

Lutheran World Information

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Old city of Jerusalem. Photo: LWF/M. Brown

Bishop Younan, Religious Leaders Issue Statement Condemning Violence around Holy Site in Jerusalem

Calls for the Integrity and Status of Each Holy Place to be Respected



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – Bishop Dr Mounib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and other religious leaders in Jerusalem have condemned increased violence around the site of the Al Aqsa Mosque in the Old City. The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land also called for “the integrity and status of each holy place to be respected.”

“We lament that the site... has become a major focus of the conflict in the Holy Land,” the Council of Religious

Institutions of the Holy Land, which includes Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, said in statement issued on November 9.

“Each religious community should treat the Holy Sites of the other faiths in a manner that respects their independence. Any act of desecration, aggression or harm against Holy Sites must be halted and strongly condemned. We are deeply worried over the possibility that the political

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LWF Pays Tribute to Former DMD Associate Director Christa Held

Christa Held, a former associate director of the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) who died during the night of 21-22 October, was a pillar in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for more than 30 years.

Held started working with the LWF in January 1960 as a shorthand typist in the Department of World Service (DWS) and her interest and commitment to the work of the LWF and the life of member churches were instrumental in developing her career.

Ten years later, in January 1970, Held became Executive Secretary in Community Development Service (CDS) within the DWS. In July 1980 she became Director of CDS, and after the restructuring of the LWF at the beginning of 1990 was appointed Associated Director of the newly created DMD. Always passionate about the vision and mission of the LWF, her interest in people regardless of position or hierarchies earned her the respect and affection of both member churches and colleagues.

Held is also remembered at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and by the churches and the people in El Salvador, for being the initiator of the Chain of Hope Maria Cristina Gomez in 1989. In response to the brutal assassination of a Christian teacher and human rights activist, ten teams of women from different parts of the world visited the war-torn country with the goal of witnessing the reality and calling for actions of solidarity and peace with justice for the Salvadoran people.



Christa Held started working at the LWF in 1960. Photo: LWF Archives

In a condolence letter, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said that the LWF treasured “her influence and her working style, which always called for excellence and responsibility, and looked for creative responses to the needs of those who suffered.”

The LWF gives thanks for her dedicated life and prays that when she meets God face to face, she will hear the words, ‘*Well done, good and faithful servant!*’

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conflict will turn into a violent religious conflict. In that case, all of us are losers—except extremists on all sides.”

Currently, Jews are allowed to visit the Holy Site in East Jerusalem but are barred from praying there. However, recent visits to the compound by several ultra-conservative Israeli politicians and activists have sparked fears among Palestinians that Israel is attempting to change the status quo and permit Jews to pray at the site. Israel has in recent weeks temporarily closed and limited access to the Al Aqsa Mosque at the site.

“The important thing about this (statement) is that it comes out of the three religions. It gives the right understanding of how we can respect each other’s historical status quo and respect each other’s holy places, and be aware that if we are complicit or silent then this situation will slip out of our hands and

the extremists will take all of us hostage,” said Younan, who is also President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“Interreligious dialogue must combat extremism. The extremists are trying to transform the political conflict into a religious war,” he added.

The Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at its 2014 meeting endorsed the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites. This document, developed in consultation with religious leaders and experts from many of the world’s major faiths, makes ten provisions on the establishment of, preservation of, access to and prevention of conflict around religious sites worldwide.

The recommendations include the handling of sites sacred to different faiths as well as cases of expropriation and nationalization. The Council also encouraged member churches to support initiatives in their context and called upon the United Nations to adopt a UN resolution in the spirit of the Code.

“We need now at this stage to bring forth the Code of Conduct on Holy Sites and—as religious communities—work together to own the code so that the Holy Sites can be respected by all religions. And also work for mutual respect among religions,” Younan said.

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land consists of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Patriarchs and Bishops of Jerusalem and the Sharia Courts in Palestine.

Statement from the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land: www.crihl.org/content/statement-%D7%94%D7%A6%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%94-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86

LWF Public Statement on Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites: www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council2014-PublicStatement_HolySitesCoC.pdf

LWF Welcomes Appointment of Bishop Bedford-Strohm as EKD Council Chair

Thanks Work of Outgoing EKD Council Chair Nikolaus Schneider

LUBLJANA, Slovenia/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge has congratulated Lutheran Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm on his appointment as chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Bedford-Strohm is the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, an LWF member church.

The EKD combines 20 protestant churches in Germany among them LWF member churches. The EKD represents more than 23 million Protestant Christians in Germany.

“I congratulate you most warmly, personally and on behalf of LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A Younan and the LWF Meeting of Officers, which today sits in Ljubljana,” Junge said in a letter to Bedford-Strohm.

Junge said he was looking forward to “continued cooperation and collaboration between the LWF and the EKD in preparation for the 2017 Reformation

anniversary Through the participation in various local committees of the EKD” and welcomed Bedford-Strohm as the new head of the board of the Augusta



Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm. Photo: ELKB/vonwegener.de

Victoria foundation with which the LWF cooperates in its running of the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem.

Bedford-Strohm, a hobby violinist, studied theology in Erlangen, Heidelberg and Berkley in California.

Junge also thanked the work of the outgoing chair of the EKD Council Nikolaus Schneider, who was born in Duisburg in 1947. Schneider was president of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland until 2013 and has

belonged to the EKD Council since 2003. He has been the chair of the Council since 2010.

Jubilee of Lutheran – Catholic Dialogue Is a Time to Express Hope

PCPCU President Cardinal Koch Speaks at LWF European Church Leaders' Conference

ROME, ITALY/GENEVA (LWI) – Celebrating 50 years of the international dialogue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans in 2017 is a critical way of remembering conflicts that started in Europe after the Reformation, and of expressing hope for deeper unity between both dialogue partners.

Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) made these remarks when he addressed leaders of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe, at their regional meeting in Rome, 27-29 October.

Speaking at a panel discussion on the ecumenical dimension of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, Koch emphasized how important it is also for Catholics to reflect on what it means to commemorate the anniversary. "In the past, for example,

the date of 31 October—the day in 1517 when Luther made public the 95 theses against indulgences—was used and perceived as anti-Catholic. Today, however, historians tell us that in 1517 Luther could still be considered a Catholic. This is an important point for us," Koch said.

The PCPCU president then pointed out three main elements for an ecumenical commemoration of 2017 from the view point of the Catholic Church. First of all, that date will also mark the 50 years of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF. "The most significant expression of this dialogue was the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification [signed in 1999]. This is a document, which I hope, one day will be followed by a further joint statement on the church, Eucharist and ministry," he said.

Secondly, in order to qualify as ecumenical, the Reformation jubilee should be a time of critical remembrance and of reconciliation in view of the memory of conflicts born out of the Reformation, Koch noted. The 2017 commemoration will also be a sign of hope about deeper unity between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. "Hope to witness together to the society of our time, the presence of God in the world," he added.

The panel discussion, chaired by Württemberg Bishop Dr Frank O. July, LWF Vice-President for Central Western Europe, was also the occasion to present the preparatory journey of commemorating the Reformation and its ecumenical implications in three different countries of the continent—Sweden, where Lutherans are the majority, Poland, where Lutherans are a minority, and in Germany, where there is a substantial numerical balance between Catholics and Lutherans.

Wherever the debate, it is characterized by reception of the document *From Conflict to Communion*, prepared by the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Study Commission on Unity in view of 2017.

In Sweden, said Rev. Kristin Molander, head of the office for Ecumenical Affairs of the Church of Sweden, reflection is carried out by small ecumenical groups at the parish level with the express purpose of bringing the dialogue from the institutional and the academic dimension to the membership of the two churches.



Participants at the panel discussion on the 2017 Reformation anniversary. Photo: Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

Dr Iwona Baranevic from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland explained that in her country, the Lutheran church has taken the lead in promoting *From Conflict to Communion*, including its translation into Polish, and inviting representatives of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenical events. However, she noted, more encouragement is required for

official joint ecumenical initiatives to promote the document. She mentioned the November 2013 conference in Warsaw by Lutherans with Catholics participating and the latter's request for 150 copies of the document for distribution to local parishes as some of the good examples.

Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke, general secretary of the LWF German

National Committee, presented the website www.2017gemeinsam.de designed jointly by Catholics and Lutherans. The platform allows visitors to express comments, opinions and suggestions on *From Conflict to Communion* and the 2017 celebrations.

(Luca Baratto from the Italian Protestant Churches' press agency NEV, contributed this story.)

Impulses from New Media in European Lutheran Churches, But for Some, War Is a Reality

LWF Vice-Presidents Reflect on Hopes and Challenges in Church and Society

ROME, Italy/GENEVA (LWI) – “Listening, Serving, Empowering-Being Church in a Transforming Europe,” was the theme of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) European Regions' Conference, 27-29 October in Rome, Italy.

The three Vice-Presidents of the LWF European region shared their reflections on some of the challenges facing Christian and Lutheran witness in their respective contexts, and the new impulses that could help churches to build relationships that empower them to serve in their communities.



Participants in the LWF European Regions' Conference in Rome, Italy. Photo: Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

Fear of War Is Real

Central Eastern Europe: Hungarian Bishop Dr Tamas Fabiny from the Central Eastern Europe region, of which he is LWF Vice-President, highlighted the tragic results of the conflict situation in the Ukraine. The LWF Council adviser Ms Anastasiya Pidubskya had talked about the impact of the armed conflict on the population, saying it is resulting in internal emigration and traumatization even among the health and social service providers.

“The neighboring countries are afraid of the escalation of war. Indeed in the Baltic countries, the fear of war is real among the populations. People approach the church asking what to do, how to respond in case of war. And, unfortunately, the atmosphere of sus-

picion is rising between ethnic groups of these countries,” Fabiny noted.

Other concerns in the region include the challenge of the negative demographic tendencies and emigration. “Hundreds of thousands from our population go to the Western countries to work and to live there. And those leaving are basically the young educated intellectual layer of our societies like doctors or computer experts,” said Fabiny, who is bishop of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary.

There is also internal migration as younger people move to bigger cities to find work. “Thus villages, smaller towns, and therefore also our congregations in the countryside are emptying out,” he noted.

In Hungary, the new state requirement that ethics or optional religion is taught at elementary schools poses a special challenge for the Lutheran church as its pastors and religion teachers have to cover the whole country and provide numerous religion classes. “We have to find a way of coping with this challenge. While we would like to take the opportunity, we also would not like to weaken the congregational work,” he said.

Fabiny added that the participants from Central Eastern Europe region had each named a concrete issue the others should pray for. “We hope that a network of prayer will strengthen the spiritual strength of the Lutherans in the region, and that other churches in the continent will show more sensitivity

toward our special situation. This is especially needed for the region due to the crisis in Ukraine.”

A World with Broken Traditions

Central Western Europe: Bishop Dr Frank O. July, LWF Vice-President for Central Western Europe said he appreciated the increasing using of new media, and wondered how these could be used to help enhance relationships not only between Christians but also between and among people of different faiths.

“Some of the challenges facing Christian and Lutheran witness today is that we live in a world with broken traditions. This also means that we are no longer able to transfer and submit faith contents automatically,” said July, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Germany.

“From our conversations, I learned that young people are able to use the

new media and social networks much better than me. And I think it is necessary and important for the church to go deep inside in that new space of new media,” July noted.

Still, new media “can never replace face to face communication, which becomes ever more important. We have to be near the people. And we have to be oriented at what we are doing and actively promoting. So I think it is very important to support our Italian sisters and brothers in the issue of migration and refugees arriving at the coast of Italy,” he added.

Solidarity with the Poorest Neighbor

Nordic Countries: Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien, LWF Vice-President for the Nordic region said the “very serious challenges” that Christians and churches face today include the huge numbers of refugees particularly in southern Europe and climate change.

Both issues “increasingly threaten our future and also call for “solidarity with the poorest neighbor in the world.”

Byfuglien, from the Church of Norway, said the conversations in the group sessions explored possibilities for the churches “to get better” at using social media and improve their connections to people in the local contexts. “We need to be an ever more listening and guesting community, both locally and on a broader level. We need to communicate better and be more relevant in the society and with the different groups of people to whom we relate,” she stressed.

Byfuglien described as “very promising” the enthusiasm of the young people linked together in the LWF Global Young Reformers Network. “This is good and necessary for the communion today and in the future,” she added.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy hosted this year’s meeting, attended by 55 participants from 30 LWF member churches.

European Lutherans Express Solidarity with Italian Church for ‘Welcoming the Stranger’

Message from LWF Regional Church Conference

ROME, Italy/GENEVA (LWI) – Leaders of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe have expressed their solidarity with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy (ELCI) for its committed work among migrants and refugees and its ecumenical engagement in the country.

In a message from the annual LWF European Regions’ Conference, hosted by ELCI, 27–29 October, the 55 participants from 30 member churches in 21 countries expressed deep appreciation for ELCI’s witness, which “reminds us of the need to bridge the gap between ecumenical dialogue and practical diaconal work.”

The LWF church leaders affirmed the Italian Lutheran church partnerships with other Protestant churches in diaconal projects that offer possibilities

of integration and work for people mainly fleeing crisis regions in the Near East and Africa. “It is encouraging to look at the commitment in advocacy and dia-

conal action with immigrants and refugees and the strong ecumenical efforts to accompany the vulnerable neighbor.”



ELCI Dean Heiner A. Bludau speaks at the LWF European regions’ conference. Photo: Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

They said ELCI's intervention supports the "Welcoming the Stranger" statement by faith-based organizations and the United Nations refugee agency, which the LWF endorsed in 2013. "There must be established a culture of welcome to these affected people. We want to help them regardless their religion, their confession, their gender, their origin," they emphasized.

The LWF Council members, representatives of LWF National Committees and ecumenical officers also challenged the European Union to give new attention to the Dublin III protocol, in order to offer the possibility for a more balanced and just division of responsibility for refugees and migrants between the

European countries. "In these days, when more and more refugees come to our continent, we want to be open for them, we want to welcome them and we want to support them in any way," the Lutheran church leaders said.

"Listening, Serving, Empowering – Being Church in a Transforming Europe" was the theme of this year's meeting, bringing together the Central Eastern, Central Western, and Nordic regions of LWF Europe. In keynote presentations and group discussions, participants reflected together on new models of being church in the 21st century.

ELCI Dean Heiner A. Bludau, noted the main concern for the Lutheran and other Protestant churches in a major-

ity-Catholic Italy today is to "raise our voice with genuine Protestant themes." He said this includes important questions of State-Church relations which cover issues such as tax contribution to the church.

In view of the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017, Bludau said the intention is to celebrate together in an ecumenical context. "It is important for us to send the message in the community that it is not only a historical event but an opportunity to find out together as Protestants and Catholics what Reformation means for us today, and what new impulses churches can offer to the communities in which we serve."

Universal Children's Day

LWF Provides Education Support and Protection to Children in South Sudan

AJOUNG THOK, South Sudan/GENEVA (LWI) – Fourteen-year-old Nafisa Hamad Kuku from South Kordofan, Sudan, is in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)-coordinated accelerated learning program (ALP) at the Ajuoug Thok refugee camp in South Sudan. She wants to go to university to study medicine after she finishes the course.

"I would like to be a surgeon to help people back home or anywhere in the world," she said. "In doing so, I'll share the knowledge I will have acquired at school."

Through the European Union (EU) Children of Peace project, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)'s is helping to educate 3,615 children in South Sudanese refugee camps whose schooling has been impacted by the conflict in Sudan.

The LWF-coordinated accelerated learning program (ALP) is being offered to children in the Yusuf Batil and Kaya refugee camps (Maban county) in Upper Nile State and Ajuoug Thok camp in Unity State. The goal is to give children and young people affected by conflict access to schools where they can learn in a safe environment and also receive psychological support to help them heal from the trauma of war.



A young boy doing his homework in Yida refugee camp, South Sudan. Photo: LWF/ M. Hyden

"For many children, their normal participation in the education system has been interrupted due to conflict and war in Sudan, which has resulted in over-age learners enrolling in primary education," said Anek Cavine, Department Program Coordinator for LWF South Sudan.

"For instance 36% of the children enrolled in primary school were over-age learners, which means we see many 17-year-old students attending the same classes as seven-year-olds. "

Most children enrolled in the ALP program currently operating in 12 primary schools in the camps are able to complete two grades in one year.

"My most memorable experience in working with these children is their willingness to enrol in schools and learn despite the age differences among them. We even had some child mothers who missed out on their education. They were so eager to learn that they would bring their babies along at first, before we could identify caregivers

to support them,” Cavine said. “This is really a big motivation to continue supporting these children to go further with their education.”

Additional support from the LWF includes teaching and training material, help desks and child rights clubs as well as training opportunities for teachers to be able to respond more effectively to child protection incidences within the camps. The ALP students also gain increased educational awareness about the dangers of armed conflict

and issues surrounding violence and protection, and have greater access to child/youth protection mechanisms.

“Not only can education enhance future employment prospects, it can also provide valuable psychosocial support and life skills, which includes developing children’s self-esteem,” Cavine said.

The Children of Peace project is funded by ECHO—the EU humanitarian office—and was established after the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Cavine will be taking part in the

International Children’s Day Google Hangout at 2.00pm on 20 November, aimed at highlighting the work of the nine EU Children of Peace projects. The LWF has been providing access to education as part of its emergency assistance to South Sudanese refugees in both states and other regions of South Sudan since 2012.

ECHO Children of Peace:
<http://ec.europa.eu/echo/en/what/humanitarian-aid/children-of-peace>

LWF Joins International ‘No Excuse for Violence Against Women Campaign’

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

GENEVA (LWI)—The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) have joined the international ‘No Excuses for Violence Against Women’ campaign of the World YWCA, which runs from 25 November through to Human Rights Day on 10 December.

“Many times it seems violence against women is an issue that happens elsewhere, that affects others, not us; a reality that is not to be raised by the church because it is believed to be a problem for a tiny minority of poor and uneducated people,” said Maria Cristina Rendón, Program Assistant at the LWF

Women in Church and Society (WICAS). “While these excuses go on, thousands of women and girls get abused, harassed, raped or beaten to death.”

To mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence and its commitment to gender justice, the LWF’s WICAS program features a series of short videos by people of faith affirming why there is no excuse for violence against women and no excuse for ignoring it. These voices also speak about healing and restored dignity that is possible when instead of silence there are words of comfort and support for those who have been silenced by shame.

In one video, LWF President Bishop Munib A. Younan emphasizes that the understanding that women and men have been created equally in the image of God needs to be further developed into structures and processes that ensure that there is no room for violence against women within the church and in society.

Yunan also highlights that religious discourses and cultural systems can feed and maintain unequal relations among women and men whereas when convinced of their prophetic perspective, churches can play a leading role in ensuring gender justice.

Being part of this campaign is the continuation of a journey that has led the LWF to take concrete steps, such as the publication in 2002 of *Churches Say No to Violence Against Women*, and the *LWF Gender Justice Policy*. The publication affirms that “the need to bring men and women together to work toward building healed and healing ‘shalom’ communities makes the issue of violence against women not only a life issue but one of faith.”

The World YWCA-led campaign against gender-based violence calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and invites the international community to take action against it.



“NoExcuses” logo in the chapel of the Ecumenical Center, Geneva. Photo: LWF/S.Gallay

Lutheran Tradition Important for Slovenia's Religious and Cultural Diversity

LWF Meeting of Officers Greet Political and Faith Leaders

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Meeting of Officers has expressed its appreciation to the Slovenian government for safeguarding religious and cultural diversity in a nation that traces its establishment to the Reformation movement.

During meetings with the Slovenian President Borut Pahor and with Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Jankovič, members of the LWF governing body led by the President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan heard how the government supports the different religious bodies in the country including the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia. The LWF member church hosted the 12-14 November meeting of LWF Officers, who in addition to talks with government officials met with representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox churches and with Muslim leaders.

Younan, who is also bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), underlined LWF's appreciation for the observance of 31 October—Reformation Day—as a national holiday in the majority Roman Catholic Slovenia.

“Today in our world, we are becoming more and more aware that none of us are independent, we are all interdependent. It is our role to speak more about how the values of faith can be implemented in a world that is secularized and broken. These values of peace, reconciliation and diversity are values we as religious leaders must have,” Younan said, reflecting on the conversations with Slovenian secular leaders.

At the meeting with President Pahor, the head of state offered to set up a working group to enable both the government and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia to explore ways of marking the 2017 Reformation anniversary.



Bishops Ernisa and Filo from Slovenia presented with gift from Bishop Younan (center) at reception in Lutheran Church Ljubljana. Photo: LWF/H. Martinussen

Younan emphasized LWF's commitment to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, highlighting the 50 years of dialogue with Catholics and over 30 years with the Orthodox as important milestones. He referenced the recent signing of an agreement between the LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) to cooperate in humanitarian work as the first official cooperation between an international Christian and a global Islamic humanitarian organization.

In view of LWF's humanitarian work, the General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlined Slovenia's obligation to live up to its duty to protect refugees.

During a reception hosted by the LWF member church in the Lutheran church in Ljubljana, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference Bishop Andrej Glavan emphasized the need to continue working together as ecumenical partners.

The Orthodox Church representative Paroh Milan said, “I feel that we belong to one family because all of us come from one God and that is why I am sure that we not only can but also have to work together to build a society which offers the opportunity to believe together and to be a witness.”

“When I speak about the church in Slovenia I do not speak about a small church but a church in a minority situation. Although we have a rich history with Primož Truber, (who translated the Bible) that is not enough for the church,” noted Presiding Bishop Geza Filo. “We want to be the church today within the context of a Roman Catholic majority. We want to continue contributing with our Protestant principles. We need to be able to bring a living word into the church and into society.”

In Slovenia, the reformer Primož Truber is celebrated as the author of the first Slovene language printed book, and the founder of the Protestant Church of the Slovene Lands. Dr Marko Kersevan, head of the Truber Institute noted that even though only one percent of Slovenians belong to the Lutheran church, the Lutheran tradition has had an impact in society.

“The language became a unifying force in order to constitute the Slovenian nation. The written language of Slovenia came into being through Reformation and with the spirit of Reformation through the Reformation movement,” Kersevan added.

LWF President Bishop Younan Awarded Honorary Doctorate for Peace Work

Calls for Bridges of Hope and Reconciliation in Middle East

MÜNSTER, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)— Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) has been awarded an honorary doctorate degree by the University of Münster in recognition of his dedication to building peace and justice in the region through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Younan, who is also President of the Lutheran World Federation, “acts as an evangelical theologian and as a reconciling, bridge-builder between both religions and ethnic groups in a very conflict-laden area,” the university’s Protestant Theological Faculty said in a statement. “He lives and practices his evangelical perspectives in a very meaningful way, through forgiveness and reconciliation.”

“In these past weeks, it has been brought to our attention again and again that we are faced with the fact that certain forces want to transform the political conflict within Israel and Palestine into a religious conflict,” Younan said in a speech accepting the award. “In the name of religion, these forces are working to change the status quo of many different arrangements and relationships in this city of two peoples—Palestinians and Israelis—and three faiths—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.”

Earlier this month, Younan and other Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders from the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemned



Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

increased violence around the Al Aqsa Mosque site in the Old City and called for “the integrity and status of each holy place to be respected.” Yesterday five Israelis were killed and eight more wounded in an attack by two Palestinian men on Jewish worshippers praying at a Jerusalem synagogue.

“We have a choice. We can let those who would carve the world into false dichotomies—of us and them, good and evil-doers, tax collectors and the righteous—define our world and how we engage it,” Younan said. “Or we can resist xenophobia and exclusion, allowing our minds to be transformed by God’s embrace. Instead of instilling a fear of the other that promotes anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or Christianophobia, we

can instead see others as *imago Dei*—persons created in the image of God.”

“For the vision of reconciliation, based on justice to be achieved throughout the Middle East, it must first be achieved among Israelis and Palestinians. To achieve this goal, we must hold both religious and political leaders to account, drawing them away from the temptations of religiously-sanctioned political extremism toward the promised fruits of coexistence and hope,” Younan said

What happened to the wall in Berlin is “a sign of hope for us in the Holy Land. It is my hope that the concrete and steel used to build walls today will soon be used by Palestinian and Israeli children to build bridges of understanding, justice, and reconciliation,” he added.

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 the-

ology 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.

Education and Peace Building

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

Peru: Ecumenical Impulse to Dialogue in a Fragmented Society

From Conflict to Communion Can Assist Healing Process

LIMA, Peru/GENEVA (LWI)— Peruvian Lutheran church leaders say reflecting together on the joint Catholic-Lutheran publication *From Conflict to Communion* as a basis for joint commemorations of the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 could help heal the social divide in Peru.

Representatives of the Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church (ILEP) made these observations on 31 October during a Reformation Day ecumenical dialogue on the theme “From Conflict to Communion,” organized by the ILEP Pastoral Conference in the Peruvian

capital. ILEP pastors Rev. Adita Torres and Rev. Pedro Bullon said the 2013 publication by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity could help bridge their nation’s social divide.

“It can serve as an element for joint witness of our faith in order to strength-

en democratic dialogue in the face of a social situation that is very fragmented,” the ILEP representatives noted. “The document can help to continue building the social web that was devastated by the effects of the political violence that took place between 1980 and 2000 whose wounds are very difficult to heal.”

The 2014 Lutheran – Catholic dialogue in Peru coincided with the 15th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), signed by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, and the first-time reception of the publication *From Conflict to Communion*, which the LWF endorsed by in 2013.

“This opportunity helps both bodies to engage in difficult ecclesial topics and mutually examine the historical reality of the Reformation, its outcomes, as well as questions and answers so that we could discover together ways of working together for a future of hope,” the Pastoral Conference noted.

The Peruvian church, which has 1,300 members and has been part of the LWF since 2005, is looking forward to the 2017 commemoration of the beginning of the Reformation,



Reformation Day in Peru: 15th JDDJ anniversary and dialogue on “From Conflict to Communion.” Photo: ILEP

because it offers opportunities to deepen dialogue with Catholics, the Lutheran church leaders noted.

Sister Elena Salas, a Roman Catholic nun who helped plan the ILEP event and participated in it, said she hopes that more Catholics in Peru will come to study *From Conflict to Communion*. “The majority of Catholics do not know it, they do not know of this long effort and great outcome.”

In his message to the meeting, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin

Junge emphasized the Lutheran communion’s approach to the 2017 Reformation anniversary with a sense of ecumenical responsibility.

“We want to be intentional in bringing the fruits of ecumenical dialogue to the table ... looking together at the advances, at what still remain as differences on which we keep talking, but more importantly how we keep moving from a conflict to a situation of being in communion,” he added.

General Secretary Urges Mexican Church to Defend the Value of Each Human Being

Solidarity and Prayers from the Communion

GENEVA (LWI) – In an open letter addressed to Mexican member churches and their congregations, the general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Martin Junge, expressed solidarity and offered prayers to the Church and the people of Mexico in light of the recent disappearance and deaths of 43 Mexican college students.

“The details concerning the students’ disappearance and fate are beyond the imaginable” stated Rev. Junge in his letter to the member churches. “The alleged collusion among government forces and or-

ganised crime render these barbaric acts unacceptable under any circumstance.”

Since the students’ disappearance, thousands of citizens around the country have taken to the streets in protest, complaining about the government’s handling of the case.

“This whole tragic situation reveals yet another burden that our Latin American societies have been carrying for generations: it is the impunity,” said Rev. Junge. “It engenders violence, it corrodes the parameters that define what is just, and generates negative conditions leading to a situation where

brutality and cynicism ends up imposing itself as a way of social interaction. It is this kind of impunity that ultimately speaks to an unimaginable disregard for human life.”

Communicating on the behalf of the global Lutheran communion, Rev. Junge expressed his profound sorrow to Rev. Daniel Trejo Coria, president of the Mexican Lutheran Church in Guadalajara.

“We imagine how this news shocks the Mexican population and how this situation unsettles those who gather to listen to the Word of God and its promise of life in abundance for all.”

Reiterating the need for prayer, Rev. Junge called upon the ILM to seize the opportunity that this difficult situation represents to prophetically announce with words and deeds the intrinsic value of each single human life be-

cause of being created at the image of God. "Remote as the concepts of justice and peace may appear in view of the horrendous news that we are receiving today about the dead of the 43 students and the circumstances

under which they perished, for us who know about the presence of the Triune God in the midst of this violent and complex world there is always certainty about unexpected Advents even in our crude realities".

LWF Welcomes U.S. and China Agreement on Climate Change, Hopes for Global Accord in 2015

Calls for Concrete Actions and Decisions to be taken at COP 21

BEIJING, China/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation General Secretary welcomes a historic accord between the United States and China to cut greenhouse gas emissions that could pave the way towards a new global agreement at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015.

"The commitments expressed in the ASEAN meeting are a step in the right direction. They give hope that concrete actions and decisions could be taken at COP 21 in Paris," said Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev Martin Junge.

"In line with what the LWF Council has expressed in 2014, it is only with such expressed commitments that climate change can be effectively addressed. The LWF continues its commitment to work towards the goal of addressing climate change."

The landmark agreement, announced by U.S. President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping on November 11, includes new targets for carbon emission reductions by the U.S. and a first-ever commitment by China to stop its emissions from growing by 2030, if not sooner. To achieve this goal, China, the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, pledged that alternative energy sources such as windmills and solar power would account for 20 percent of its total energy production by 2030.

The U.S. agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. That is double the pace of reduction it targeted from 2005 to 2020. China and the U.S. are the world's top two carbon polluters.

The General Secretary expressed hopes that the UN Climate Change

Conference in Lima (COP 20) in December will lay the foundations for a binding international agreement ahead of the conference in Paris next year.

At the 2014 Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the LWF issued a statement underlining its commitment to a global agreement on climate change. The LWF "urges heads of state and key decision makers to make it a personal priority to address the human contribution to climate change, and make firm commitments for deeper cuts in carbon pollution."

The LWF statement also asks political leaders to "ensure that the response includes provisions to assist the most vulnerable communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change already being experienced, and to account for the loss and damage being caused."

"If we act now it will still be possible to keep global warming below the internationally agreed danger-threshold of 2 degrees Celsius. To achieve this, carbon pollution must be reduced quickly; and climate change is a matter of social and economic justice, as it most affects the poorest people and displaces the most vulnerable," the LWF Council stated.



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

LWF Statement on Climate Justice:
www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council2014-PublicStatement_ClimateJustice.pdf
LWF Fast for the Climate campaign: www.lutheranworld.org/fastfortheclimate

'We want to be the life of the church'

Young Reformers Urge Ongoing Reformation during First Virtual Conference

GENEVA (LWI) – Young Lutherans from around the world taking part in the first virtual conference of The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Global Young Reformer's Network want to play a central role in churches working to reform themselves and society.

Participating in the conference held on Reformation Day under the theme, "Freed by God's Love to Change the World," young reformers from Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sweden and the United States listened to speeches, took part in online conversations, and posed questions on Christianity and Lutheran identity.

They made it clear they want to be involved in their churches, and they want their churches involved in the world.

"We, as young Lutherans in Colombia, are not only symbolic of youth, we want to be the life of the church, be part of the decision making. The church should always be reforming,

that means seeking and giving full participation to all members," said Mauricio from Colombia.

"I understand that to be a Lutheran, our identities lie in our actions. Luther was a reformer. He did something, he reformed the Church," added Daniel from Indonesia. "We are called as reformers to our local contexts. To be Lutheran means to be a reformer, to inspire people to do good."

The conference began with a Reformation worship service highlighted by a virtual choir including dozens of singers from around the world who had pre-recorded their voice. Opening theme speakers included Darius Lee, a lawyer and member of the Lutheran Church in Singapore and Rev. Helvi Muremi, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia.

"I feel blessed to be one of the young leaders representing and encouraging young Lutherans," said Muremi. "I want to help you connect, know your identity, be firm in your beliefs and teachings, and be proud of who you are."

Involved, Flexible and Global

Speakers during the three-hour interactive conference included LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Ms Eun-hae Kwon, Vice-President for the Asia region. Panel discussions focused on climate justice, identity and diversity in the Lutheran communion, and principles of youth participation.

"The Global Young Reformers Network is a space that we are opening up within the LWF to make our voices heard so we can continue reforming our church and our lives," commented Alejandra from Nicaragua.

The young reformers have a clear vision of what the church should be: involved, flexible and global.

"As a young generation, we need the church to be missional, movable and everywhere," said Moti from Ethiopia. "A church needs to feel like home."

Lutheran churches also need to be aware of their contexts and build bridges with the wider religious community, added Joefrick from Malaysia: "In a Muslim country ... where there are many controversial issues that have been raised recently, we still need to know our role as a Christian minority."

Pimpinan from Indonesia wants a church without walls. "Evangelism is not about bringing the gospel to people but rather about discovering, together with others, the presence of God in the world," he concluded.

Follow the ongoing conversation on young reformers' ideas on <http://youngreformers.wpengine.com/forum-of-ideas/>



The LWF Young Reformers Steering Group members participated in the 2014 meeting of the ecumenical community of Taizé in France. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

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www.lutheranworld.org

Concern for Iraqi Refugees as Cold Season Approaches

LWF Assists With Shelter, WASH and Winter Clothing

DOHUK, Iraq/ GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) emergency team in Iraq is concerned about how to sufficiently prepare the refugees for the cold season. “We need extra gas stoves and blankets” team leader Dr. Gedeon Saad says.

More than 1.5 million people according to the UN have been internally displaced in Iraq by the advancing military group “Islamic State” (IS). Most of them fled to Northern Iraq into territory controlled by the Kurdish military. LWF through Christian Aid in Northern Iraq (CAPNI) is assisting in the area around Dohuk with non-food items such as shelter, cooking kits, stoves, blankets, carpets and water and sanitation.

“We aim to provide more than 200 families with shelter and a minimum of 3,400 families with winter clothing” Dr. Saad says. About 600,000 internally displaced people (IDP) have been registered in the Dohuk area. Saad estimates that these are only 60 percent of the actual number, as registration is also difficult. Many people are living in old or unfinished buildings without water, sanitation or access to aid and medical care. These “informal settlements” have to be found first.

Others could not bring personal papers. Many of the refugees are



LWF assisting in the distribution of winter clothes sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria in Khanki camp, Northern Iraq. Photo: LWF Iraq

registered with the ration card they used to buy food with during the UN sanctions against Iraq. “These cards show all the information, number of family members, children, people with special needs, elderly – we need to know that to properly care for them”, Dr. Saad adds.

As the cold season approaches, winter clothing has become a priority. LWF is assisting in assessing the needs of the families and the distribution of winter kits. “They were not allowed to even take a suitcase”, LWF team leader

Saad says. “All their money was taken from them. Many arrive with only the clothes they are wearing”.

Since the beginning of the new school year, the IDPs also had to leave most of the schools where they had found shelter during the summer. “They live in tents now”, Saad says. He is especially worried about people in so-called informal settlements. “They live without the most basic sanitation, and do not know where to receive help” he says.

LWF Haiti Program Continues to Promote Sustainable Development, Environmental Protection

Income Generating Schemes, Support to Most Vulnerable Groups

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti/GENEVA (LWI) – Since the devastating earthquake of January 2010 that killed more than 200 000 people in Haiti, damaged or destroyed more than 300,000 buildings and left 1.5 million people displaced from their homes, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) program in the

Caribbean country continues to work with partners on projects aimed at sustainable development, reducing the risks of natural disasters and rebuilding the environment.

“LWF Haiti is focusing on the need for sustainable change on behalf of the most vulnerable groups of Haiti’s

population. As a result, we are working with projects that are enabling people to get sustainable incomes,” LWF Country Representative Per-olof Lundqvist said. “The Human Rights-Based Approach developed by LWF Haiti also brings support to local communities in their advocacy

campaigns for better inclusion, participation of vulnerable populations in decision-making processes, promotion of gender equality and equity, and psychosocial well-being.”

LWF projects include work on food protection and reforestation as well as the MUSO, a micro bank system that allows poor people to get access to loans and savings so that they can start small businesses and income-generating activities in order to strengthen their resilience to natural disasters and other emergencies.

“We aren’t done yet, solidarity with the people of Haiti is still required,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge after a recent visit to the poorest country in the western hemisphere. “Haitian people are remarkably resilient. They have been hit by many human-made and natural disasters throughout their history, yet here they are claiming life in dignity and inviting LWF’s support!”

“I visited a milk-processing facility, which was built with the support of the LWF. For the LWF, it is an already closed project. But not for the people. I saw with delight how local organizations are running the factory. The milk production goes to local schools. The cheese they produce is sold to a supermarket in the capital city,” Junge said. “In view of the global discussion whether development aid makes sense at all, I was affirmed once more in my conviction: yes it does!”

Other LWF programs include income-generating activities with local partners in Foret des Pins, Macaya, and Palmes, and the Model Village



Rev. Martin Junge visiting one of LWF/DWS Haiti projects. Photo: LWF/DWS Haiti

in Gressier rehabilitation project, built for 180 destitute families after the earthquake.

“The community is growing in independence and will soon assume the entire responsibility for its own development and self-governance,” Lundqvist said of the Model Village.

“Local communities have also decided to protect one of the few remaining forests in Haiti. An area of more than 10,000 acres can’t be protected but by a community mobilized and resolved to fight for each single tree. This is the purpose of the network of organizations in Foret des Pins: to prevent further deforestation for the sake of their own communities and their future,” Junge added.

However, major challenges still remain for Haiti on its path towards recovery almost five years after the earthquake.

“The political instability in the country; a very vulnerable and polluted

environment; the weak infrastructure and the increasing gulf between the wealthiest and the poorest in the country. These are factors that hamper the development and that we have to face and confront in order to be reliable as an organization working for the rights of the most vulnerable part of the population,” Lundqvist said.

“At a time when interest in this Caribbean country is decreasing among the main donors, the necessity of continuous support is greater than ever. The resilience of the Haitian people is enormous, but they need the necessary accompaniment in order to build a sustainable future.”

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