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STATEMENT BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Rev. Dr Martin Junge

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes and supports for the beginning of peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN)

Geneva/Bogotá, 4 April 2016 – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes and supports the announcement today that the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are to start meeting for Peace Talks. Being aware of the grave humanitarian consequences and the tremendous impact of the armed conflict on the civilian population, we appreciate the great relevance of the beginning of a dialogue between the Colombian government and the ELN, with a view to ending the conflict and thus also the suffering of thousands of people throughout Colombia.

The Lutheran World Federation wishes to underline the following.

- We believe that the parties should take advantage of this favorable opportunity to build a new society in which conflicts will be solved by dialogue and not by arms and in which democratic participation by all sectors of society is encouraged.
- We urge the parties to adopt measures to scale down the conflict and demilitarize the regions.
- We consider that the launching of a process of dialogue and negotiation with the ELN constitutes an important opportunity for discussing outstanding issues in the national debate such as environmental conflicts, the management of natural and mining energy resources, the exploitation of hydrocarbons and the need of a model of development which is environmentally sustainable, respects the rights and safeguards the livelihood of the rural and indigenous population and of people of African descent.
- We believe it is necessary for this round of dialogue to widen the debate to include the rights of local communities to the land and territory because it is vitally important to transform and strengthen the rural areas to prepare them for peace.
- We urge that peace be related to social justice, human dignity and guarantees for the respect of human rights. Armed conflict cannot continue to be used as an excuse for continuing to neglect the needs and rights of the impoverished and

vulnerable population and, on the contrary, every possible action must be undertaken to promote their development and, finally, the integration into Colombian society as a whole.

- We hope that in this process, the participation of women will be assured and their demands and needs included on the agenda.

We call on the parties to ensure that the agenda agreed really brings relief to the people and communities affected by the conflict, takes account of their needs and aims at guaranteeing truth, justice, reparations and safeguards against the repetition of their sufferings. In this connection:

- We request guarantees for our work as neutral humanitarian agents in the country, serving the people and populations which are most vulnerable, remote and in greatest need.
- We are aware that a negotiation process on such a scale will require the support of the international community; we therefore offer our best services and firmest will to cooperate with our knowledge and experience accumulated in the country as a humanitarian and development organization.
- As a communion of churches and a faith based organization, we appeal to the Christian values of striving for equality, dignity, justice and peace, paying special attention to the sectors and persons who are most marginalized and oppressed. We believe that, although there may be differences over their interpretation and implementation, these values can serve as a significant common basis to bring the parties closer together.