Salvadoran government has declared a national state of emergency following the loss of 90% of the annual bean crop and up to 30% of the annual corn harvest.

The Honduran government has also declared a state of emergency in the dry corridor. The communities most impacted by the lack of rainfall are located in 64 municipalities across

10 departments, affecting an estimated 76,712 families. 25,000 families in the Departments of La Paz, Francisco Morazán, El Paraíso, Choluteca, and Valle are expected to suffer the worst consequences of the drought.

Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, the Departments of Estelí, Madriz, Chinandega, and Nueva Segovia have been the ones hit hardest, where 75% of

the first corn crop has been lost. An estimated 100,000 families have been most affected in 65 municipalities.

El Niño, which can last more than a year, significantly raises surface temperatures in the central and eastern areas of the tropical Pacific Ocean, a phenomenon linked to major climate fluctuations around the world.

Statement from Palestinian Christian Leaders – LWF President Wrongfully Placed as Signatory

A statement on 10 October with the title: “Statement from Palestinian Christian Leaders: Europe Must Recognize the State of Palestine,” has been published and widely distributed. The statement identifies Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation as a signatory. But Bishop Younan has never signed the statement.

The Lutheran World Federation strongly objects to the action of wrongfully placing Bishop Younan as signatory.

As a spokesperson of the LWF, President Younan has repeatedly re-iterated the LWF’s clear stand on the issue of peace and justice in the Middle East:

In 2011, the LWF Council resolution on the Middle East called for a two-state solution and the end of the occupation and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.

The resolution called for peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. It also called for the immediate lifting of the economic blockade of the Gaza strip and for the urgent international action to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and for all parties to refrain from violent or provocative actions.

The LWF Council also called for Jerusalem to be a city shared between the two peoples and three religions.

In 2012, the LWF Council called upon its member churches to educate members of LWF churches based on the 2011 statement as a basis for awareness, advocacy and accompaniment; and to strengthen the various contacts with Israelis and Palestinians, encouraging dialogue and reconciliation.

In 2013, the LWF Council affirmed the long-standing commitment of Christians in the Middle East to be recognized as an integral part of their societies and supported the desire of Christians in the region who want to remain in their countries with their people.

The LWF is committed to a two-state solution in the Middle East. President Younan’s advocacy and work for peace, reconciliation and mutual recognition of the peoples and religions in the region has been widely acknowledged and confirmed by international partners over the past years and continues to be a source of inspiration to member churches in the LWF.

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