

Lutheran World Information

15
11-12

In this issue

Paris Climate Agreement Hailed by Ecumenical Leaders..... 4

16 days of activism against gender-based violence 9

Disability is not inability – One woman's story..... 22

The youngest victims of conflict 28



This Christmas, LWF President Bishop Younan draws attention to the plight of millions of refugees across the world, who like Baby Amara and her mother in Northern Iraq, are seeking refuge from persecution. Photo: LWF/ Seivan Salim

LWF Christmas message 2015

A time to offer hope to refugees seeking safety

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – The President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan uses his Christmas message this year to urge churches to bring hope to the millions of refugees fleeing violence and religious persecution across the world.

“Because we see in refugees the face of Jesus and the Holy Family, our call for refugees is strong,” says Younan in the 2015 LWF Christmas message.

As Christians approach the time of year when Christ was born in humble surroundings in Bethlehem, many have become increasingly aware that the world is not safe and secure, says the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

“The reality of violence and turmoil long present in the Middle East, parts of Africa, and southern Asia, has now manifested itself in Europe and North America. As the Holy Family once searched for a Bethlehem inn, I ask, ‘Is there a place in our world for peace based on justice?’”

He encourages the LWF member churches to continue providing and advocating for refugees’ wellbeing. “Empower them for justice, strengthen them through education, welcome them into our countries, help them return to their homelands under a unified, democratic political order, respecting human rights,



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

Continues on page 3

Contents

Communio

1.....LWF Christmas message 2015

21st Session of the Conference Parties (COP 21)

- 4.....Paris Climate Agreement Hailed by Ecumenical Leaders
 - 5.....Nearly 2 million people-of-faith petition on the eve of COP 21
 - 6.....Churches together against climate change
 - 7.....Caring for creation – A bridge between church and society
 - 8.....Climate change is reality for the Lutheran communion
- 9.....16 days of activism against gender-based violence
- 10.....Church-led peace march against gang violence
- 11.....Celebrating 45 years of ordaining women
- 11.....Ignorance, myths and stigma “steal” life
- 12.....Parishioners fight AIDS stigma in Tanzania
- 13.....Tribute to visionary theologian Gedion Adugna
- 14.....LWF tribute to Dr Yoshiro Ishida
- 15.....Embracing differences in multi-faceted Asia
- 16.....Universal Periodic Review: Myanmar and Nepal accept LWF recommendations
- 17.....Crying out for freedom of worship in Indonesia
- 18.....A dream come true in India’s church ministry

Features & Themes

- 21.....A future beyond kiosk work
- 22.....Disability is not inability – One woman’s story
- 22.....Flood relief in Arauca, Colombia
- 23.....Struggling to protect human rights in Arauca
- 24.....Human Rights: Working for a just society
- 25.....Healing wounds of isolation and deprivation
- 26.....Help for traumatized women in Iraq
- 27.....LWF supports winterization in Northern Iraq
- 28.....The youngest victims of conflict
- 29.....Developing a culture of peace
- 30.....Food support for refugees and hosts in Jordan
- 31.....Cry and dance at the same time

News in Brief

- 3.....Strategies to counter terrorism engender more violence
- 3.....Faith-based humanitarian groups say Pope’s visit to CAR offered hope
- 19.....LWF Endowment Fund enjoys strong year
- 20.....Lutherans and Catholics are walking together in service to the poor
- 20.....500 trees, 500 faces for the Reformation anniversary

The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches 150, route de Ferney P.O. Box 2100 CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Telephone +41/22-791 61 11 Fax +41/22-791 66 30 E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org www.lutheranworld.org	Head of Communications (interim) Pauline Mumia pmu@lutheranworld.org Layout Stéphane Gallay sga@lutheranworld.org Circulation/subscription Rita Aufranc rita.aufranc@lutheranworld.org	Lutheran World Information (LWI) is the information service of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Unless specifically noted, material presented does not represent positions or opinions of the LWF or of its various units. Where the dateline of an article contains the nota- tion (LWI), the material may be freely reproduced with acknowledgment.
---	---	--

gender justice and freedom of religious expression,” Younan urges.

A refugee himself, since 1948 after his family was forced to flee home at Beer Sheva in present day Israel, the LWF president said the church’s call remains to serve the most vulnerable and to find them shelter—a place in the inn.

“The message of Christmas challenges us to seek justice, to bring hope to the hopeless,” Younan concludes.

Each year, the LWF Christmas message is linked to a Christmas card, highlighting an aspect of the communion’s work. The 2015 image shows a displaced woman and her baby in a communal shelter in Northern Iraq, where her family sought refuge from persecution.

The Lutheran communion member churches directly support refugees and internally displaced persons across the world. Their contribution towards LWF’s humanitarian work

globally enable nearly 2 million people to find new shelter, food and access to basic services such as education, health and establish alternative livelihoods.

[Read the LWF Christmas message 2015: www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-christmas-message-face-jesus-every-refugee](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-christmas-message-face-jesus-every-refugee)

Strategies to counter terrorism engender more violence

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) marks Human Rights Day today by denouncing both the recent “vicious” terrorist attacks “in many cities on many continents” and the “unacceptably high death toll” in actions to counter terrorism in Syria.

Quoting from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge remind the international community of States that “disregard and contempt of human rights result in barbarous acts that have outraged” the conscience of humanity.

They express LWF’s grave concern that the disproportionately massive airstrikes on Syria do not have a United Nations mandate. These attacks further erode legal instruments that the international community has painstakingly developed over the years to address conflict and war.

While terrorism must be countered and its root causes addressed, military power alone will not resolve terrorism’s vicious cycle of violence, the LWF leaders say.

States must analyze lessons learned from previous responses and define approaches that are applicable today. The so-called

“coalitions of the willing,” have not only failed to stem the tide of extremism, but can be seen as “a major contributor to its growth.”

The Lutheran leaders plead for civilian protection in war zones and “generous” humanitarian assistance, without discrimination, to victims of violence and persecution. This includes protecting and welcoming refugees.

LWF provides support to refugees and internally displaced people from Syria and other countries in conflict. The president and general secretary refer to the exacerbated pressure military intervention has on civilians. “When they do flee, these refugees all too often come up against increased restrictions in too many countries.”

They urge political and religious leaders to utilize inter-cultural and inter-religious engagement to build peace where conflicts are in part justified with religious motivations.

“There is a duty to counter terrorism and to bring it to a halt; there is a grave risk that current strategies will achieve the opposite,” Younan and Junge conclude.

Faith-based humanitarian groups say Pope’s visit to CAR offered hope

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) joined faith-based organizations working with displaced families in the Central African Republic (CAR) in saluting Pope Francis’ recent visit to the African country as a sign of hope.

In statement the groups working with the thousands of vulnerable people in CAR said the Pope’s visit came at a critical time. The pontiff has said he went to CAR, 30 November, as a pilgrim of peace.

“In spite of the recent security concerns and upsurge of violence which has taken hundreds of lives and left thousands newly displaced, your presence in the country demonstrates even more your commitment to peace,” the faith-based organizations stated on 27 November.

Since a military coup in 2013, CAR has experienced an escalation of violence, displacing nearly 1 million people inside the country and neighboring nations.

Through its emergency program in CAR, the LWF assists internally displaced people in the Nana Mambêrê Ouham Pendé prefectures in the west of the country, protecting those hit by the conflict and the resulting trauma, and creating safe conditions for their return home. Collaboration with the LWF member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of CAR, includes efforts towards peace building and reconciliation within communities.

The Lutheran communion provides communities with safe water and sanitation, tools and the skills to rebuild their homes and financial assistance, while helping them improve their ability to cope with emergencies.

[The joint statement is available at www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-faith-based-humanitarian-organisations-welcome-pope-francis-central-african](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-faith-based-humanitarian-organisations-welcome-pope-francis-central-african)

Paris Climate Agreement Hailed by Ecumenical Leaders

“What a step and what a goal. Let’s put all our weight behind it.”

PARIS, France/Geneva (LWI) – Global church leaders have welcomed the landmark Paris climate agreement as a historic diplomatic achievement and a starting point in efforts to mitigate climate change and make poor countries more resilient to its damaging effects.

The agreement commits countries to keep the global temperature rise to well below two degrees Centigrade, while making all efforts to keep it to within 1.5 degrees. It is hoped the agreement – the most significant in history – will unleash worldwide action and investment in low-carbon, resilient and sustainable technology.

Leaders of 195 countries agreed developed countries shall support developing countries to adapt and grow in a clean and sustainable way. They promised to support countries to further develop ways of addressing loss and damage caused by climate change.

Church leaders stressed the critical role churches and faith-based organizations played in the process leading up to Paris. They urged churches to now push global leaders to implement the agreement.

When the agreement was announced, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, used his Twitter account to express gratitude and hope, “The Paris Agreement is a reality. We have the right to hope! Thanks to God! And thanks to all who have walked steps towards climate justice.”

The Lutheran World Federation general secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge welcomed the historic achievement by posting, “What a step and what a goal. Let’s put all our weight behind it. The big difference to get us there is the little difference each of us can make.”



Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), greets LWF Secretary General Martin Junge before a ceremony for the presentation of some 1.8 million signatures on an interfaith petition for climate justice during the COP21 climate summit in Paris, France, November 28, 2015. Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

“Well done to the joint ACT Alliance, LWF, and WCC team in Paris for your hard work resulting into an ambitious climate agreement,” tweeted Dr John Nduna, general secretary of ACT Alliance.

Over 100 people from the three organizations worked alongside other faith and civil society representatives at Paris.

For Tveit, Junge and Nduna, COP21 would not have reached an agreement without the global climate movement, which included many churches and religious organizations.

Last week, Daniele Violetti, chief of staff of the United Nations climate change body praised the role of interfaith organizations. “Thank you for all that you did on the way to Paris and during the conference. The moral imperative has been at the center of the climate talks and that is a direct consequence of your engagement,” said Violetti. “You continue to want to be engaged. This is essential,” he added.

No guarantee of a safe world

Nevertheless, experts agree, the deal in itself will not deliver a safe world. World leaders must review commitments in 2023 and scale up action by 2025 at the latest. The review will be every five years.

“By itself the Paris agreement provides no legally binding way to drive our common ambitions into practical implementation,” Tveit said. “The new accord announced in Paris will also require our continuous mobilization to ensure that leaders live up to their stated commitments.”

Rev. Fletcher Harper, from Our Voices, the global faith and spiritual climate action network, stressed “the commitments must be made real. All of us will need to play a part.” “We’re ready for the next stage of this journey. This agreement represents the end of the beginning of humanity’s reckoning with climate change.”

Nearly 2 million people-of-faith petition on the eve of COP 21

Saturday, 28 November, marked the beginning of the ecumenical and interfaith cooperation at COP21 in Paris. Four petitions by ACT Now for Climate Justice (part of ACT Alliance), the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Religions for Peace and Our Voices, with a total of almost 1.8 million signatures for climate justice inspired tears of joy and dancing feet in Paris.

The tears were shed by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), who then grabbed the hands of religious leaders to dance in celebration of what they had achieved.

The faith leaders—including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims—had gathered to present their organizations' petition to Figueres and France's Special Envoy for the Protection of the Planet Nicolas Hulot.

"It was very emotional," said The Lutheran World Federation General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, who is accompanying the seven LWF delegates to the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the UNFCCC. "For those political leaders taking responsibility to get a sense of the grassroots and of 1.8

million signatures behind them, it was a very special moment."

"We have been in discussion with Christiana Figueres since 2013 and she has been calling forward our support to join the effort," added Junge. "It has also brought different faith traditions together because we have so much in common and we have so much to share."

"Despite differences, we can all unite as human beings to respond together to this challenge," Figueres told those assembled.

Her comments were echoed by faith leaders who were present on stage to present the four petitions—and who then became Figueres' dance partners.

A human family

"The importance of this event is that now it's being recognized that faith-based organizations have a major voice," said Sister Jayanti of the Brahma Kumaris spiritual movement in India. "This is why nearly 2 million signatures were collected. I don't think any one organization could have done that, but all the faith traditions working together."

"Faith-based organizations can touch people's hearts and remind them

that we are a human family," added Jayanti. "Because if one part of the world says it has nothing to do with me and the rest of the world is suffering—we can't carry on like that. This injustice has to change. And when people's hearts are touched and moved then there can be a transformation."

Among the 400 faith actors present for the ceremony, were many "climate pilgrims" who have marched by foot and cycled from all continents. "They and many thousands of others have walked 270,000 kilometers—this is seven times traveling the world," said Figueres

Earlier that morning, hundreds of the interfaith pilgrims gathered for "a spiritual moment" in the Basilica of Saint-Denis. "The spiritual moment was a very special moment," said Junge. "I became very much aware of how much we know actually as different faith traditions about the care of creation."

The interfaith events did not take place inside the French capital itself, but in the Seine Saint-Denis commune, where COP21 is actually happening, 30 November-11 December. The area is one of the most multicultural and multi-religious parts of the Paris region.

The location was all the more poignant in the aftermath of the 13 November attacks by extremists in Paris, as police raided the Saint-Denis neighborhood in the search for suspected terrorists.

Concept of justice

Yeb Saño, the former chief climate negotiator for the Philippines, was among the pilgrims who completed a 1,500 kilometer climate pilgrimage from Rome to Paris.

"We appeal to governments and world leaders gathering here in Paris to look into their hearts and heed the clamor for change and transformation and help build a world that is safe, peaceful, and sustainable for all humankind," said Saño.



Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, dances with Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of South Africa to celebrate some 1.8 million signatures on an interfaith petition for climate justice during the COP21 climate summit in Paris, France. Photo: LWF/R. Rodrick Beiler

“Every person from each spiritual tradition brings their principles and concept of justice,” said Saño. “I am enthused and encouraged together

with all of the pilgrims I have had the honor of walking with that this year will be different. We will stand together and we will find the courage and we will

be walking on this journey—not just until Paris but beyond Paris. Together we will make a difference and change the world.”

Churches together against climate change

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegates taking part in faith and civil society action at crucial climate talks in Paris are also using the opportunity to build solidarity with the French churches.

World leaders meet 30 November-11 December, for the 21st Session of the Conference Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to negotiate a response to global climate change. LWF’s team to Paris brings the perspective of their regions to the debate.

“LWF decided young people should lead on this issue of environment,” said Pranita Biswasi, 25, representing Asia. “What we do here is connect with different faith-based actors,” added the member of the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church in India.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, who accompanied them to Paris,, emphasized the importance of solidarity with the French churches.

“To us it was so important that we would be able to not only participate in the high level meetings and events of

COP 21 but that we would be sure that we connect with, get feedback from, and be nurtured by what our constituencies are doing here in France,” Junge said.

This solidarity cuts both ways. During a visit to the LWF-associated Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, Rev. Dr Sarah Hinlicky Wilson offered prayers for Biswasi’s home region, where recent floods are threatening the community.

That moment gave friends in less vulnerable regions a very immediate and personal example of the role of climate change in creating extreme weather. It graphically illustrated the different climate change realities for the LWF representatives.

The delegates also learned about the unique challenges of faith-based political advocacy at the talks.

“The history of France itself is very much shaped by the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the political realm,” Rev. Laurent Schlumberger, president of the United Protestant Church of France, told the delegation.

“In this context, Protestantism has always been a minority and a threatened minority. Today the majority of the society is atheist or agnostic,” he said, adding that in such an ultra-secular context, religion is often kept out of the political sphere altogether.

This picture stood in stark contrast to the testimony of Nordic delegate 23-year-old Matilda Mattsson. She described the important contribution of the church in a country where 5 million of the 9 million population belong to the Church of Sweden.

“We have had people going to the climate conference for 10-15 years with the Church of Sweden delegation. And this year we have the archbishop here. So right now the climate question is very highly prioritized in the Church of Sweden, and it will continue to be,” Mattsson said.

François Clavairoly, president of the Protestant Federation of France, emphasized that as Protestantism is a minority in France, it speaks with a humble voice in the country. “It’s very difficult to have access—we are actually very far from the Swedish context.”

If anything, French churches have more in common with the situation presented by the African delegate, Pascal Kama, 30, of the Lutheran Church of Senegal. Despite being a minority religion in a Muslim context, a plastic bag recycling initiative the church started was so successful that public officials fully endorsed it.

“For us as a church, when it comes to climate justice, we already have the means to achieve something. And from there you can move forward step by step and that will show people that somewhere there is someone who is doing something on the environment,” Kama added.

(By LWI correspondent LWI Ryan Rodrick Beiler in France)



Leaders of Protestant churches in France, Rev. Laurent Schlumberger, Rev. François Clavairoly and Rev. Dr Jean Ravalitera meet LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge (fourth from left) and the COP21 LWF delegation, in Paris. Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Caring for creation – A bridge between church and society

Seven youth from different regions of the globe that make up The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation monitoring United Nations climate change negotiations in Paris—each with their own stories of environmental activism in their home communities.

But they also came to France to listen to stories from local churches caring for the creation by making the church “green” through practical, local initiatives, and by advocating for climate justice through cross-border advocacy.

In Paris until 11 December for the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the LWF delegates met with French church leaders and activists.

At St Matthew Parish in Strasbourg, they heard how an audit of the church’s energy use—tracking its heating consumption and waste—helped the congregation make strategic plans to improve their building in order to maximize its energy efficiency.

David Rudloff, who helped lead the process, explained, “We know what we can do and we are working to make the first step and the second step and the third step.”

Involving the whole community

“It’s so simple, it’s not very extraordinary,” he said. “Explaining to the whole community that it’s not only a financial improvement but a real step toward environmental improvement, we made the whole community think about how we are not alone and we have real power to change.”

The French climate activist said the church decided to celebrate creation by becoming a spiritual community that emphasized technical activity. The impetus comes from Rudloff’s deep personal faith and his principled commitment on ecology.



Youth hold symbols of creation during an ecumenical celebration at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris during the COP 21 climate talks taking place in nearby Le Bourget, 3 December 2015 Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

“For many years I was a little ashamed to speak about ecology when I was in church and to speak about my Christian faith with ecologists. I thought that they will reject me if I speak out. And so I had this wall, this barrier in my head,” he reflected.

Rudloff said he was surprised to be welcomed by the church and environmentalists.

“If I’m only an ecologist I hide something of myself and vice versa. And so I discovered that the church was more open to the ecology than I initially thought. So I think that the main enemy is our own fears,” he noted.

In the face of such fears, Christian Albecker, the president of the Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine (UEPAL), encouraged the delegates to embrace a vocation of hope amid their work on climate justice.

“We, as Christians, have a special responsibility to say that it’s possible. Hope is not just a dream. It can come true. You have also many pessimistic voices that say it’s too late,” said Albecker. “Christians have to bring the message that hope is always possible and action is possible.”

He wants to see more commitment like that demonstrated by churches involved in the Pilgrimage for Climate

Justice where different groups from Germany and France walked together to Paris to call for climate justice at COP 21.

“This is my church”

“This was a very important experience for our church because we were surprised that so many people got involved,” said Albecker. “We estimate that about 1,500 participated in the march, which for a church like ours is quite a lot.”

“It was a spiritual experience and it was a physical experience,” said Albecker, who along with his colleagues from the church offices participated in one day’s 23-kilometer march. It was also a political experience.

They presented a common declaration signed by the UEPAL leader and several local Catholic bishops to a representative of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. For him, the pilgrimage was one example of how to overcome barriers while making a unique faithful witness.

“The media covered the pilgrimage and Fast for the Climate very positively,” he noted. “The questions asked often were, ‘Why do churches get involved in this question of climate justice? This is a technical or political question. What are the churches doing?’”

Church leaders responded by saying that caring for creation is an essential question for Christians and other faith traditions. Such an answer provided a “bridge” between the church and the whole of society, Albecker argued.

And, he said engagement on climate justice by religious activists can bring people back to the church. “We have a woman in one village who was very active on the environment who joined the church because she said it was the first time it had become in-

involved on such an important question. “This is my church!” she concluded.

UEPAL with its 250,000 members is one of the three LWF member churches in France.

(By LWI correspondent LWI Ryan Rodrick Beiler in France)

Climate change is reality for the Lutheran communion

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) approaches the forthcoming United Nations (UN) climate summit in Paris next week with the message that climate change is not an abstract reality to the Lutheran communion of churches.

“It directly affects the member churches in Angola, Greenland, Kenya, Namibia, the United States and many other places, with large communities of vulnerable people displaced by increasingly heavy rainfall and storms and prolonged drought,” says LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge.

Junge will join LWF’s observer delegation comprising youth from the seven regions of the global Lutheran communion at the historic negotiations, 30 November – 11 December. Together with other faith and civil society representatives, they will be urging political leaders to strive for an ambitious and far-reaching agreement that helps to protect those most severely affected by climate change. Activities planned prior to the COP conference include the handing over of a petition by faith leaders to political authorities, and welcoming pilgrims.

“Climate change is a devastating reality for communities in Argentina, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and several other coun-



LWF President, Bishop Munib Younan, General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge and young Council members advocate for climate justice. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

tries, where unusually heavy rainfalls or prolonged drought have destroyed large extensions of land,” he argues.

At this year’s COP, the LWF delegation will host the “Fast and Feast for the Climate” event to formally conclude a global fasting initiative on the first day of each month in solidarity with vulnerable people, which the LWF started with other faith and secular organizations at the 2013 conference in Warsaw, Poland.

Junge says these approaches help to amplify that Lutheran theological

understanding has something critical to offer to the debate around climate change, particularly the idea that freedom should not be separated from accountability.

“Freedom can’t be invoked as a reason to continue depleting resources that won’t be available to others, or to future generations,” he argues.

At its June 2015 Council meeting, the LWF endorsed the policy to not invest in fossil fuels and affirmed its commitment to become carbon neutral by 2050.

16 days of activism against gender-based violence

LWF joins coalition to address violence against women and girls

GENEVA (LWI) – A coalition of faith-based organizations is emphasizing a joint approach in addressing unprecedented levels of violence against women and girls.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Anglican Communion, Islamic Relief, Mission 21, World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World YWCA, Church of Sweden and Finn Church Aid are reiterating the importance of an inter-religious approach to the 16 Days of Activism to end gender based violence, which is observed annually throughout the world.

“From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All,” is the theme for this year’s focus. The period begins on 25 November with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and continues until 10 December, Human Rights Day.

UN Women says one third of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. More than 125 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to female genital mutilation across countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Early and forced marriage and lack of education

The campaign hones in on the connection between children, early and forced marriage and lack of access to education.

It calls for schools to be held as protected spaces, for greater gender justice awareness among girls and their families, for rites of passage and other gender and sexual socialization processes within cultures and religions to be recognized, and for sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls to be viewed as crucial in efforts to overcome violence against women and promote women’s empowerment.

The coalition has pledged to take the following actions, working together and within their own contexts as organizations:

- gather sacred narratives from Islamic and Christian traditions on protection and empowerment of women and girls
- highlight existing initiatives to overcome violence against women and girls, such as Thursdays in Black, NoXcuses, Imams against Domestic Abuse, Gender Justice

Policy, We Will Speak Out coalition and scholarships for women’s theological education

- share prayers of lament, confession and blessing related to young girls
- share the importance of working with faith leaders and encourage them to pledge to never sanctify any union that involves a minor.

The coalition plans to collaborate closely with UN agencies and diplomatic missions, particularly those working to overcome early and forced marriage and ensure access to education, to strengthen local communities’ ability to reject the practice of early marriage, especially in countries where the incidence of early marriage is high, by mobilizing faith constituencies.

The campaign is linked to UN human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Universal Periodic Review of human rights, and Security Council resolution 1325 that affirms the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Dignity of girls

Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, LWF Secretary for Women in Church and Society, says this year’s theme offers an opportunity for churches to openly and directly discuss the problem of early and forced marriage. The aim of the campaign is to get churches of the LWF communion building awareness of the sad reality that so many girls face.

By engaging church leaders, pastors and advocates at different levels, it is hoped they will address the topic in sermons, conversations, group work and women’s fellowship.

“We want to bring this to a public level. It should be part of an agenda



Women’s centre in Kingston, Jamaica, offering education to young mothers so they can continue their education after giving birth. Photo: WCC/Peter Williams

that addresses the public role of the church and theology.”

Addressing the issue of early and forced marriage for girls is connected with ongoing discussions in the LWF

Communion. One sub-theme of the 2017 LWF Assembly is: Human beings – not for sale. “Girls should be able to flourish, as human beings, not as child brides, not as commodities to be negotiated.

We want to see girls with dignity, with access to education, with the ability to make choices, to decide their future. This is our dream – a world without violence and discrimination,” Neuenfeldt added.

Church-led peace march against gang violence

Salvadoran Lutheran Church leads initiative

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador/GENEVA (LWI)

– Some Salvadoran gangs responsible for much of the country’s widespread violence have announced a cessation of violence following a peace march organized by the Salvadoran Lutheran Church (ILS) in the capital San Salvador.

“Yes to peace, God bless El Salvador, yes to the desired peace,” were the slogans as thousands joined the ILS Pastoral Initiative for Life and Peace (IPAZ). The church had invited sister churches worldwide to pray together as it conducted the march on 27 October.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church responded by thanking God and the worldwide community for its support as the reduction in violence became the reality. It is hoped the gangs’ commitment will inspire others to follow suit.

Bishop Medardo E. Gómez Soto said the Central American country faces a difficult situation because of the widespread violence. Part of the Lutheran church’s work is peace building initiatives and public advocacy aimed at ending the violence. The global Lutheran communion’s solidarity with the Salvadoran church and others affected by similar violence in the region includes a 2012 public statement by the LWF Council urging governments there to “hear the cries of their people” and protect human rights.

“I want to inform you that the violence has grown so great that it is affecting the life of the nation and is causing other problems such as migration, economic troubles and even mental stress, and other consequences that Salvadorans are living through,” Gomez wrote.

Some 5,000 people are murdered in the country every year, making it one of



Bishop Medardo E. Gómez Soto (right), seen here with Honduran pastor Rev. Martín Girón, invited churches in the LAC region for prayers of solidarity as IPAZ appeal for peace in El Salvador. Photo: LWF/Adriana Castañeda

the deadliest nations that is not at war. In October it was reported that on one day alone, at least 220 people were killed. Much of the violence is gang related.

“We want to make a loud scream and cry to stop all the violence that is agitating the country,” Gomez declared. “We will present our cry to our country, officials, gang members and everyone to stop the bloodshed.”

Marchers converged on the Monument to the Divine Savior of the World, streaming from Cuscatlán Park, Redondel Masferrer and the Monument to the Constitution. They included members of all churches and society at large.

During the event, a pastoral statement was read calling on all those groups terrorizing communities to immediately cease the violence and crime.

“Stop the recruitment of children especially. Stop all threats against families, communities, neighborhoods, settlements, townships, and forced eviction. Allow the free transit of people

across the country,” the Lutheran bishop urged.

All LWF member churches in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region were invited to join in prayer on the day or during the week, and in solidarity ask God to bring peace to the people of El Salvador. They were urged to encourage their leaders to help rebuild and heal the wounds that the violence is leaving.

Peace requires justice in the form of jobs, education and healthcare, the bishop noted. “Violence is a big business and the beneficiaries do not accept any peace process.”

LWF area secretary for LAC, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti noted that while “peace is costly to build and achieve, church leaders in El Salvador are moved by the spirituality of justice, to realize it.” There are thousands of persons around the globe praying together and accompanying the IPAZ initiative, she added.

Celebrating 45 years of ordaining women

ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton “gives thanks” for women pastors

CHICAGO, Unites States/GENEVA (LWI) – In marking the 45th anniversary of the ordination of women into the ministry of the Lutheran church in the United States, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) gave “thanks for my sisters who were the first women pastors.”

Eaton, the church’s first female presiding bishop, was ordained in 1981. This was 11 years after the first Lutheran woman, Rev. Elizabeth A. Platz, was ordained by the Lutheran Church in America, one of ELCA’s predecessors.

“Even as a young girl I felt called to service in the church, to word and sacramental ministry,” said Eaton, who serves on the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). “In the face of sometimes vehement opposition, I questioned it. My ordination was not a feminist statement but a response to an

irresistible call from God to serve.” This November, the LWF member church is highlighting the anniversary as an occasion to celebrate the gifts women bring to the ELCA, said Rev. Cherlyne Beck, program director for the support of ELCA rostered leaders.

Today women make up 35 percent of active clergy in the 3.7 million-member ELCA. In the past five years, 49 percent of those ordained clergy were women, while the number of women and men currently preparing for ministry is about equal.

Lutheran women clergy serve as pastors, campus ministers, chaplains and missionaries. Nine of the ELCA’s 65 synod bishops are female and 86 women serve as senior pastors in contrast to 456 men in that role.

For Rev. Elizabeth Ekdale, lead pastor of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church

in San Francisco, the anniversary is both a reason to celebrate and reflect on the gifts of women clergy. “I’ve seen more opportunities for women but the struggles are still there,” she said. “We need to keep working for full inclusion and equality.”

Bishop H. Julian Gordy of the Southeastern Synod said the synod works to nurture and celebrate the gifts of women by inviting them to take on leadership roles in all areas of synod and congregational life. “We are getting closer to that place of equality to which God has called us.”

For Rev. Dr Cheryl Stewart Pero, growing in inclusion is especially important for the ELCA when it comes to ordained women of color. A professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Pero was the second African American Lutheran woman to be ordained in 1980.

She is working together with Rev. Wyvetta Bullock, ELCA executive for administration, on a project to highlight the voices of women of color as the church marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. “In the years to come, I would hope that we will achieve much more equity and parity,” Pero added.

Nearly 80 percent of the LWF member churches ordain women, and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge has emphasized that the global communion understands ordained ministry as being open to men and women.

(Edited from an ELCA News article by Erin Strybis, associate editor in ELCA Mission Advancement).



Rev. Taryn Montgomery making the sign of the cross on her daughter's forehead at the Bread of Life Lutheran Church in Minot, North Dakota, United States. Photo: ELCA

Ignorance, myths and stigma “steal” life

LWF furthers regional collaboration for HIV and AIDS advocacy in Africa

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa/GENEVA (LWI) – Stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS continues to plague efforts to prevent infections, Lutheran church

leaders and health activists from across Africa heard at a regional workshop of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF member

church representatives shared their own experiences of how stigma creates fear and shame in people living with HIV and their families.

“Ignorance kills life in abundance,” said Rev. Dr Magdalena Ya-Shalongo, principal of the Engela Parish Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, in her keynote address to the workshop, held 9-12 December in Johannesburg.

Losing two brothers to HIV created great adversity for the Namibian pastor as she mourned their loss. She narrated how she worked to sustain her family and fight the stigma associated with the infection.

Still, she held fast to her faith and came to understand that all God’s people are called to advocate for the prevention of HIV and AIDS, urge proper treatment for all those living with the disease and end the stigma and exclusion.

Stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS creates too much space for myths and lies that manifest themselves as fear in people. It creates shame in those who are living with HIV, Ya-Shalongo told fellow AIDS workers.

She said her work around AIDS is guided by the passage in John’s Gospel

(10:10b), “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The theme of the workshop was “Strengthening Regional Networks on HIV and AIDS Advocacy.”

In her reflections, she said the “denial of the prevalence of the virus or being afraid to talk about it allows evil to take hold, and steals the chance for God to stir hearts into action.”

The LWF initiated the gathering of coordinators of health and wellness programs and church leaders in recognition of the urgent need by churches to address the human rights issues that are increasingly associated with the HIV pandemic in Africa. The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) hosted the workshop with funding from the Netherlands-based Robert Carr Fund international organization that supports the AIDS work of civil society networks.

The World Health Organization estimates that out of the 37 million people living with HIV globally, more than 24.7 million—75 percent—are in Africa and only 37 percent of this number receives antiretroviral therapy. Less than half are

receiving proper treatment, and possibly do not know their status.

Stigma surrounding the virus plagues prevention and education efforts by churches, especially since HIV is often associated with sexuality, and this topic is taboo in most churches, participants at the workshop heard. The situation presents a complicated socio-economic, development and human rights challenge as myths, traditions, socio-cultural beliefs and practices continue to overshadow the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by those living with HIV.

The 18 participants from LUCSA, the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA) and the Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa (LUCCWA) explored collaboration on regional strategies to end HIV infections and stigma. They met after World AIDS Day, 1 December, which many countries in the region observe each year, currently under the theme, zero new infections, zero stigma and zero HIV-related deaths.

The participants set up a regional HIV and AIDS network and advocacy committee to help increase collaboration between the churches and across the sub-regions. They will also develop a human rights-based handbook.

The LUCSA HIV and AIDS Program has established a model of “mainstreaming” efforts to fight the spread of HIV, which encourages churches to incorporate advocacy and education in their existing programs.

Although LUCCEA and LUCCWA have AIDS programs, there has been little coordination among their respective member churches or across the sub-regions.

(A contribution by LUCSA communications officer Allison Westerhoff, on behalf of the Africa Lutheran Information and Communication Network).



Churches in Africa recognize the urgent need to address the human rights issues associated with the HIV pandemic in Africa. LUCSA executive director Rev. Dr David Tswaedi leads a session of the December workshop in Johannesburg. Photo: LUCSA/Allison Westerhoff

Parishioners fight AIDS stigma in Tanzania

Empowering vulnerable women helps saves lives

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – Eunice, five-month old twins lives with HIV. So a 27-year-old Tanzanian mother of do her twins.

“What will I do? My children and I are HIV positive,” she asks.

Eunice's husband divorced her while she was pregnant, because he suspected that she had contracted the virus, although she did not take an HIV test during the pregnancy. The twins' slow development after birth prompted her to find out their status, which turned out to be HIV positive.

Eunice has suffered under the burden of poverty and HIV but today the family is receiving antiretroviral treatment, nutritional support and financial assistance. She has started a small business to meet her family's basic needs.

Much of this support comes from the local Marangu congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). The pastor has mobilized funds from parishioners to assist Eunice and the children with clothes and other materials.

"Through the church, Eunice has improved her life, health and nutritional wellbeing," said Mary Mmbaga, the ELCT HIV and AIDS coordinator. "Eunice has confidence, dignity and self-esteem. The children are doing well. Besides the difficulties, she is happy and able to interact with her neighbors."

Mmbaga said this kind of local HIV and AIDS support provided by the ELCT congregations in Tanzania has sparked discussion on a number of related topics between the generations, genders and other groups. "This is a major change for our congregations, parishes, church districts, dioceses, communities and households," she noted.

And it is a welcome change.

Tanzania is one of the sub-Saharan African countries that has been hard-



ELCT's HIV and AIDS awareness building efforts includes seminars for married couples. Photo: ELCT

est hit by the AIDS pandemic, with 1.4 million people living with HIV in the population of nearly 50 million people. In 2013 alone, the country had more than 73,000 newly infected persons.

Despite these figures, the scaling up of antiretroviral treatment has helped to control the HIV epidemic.

Still, poverty, which drives girls to succumb to unsafe sex at an early age, and the lack of access to education, information and reproductive healthcare for women, mean the elimination of HIV and AIDS remains a monumental task, according to Mmbaga. It is estimated that 690,000 women and girls are living with HIV in Tanzania.

The ELCT, which has long provided education and health care services, including hospitals and medical training, continues to address the harmful practices that lead to infection. "Social and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation,

and lack of awareness about the risks of early marriage for girls are among the factors that largely impede the strategy against HIV and AIDS," she added.

She noted that the ELCT "has done a good job" of tackling the stigma around HIV and AIDS. "But it must confront the cultural edicts that give men control over women to the extent that women are left on their own should they become infected," she added.

"There is no doubt women are more vulnerable than men when it comes to the cultural dynamics of power. But if empowered, they are able to not only save their own lives but also ensure the wellbeing of their children and other family members," Mmbaga argued. It is important to empower churches and communities with education and knowledge on gender justice, which is an important focus of LWF's work with its member churches globally, she concluded.

Tribute to visionary theologian Gedion Adugna

A tragic loss for Mekane Yesus and LWF Communion

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the global Lutheran communion have paid tribute to lay theologian Mr. Gedion Adugna, who died on 19 November, aged 34.

Adugna was the Associate Dean of Theology at the EECMY Mekane Yesus

Seminary in Addis Ababa, where he also taught. He had served in a variety of posts in the church, and contributed globally to many theological education processes including at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

EECMY leaders expressed deep appreciation for the young theologian

at a memorial service on 23 November. They noted deep appreciation for his clear vision for the transformation of both his church and society at large.

EECMY President Rev. Dr Wakseyoum Idosa said at the memorial service held at the Mekane Yesus Seminary chapel that Adugna's sudden and tragic

death had saddened both the EECMY and the seminary where he taught. Colleagues at the theological education institution described him as friendly, bright and helpful towards his students, and as an outstanding leader with great potential.

In his message of condolences to the EECMY president, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge noted that Adugna had been an active, committed theologian in various LWF global endeavors and would be remembered as supportive, gentle and friendly by those who had met him.

“His contribution to the Mekane Yesus Seminary and the EECMY, especially around theological education, has enriched the work of various LWF global programs,” Junge said. “In this regard, his tragic departure is also a great loss to the LWF communion at large.”

Adugna was born in Debre Berhan, Ethiopia. He received a degree in Church History from the Mekane Yesus Seminary before serving the Central Ethiopia Synod, coordinating its youth department. After two years of service with the synod, he was invited to teach at the seminary in 2009.

In 2011 he completed a Masters of Theology at the Ethiopian Gradu-



Ethiopian Lutheran theologian Gedion Adugna (1982-2015), a visionary leader for the transformation of church and society at large. Photo: Private

ate School of Theology and continued serving the Mekane Yesus Seminary as a teacher and associate dean.

Additionally, he served as a board member of the EECMY Children and Youth Department and participated in the preparation of the church’s children’s curriculum. He also developed curriculum for the seminary’s theology department.

He represented the EECMY at different meetings and consultations representing regionally and globally, including at the recent LWF conference on the global per-

spectives of the Reformation in Windhoek, Namibia. He was also an active member of Global Associates for Transformational Education, where he made a significant contribution to theological education focused on transformation.

Mr Gedion Adugna is survived by his wife Ayantu Shiferaw, and their son.

(Ms Tsion Alemayehu, public relations officer at the EECMY, contributed to this story)

LWF tribute to Dr Yoshiro Ishida

A leader who left his mark on Lutheran mission

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has paid tribute to Rev. Dr Yoshiro Ishida, former director of the LWF Department for Studies, who died on 4 November at the age of 87.

“Twice, Dr Ishida served our worldwide communion with great dedication and distinction, the second time at a critical moment in our history,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge. “He has left an indelible mark on the church in Asia and on Lutheran theology.”

Born into a strict Buddhist family on the island of Miyako off Okinawa, Ishida became a Christian and was ordained by the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1955. After serv-



Rev. Dr Yoshiro Ishida, 1928-2015. Photo: LWF/Marc von Appelghem

ing several congregations in Japan, he began his first stint at LWF as Asia secretary in 1964, serving four years.

He served the then Department of Studies at an important time for the LWF (1978-1986). It was in 1977 that the LWF declared a *status confessionis* [position on the church's stand on the integrity of the gospel] that the South African apartheid system must be rejected as a matter of faith.

"His leadership was instrumental in this important process for our communion," Junge said. Other major areas

of LWF study under Ishida's leadership included Christian-Marxist relationships, Lutherans and people of other faiths, Christianity and human rights, and the cultural context of worship.

Before joining the LWF, Dr Ishida served several congregations in Japan. After his first Geneva service, he pursued doctoral studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), then taught at the Japan Lutheran Theological College/Seminary.

When he left Geneva for the second time, Ishida returned to Chicago,

where he established LSTC's Center for Global Mission. In 2000 he received the school's Distinguished Alumni Award. In granting the distinction, LSTC stated: "If there is one word that can describe Dr Yoshiro Ishida's life, it is 'Mission'."

After returning home in 1994, he became president of Kyushu Lutheran College in Japan.

Dr Ishida is survived by his wife of 58 years, Gloria Bauer Ishida, five children and nine grandchildren.

Embracing differences in multi-faceted Asia

Lutheran identity acknowledges solidarity amidst suffering

MANILA, Philippines/GENEVA (LWI) – If there is no one common Lutheran identity in multi-faceted Asia, what unites the various Lutheran expressions across the continent?

Asian theologians acknowledge that the core Lutheran teachings ought to shape today's witness to the world. They should be guided by God's love and by the understanding of the theology of the cross. Still the debate continues.

This formed the basis of discussion for 30 church leaders, theologians, women and youth representatives at a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation on Asian Lutheran identity and self-understanding hosted by the Lutheran Church in the Philippines in Manila. It included LWF member churches in Australia [including New Zealand], Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar Singapore and Taiwan.

Australian theologian Rev. Dr Stephen Haar, for one, maintains that hospitality ought to be at the heart of Lutheran theology in complex Asia.

"Hospitality will be a fitting metaphor for the identity and mission of Asian Lutheran churches in a religiously pluralistic and postmodern culture because it involves invitation, response, and engagement," says

Haar, who teaches theology at the Australian Lutheran College.

Haar invites Lutheran churches in Asia to reflect on their responses to "otherness" – other people, cultures, faiths, religions, and worldviews – in order to discover their identities and the nature of their mission. They should do so in global and local contexts that are variously impacted by post-modernism.

Women's experiences

In Manila, Rev. Dr Adlin Reginabai challenged Asian Lutheran churches to speak out against violence against women in church and society. No-one should suffer discrimination based on sexuality. Both sexes should be given equal opportunity and responsibility.

She was backed up by Indonesia's Rev. Rospita Sihan. "In our quest for gender equality we are reminded that the oppressed should not be the oppressor. Let's not perceive men as an enemies that need to be defeated, but as equal partners in family, church and society," said Sihan.

Dr Pauline Simonsen from New Zealand acknowledged that one of the gifts of postmodernism is that it allows women's experiences and voices to be heard. It influences attitudes towards their role and abilities, she said.

"Constructive confessional Lutheranism defines what many women in the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church of New Zealand believe about who we are—Christians informed by the Lutheran understanding of the gospel, engaged in loving, effective service in the world," Simonsen added.

Japanese theologian Rev. Dr Arata Miyamoto argued for understanding of both the Christian tradition of the theology of the cross and the East Asian notion of dukkha (suffering). This should encompass a God who suffers, the suffering of Christ on the cross for the sin of humanity—suffering that transcends all human suffering.

Participation in public life

Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, LWF study secretary for Lutheran theology and practice, encouraged the churches in Asia to design theological and spiritual formation that equips members for participation in shared public life in rapidly secularizing societies.

Rev. Dr Wilfred John Samuel, principal of Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia said Asian Lutheran identity needs to have an open attitude in celebrating our differences. But this needs to be combined with a search



Asian church leaders gathered to discuss differences and commonalities across Lutheran churches of the Asia region. Photo: LWF/JC Valeriano

for mutuality and cooperation. He pointed to six vital areas that must be considered when re-thinking Asian identity – communion identity, confessional identity, liturgical identity, Refor-

mation identity, social transformation identity and contextual identity.

There are signs the conversation on Lutheran identity in Asia is critical and that it will continue.

“I am happy that we are heading in the right direction. I am glad to be here and it is a privilege to listen to the formation of Asian Lutheran identity,” remarked Prof. Frank Lin from China Lutheran Seminary.

Rev. Selma Chen from Taiwan, who has been part of the conversation on Lutheran identity in Asia since 2012, added that the Asian Lutheran Identity and Self-Understanding process is becoming clearer and is crucial.

Participants drafted a document that represents Asian Lutheran Identity and Self-understanding that will be published early next year.

Asian Lutherans will then publish a special document on the process in 2017 to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

(A contribution by Steven Lawrence, LWF regional expression officer for Asia.)

Universal Periodic Review: Myanmar and Nepal accept LWF recommendations

Giving communities a voice on the international stage

GENEVA (LWI) – The governments of Myanmar and Nepal have accepted recommendations of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at their Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which took place at the beginning of November.

LWF had submitted a parallel report on the human rights situation in both countries, which was taken up by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), several UN member states, and consequently, the two countries themselves.

“The human rights issues the LWF advocated for were considered in the plenary and most of them were accepted by the governments of both countries,” LWF Advocacy Officer Dr Ojot Miru Ojulu said. “We succeeded in giving local communities a voice on the global stage.”

The UPR process is a unique mechanism of the UN Human Rights

Council aimed at improving the human rights situation on the ground of each of the 193 UN member states. The mechanism is used to review the human rights situation of all UN member states every four-and a-half years.

In the process, non-governmental organizations are encouraged to submit their findings in firsthand reports, so-called parallel reports, which member can consider when presenting recommendations of the country under review.

LWF submitted parallel reports for both Myanmar and Nepal on the basis of its long presence in and engagement with local communities and civil society in both countries.. LWF country programs assembled the reports after consulting communities and civil society actors in the respective countries, speaking with community members, community-based organizations and local authorities.

Even before the review, LWF’s alternative UPR reports were selected by the OHCHR and posted on its website giving the reports wider publicity and accessibility by all stakeholders. The findings of the LWF also found their way into the official OHCHR report.

“In the brief 10-page official OHCHR summary of NGOs reports, LWF reports were cited 19 times,” Ojulu said. “The High Commissioner’s report picked up issues such as the right to housing, right to health, right to education and right to development, in the case of Nepal. For Myanmar, our findings on the right to water, children’s rights and women’s rights were quoted. This is strong affirmation of the credibility and quality of LWF reports.”

Myanmar’s commitment

During the review process, some of the government missions accredited to the

UN that LWF national staff from Nepal and Myanmar had visited considered LWF's recommendations in their statements.

"The Myanmar and Nepal governments accepted most of these recommendations, including the recommendation on a land registration system, protection from all forms of violence against women, and effective registration of all children in the country for Myanmar," Ojulu explained.

"For Nepal they accepted our recommendation on effective implementation of the caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Act of 2011, access to education for children with disabilities, and effective implementation of the People's Housing Program" among others.

After the review, LWF also held discussions with a representative of the government of Myanmar. He reassured LWF staff of his government's commitment to improve the human rights situation in the country. "He reiterated his government's openness to work together with civil society organizations such as the LWF in translating UPR recommendations

into concrete actions on the ground to improve people's lives," Ojulu said.

Healthy relations

According to LWF staff, the Myanmar representative underscored the urgency of addressing women's rights, the need to reintegrate former child soldiers into society, the rights of people with disabilities, the right to education

and people's rights to health as some of the top issues for his government.

"The way in which the LWF together with its partners have worked on the UPR of Myanmar and Nepal demonstrates how international instruments – when strategically coordinated from local to global – can deliver tangible results on the ground, and contribute to an improvement of human rights and good relations between state and civil society," Ojulu concluded



A Dalit woman in Nepal. Implementing the Discrimination and Untouchability Act of 2011 which abolishes caste discrimination is a major human rights challenge in Nepal. Photo: LWF/Lucia de Vries

Crying out for freedom of worship in Indonesia

Indonesian Lutheran congregations seek support to end religious marginalization

ACEH, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – A mother's lament echoes the pain of religious intolerance in multi-faith Indonesia.

"We have been living peacefully already for many years, but why are we forced to witness our churches burned and destroyed?" cries the woman during an interview with a visiting team of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Indonesia National Committee to Aceh Singkil in North Sumatra.

Aceh Singkil's 20,000 Christians are afraid to express their faith even though religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and the country's diversity is held up as an example for the world.

On 13 October, 1,000 extremists calling themselves the Islamic Defender Youth, or Pemuda Peduli Islam (PPI), torched a

church belonging to the Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) and attacked members of the nearby Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church (GKPPD).

A Muslim man was killed during the attack and the incident heightened tension as a member of the GKPPD was charged with the murder. In the aftermath, 7,000 Christians fled their homes seeking safety in the neighboring areas. The government convinced them to return four days later.

A week before the incident, the extremist group had urged the government to uphold laws on worship houses that limited their number to just one church and four chapels in the community, though these laws breach agreements reached in 1979 and 2001.

Century-old family lineage

Churches and civil society organizations lament the government's lack of foresight. The government failed to anticipate the effect of limiting Christians' rights to religious liberty in the country, they say.

"The government must have known this type of incident would take place, so why did they not prevent it?" asks Rev. Tulus Hutagalung of the HKI.

Churches have been part of the community in Aceh Singkil long before Indonesia's independence in 1945, and remain vital in areas that are predominantly Christian.

During the visit after the church was burned down, GKPPD members narrated how their ancestors came from

Singkil 100 years ago. “I am the third generation of Christians in my family,” said 59-year old Tumanggor, showing visitors his family’s century-old tomb.

Stringent legal restrictions

Singkil is part of Aceh province, which is autonomous and governed by Sharia law after the 2005 Helsinki Peace Accord was struck between the government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). However, there is no license under the agreement or Sharia law to discriminate against other religions.

Christians in Singkil find it difficult to worship after the 13 October incidents and the government’s demolition of nine churches days later. The latter action took place at the request of Islamic groups insisting that churches in Aceh Singkil are illegal because they do not hold government permits.

According to the human rights office of the LWF Indonesia National Committee, it is difficult for churches to apply to the state authorities for building permits. A 2006 decree requires 90 signatures from church members and 60 signatures from different faith or church groups.

Churches exist in areas where Christians are the majority. “How will



Two crucifixes remain upright in the remnants of an Indonesian church burned in October 2015.
Photo: LWF Indonesia

we satisfy the signature requirement if they cannot reach the required 60 signatures? This law does not make any sense in terms of freedom of religion or belief as it is stated in the national constitution,” says GKPPD Bishop Elson Lingga.

In the meantime, Christians from the nine churches that were demolished in Aceh Singkil have no place to worship. Moreover, they are not allowed to put up tents beside the church ruins or move their worship to their homes. Police and military are keeping them from the church sites.

The LWF National Committee in Indonesia, which is made up of the 13 LWF member churches in the country has mobilized trauma counseling teams that continue to accompany the affected congregation members. It is also urging other church bodies and civil society organizations to support the churches in their advocacy for freedom to worship and in dealing with the related legal implications.

A contribution by Fernando Sihotang, LWF National Committee in Indonesia).

A dream come true in India’s church ministry

Four women in historic ordination in Madhya Pradesh Lutheran church

CHHINDWARA, India/GENEVA (LWI) – After a long wait a “dream has come true,” for Rev. L. K. Khakha from Tumsar, a small town in India’s central state of Madhya Pradesh. On 1 November, she and three other women became the first ordained female pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh (ELC-MP).

“It’s a proud moment to celebrate the pastors’ ordination, which includes four women for the first time in the history of the ELC-MP, just two years ahead of the 500th anniversary of the launching of the Reformation in 1517,” said ELC-MP Bishop Emmanuel Pan-

choo. He presided over the historic ordination during the church’s 91st Synodical Council meeting at St John’s Church, Chhindwara.

Addressing the newly ordained clergy who included four men, the bishop described them as “reliable soldiers of Christ bestowed with the responsibility of pastoral ministry and diakonia.” In addition to Khakha, the other women pastors were Rev. Sundeepa Martin, Rev. Elizabeth Prasad and Rev. Isha Smitha.

Prasad who completed her theological training in 1976 said she was “overwhelmed” to be a part of the historic

ceremony. “I saw the change now when I got ordained as a pastor after such a long time. It has been a struggle to deal with the rigid patriarchal mindset and to create a space for women in church,” she noted.

For Rev. Dr Augustine Jeyakumar, General Secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran

Churches in India (UELCI), the occasion was an opportunity to reiterate the churches’ commitment to women’s participation in the ministry of the church. “It is important for all the Lutheran churches in India to ordain women as pastors, [as this is] taking a step towards gender justice.”



Bishop Emmanuel Panchoo declares Rev. Elizabeth Prasad an ordained pastor of the Madhya Pradesh Lutheran church, one of the first women to be ordained in the church. In the foreground, Rev. L.K. Khakha, another of the four women to be ordained by the church for the first time. Photo: ELC-MP/Nima David

The UELCI brings together 11 churches that are members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It ordained its first female pastors in September 1991, and ten of its member churches are ordaining women.

“Women’s issues need to be addressed for the emancipation of the woman, which is not so easy to achieve in the Indian patriarchal context,” Jeyakumar emphasized.

Those who witnessed the Madhya Pradesh ordination included Rev. M.

G. Basanthi, the first woman to be ordained by the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church in the eastern state of Odisha. “To my surprise, I never faced problems serving the church or the congregation. Now we have 11 women pastors in our region,” remarked Basanthi, who retired in 2009 after 35 years of work in the church.

The reality of women’s exclusion in the patriarchal context in India had meant almost two and half decades of introspection and dialogue before

the Madhya Pradesh church could arrive at the historic day, said Rev. Dr Chandran Paul Martin, South Asia regional representative for the Global Mission unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

LWF executive secretary for Women in Church and Society Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt expressed “great joy” upon receiving the “good news” from the Madhya Pradesh church. She noted that the great majority of LWF member churches are ordaining both women and men, thus endorsing the “Lutheran communion commitment towards inclusion.”

Making reference to LWF’s preparation for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, Neuenfeldt said women’s leadership in the ordained ministry affirms the *semper reformanda* [on-going reformation] aspect of Lutheran identity. “Ordination of women expresses the conviction that the mission of the church requires the gifts of both men and women in the public ministry of word and sacraments,” she added.

(A contribution by ELC-MP member Dr Nima David, research associate at the Center for Women’s Studies and Development in Nagpur, India.)

LWF Endowment Fund enjoys strong year

A record level of contributions to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Endowment Fund since 2009 has moved the fund closer to its target of CHF 20 million by 2017.

This year alone, it has received more than CHF 670,000, bringing the fund close to CHF 15 million. Most donations were from small members of the Lutheran communion in the global south, including Costa Rica, Nepal and Nigeria.

Established in 1999, it raised CHF 10 million in its first decade, sustained by a period of high interest rates.

This year, the fund distributed CHF 345,000 for LWF’s work in advocacy, humanitarian assistance, development, mission and ecumenical and interfaith relations.

In 2016, the fund will distribute a similar amount, which will again go directly to the LWF budget.

The largest single donor in 2015 was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

LWF resource mobilization officer David Cooke said donors provide support for the long-term financial future of the LWF. The fund offers a return on investment each year, which helps provide a buffer against income variations from churches.

The target of CHF 20 million has been equally divided between member churches on the “fair share” principle—a calculation

that takes into account the size of congregations and the economy of the country where the church is based.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada’s Reformation Challenge has set a target of 500,000 Canadian dollars for the fund, in the run up to the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

Rev. Dr Robin Steinke, chairperson of the fund board, said the fund provides income in perpetuity to support the mission of the LWF.

“Through this mission all member churches, large and small, south and north, share what funds they can and in that sharing, the gifts are multiplied. This kind of sharing is another way we witness to what it means to be a global communion of churches.”

She said that if supported, the fund could provide ongoing and sustainable revenue so the mission of the LWF could be funded regardless of the volatility of global financial markets or changes in gifts from member churches.

Member churches and individuals are welcome to contribute to the fund, which helps to witness and ministry of the LWF. The long-term goal is to reach CHF 50 million.

[Endowment Fund page](#)

www.lutheranworld.org/content/endowment-fund

Lutherans and Catholics are walking together in service to the poor

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge has lauded Pope Francis' prayers with Rome's Lutheran community on 15 November as a great encouragement for Roman Catholics and Lutherans to move from conflict to communion.

"It was refreshing to see his emphasis on approaching complex matters with the heart of a pastor, and calling both Lutherans and Catholics to put service to the poor at the center. In joint service, the servant Christ will manifest himself as the center of unity. That's the promise," Junge said.

The Pope said Catholics and Lutherans must seek forgiveness from each other for the scandal of past divisions as they walk together today in the service of the poor. He also spoke about the importance of shared prayers, joint liturgies and other ways in which Christians can worship together.

Francis is the third Roman Catholic pontiff to visit Rome's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Pope Benedict XVI made the pilgrimage in March 2010 and Pope John Paul II prayed at the church in December 1983.

In welcoming the Pope to Rome's Lutheran community for the prayers and dialogue with parishioners, Rev. Jens-Martin

Kruse said, "We thank you wholeheartedly for this hopeful sign of closeness and solidarity."

Kruse said the visit was a source of strength and encouragement to continue along the path towards church unity. The encounter included questions from Lutheran church members on how confessionally mixed couples can participate in Holy Communion, and on Christians' support to refugees.

In his remarks, Pope Francis said it was essential that the Catholic Church continue to courageously and honestly re-evaluate the intentions of the Reformation and of the reformer Martin Luther, particularly his intention to see the church continually reformed. He referred to the joint document 'From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017,' saying it offered such reflection in a promising way.

The pope prayed that the two Christian communities would continue to focus not "on what divides us, but on the need to reconcile our differences in service of those most in need."

The visit by Pope Francis was a source of strength and encouragement along the path towards Christian unity, said Rome's Lutheran pastor Rev. Jens-Martin Kruse.

500 trees, 500 faces for the Reformation anniversary

The Lutheran Costa Rican Church (ILCO) is showing its commitment to the care for creation by planting 500 trees to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

The initiative dubbed "Creation is not for sale" is linked to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) sub-theme of the Reformation anniversary, and ILCO's own effort called WittenbergFest.

The Costa Rican church's Reformation anniversary efforts are centered on three key questions: Who are we? What do we do? What do we believe? This focus allows church members to learn more about the church including the priesthood of all believers and pay tribute to the role of women in the Reformation.

Under WittenbergFest, ILCO is offering its members a variety of opportunities to get involved in its diaconal ministry with youth, women or children, as well as music, ecumenical action or intercultural activities, says Rev. Geraldine Alvarez, vice-president of ILCO.

On 22 October 22, children from the Casa Abierta "El Carpio" planted the first 10 trees in the city's Carpio neighborhood, and the church members affirmed their commitment to care for the trees. "The idea is that each tree is planted by a different person so that in 2017 we will have 500 faces connected to the 500 years," Alvarez adds.

In addition, a commemorative postal stamp was launched during the 498th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, held this year on 31 October, Reformation Day.

For ILCO and its 1,400 members, the cross remains a sign of the infinite love of God. "Even in situations where love, compassion



A child at Casa Abierta in Carpio, San José, plants one of the first trees to mark ILCO's observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Photo: Geraldina Álvarez

and solidarity seem crazy, there's the cross of Christ showing a God of grace, kindness and tenderness," Alvarez says of the LWF member church.

The LWF and its member churches are marking the Reformation anniversary and the Twelfth Assembly in 2017 under the theme "Liberated by Gods' Grace" and three sub themes focusing on the understanding that salvation, creation and human being are "not for sale."

(From the LAC Communications Network)

A future beyond kiosk work

LWF Kenya helps child workers return to school

KAKUMA, Kenya/ GENEVA (LWI) – Beatrice Emuria, a Kenyan girl from a community near Kakuma refugee camp, started providing for her family when she was ten years old.

The family's misfortune began when she lost her father, the family's sole breadwinner, in 2002. Beatrice was only two years old. Her mother was unable to get a job and provide for the family. "We didn't have enough clothes to wear and would often go to bed hungry," says Beatrice. "We were so thin and weak." The family had no property and lived from hand to mouth, barely managing to survive.

By 2010, Beatrice was deemed old enough to contribute to the family income. The ten-year-old girl joined other children from the villages near their homestead and went straight into Kakuma refugee camp in search of work. "I was among the younger ones. I didn't even know what kind of work I could do but I was driven by the desire to have something to eat every day... anything," she says.

Children do not bargain or complain

She got a job in one of the many food kiosks in the camp. All day long, she would fetch water and wash dishes together with other children. "I didn't like the job because it made me skip classes but I continued doing it because that was the only way I was able to obtain food for myself and take some home to my mum and younger brothers," she says. "My performance in school suddenly dropped and I even lost interest in school."

Kiosk owners and other business people in the refugee camp prefer to engage children as workers because "children cannot bargain for better pay, children cannot complain about poor working conditions and children don't steal from the employer," Beatrice explains. She remembers how,



Beatrice (middle) with her guardian and one of her brothers inside the tailoring shop that serves as the family's source of livelihood. Photo: LWF Kenya-Djibouti (Kakuma Office)

while they were working, they would encourage one another and share their aspirations and future plans.

According to George Thotho, LWF's Senior Child Protection Officer, as many as 3000 children from the host community were engaged in child labor and other forms of child abuse within the refugee camp, Kakuma town and some of the adjacent villages. "The situation was so bad. You could see very young boys and girls working as porters in the market, others sweeping in shops and even washing cars. We sat down with the community to design a program to try and address the situation," Thotho says.

Back to school

Beatrice's story, however, has a happy ending. In June 2013, LWF started a project aimed at withdrawing children from child labor. It was funded by Terre de Hommes and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Beatrice was among the children to be included. Withdrawing her from the work at the kiosk and setting up a better living situation took concerted efforts by LWF, the District Children's Officer, community child protection structures, local chiefs and the police.

Beatrice has been adopted by her sister-in-law together with her two brothers. She rejoined school and is now attending sixth grade at Lopwarin Primary School, Kakuma Division. Her teachers say her academic performance is impressive.

To ensure Beatrice does not return to work, LWF also supported her new guardian with training on business management and start-up capital for a small business. Her guardian is currently operating a successful tailoring enterprise which allows her to meet all the family's needs. "It's important for the family to be self-reliant so as to deter the children from returning to child labor," Thotho says. So far the program has managed to rescue 600 children from child labor. They have been enrolled in school and provided with uniforms and other scholastic materials.

Having experienced the harsh reality of child labor, Beatrice is grateful for the opportunity to go back to school. "There are still very many children working in the camp and in town. When I grow up, I want to be a teacher so that I too can help change the lives of other children," she says.

Contribution by Fred Otieno, LWF Kenya-Djibouti

Disability is not inability – One woman’s story

LWF Nepal supports networks that empower persons living with disabilities

KANCHANPUR, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI)—Growing up for Balami Chaudhary was difficult. She has one leg and she lost her father when she was very young. She felt she was a burden to her family. But today the 21-year-old, who lives in Kanchanpur, western Nepal, supports herself as a tailor and is involved with the network of physically handicapped people in her village. “I am able to stand on my own feet,” she says.

She expresses gratitude to the Freed Kamaiya Women’s Development Forum (FKWDF), a partner agency of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal program for providing her with a three-month sewing and tailoring training, and for supporting her as she began her work.

Since 2013, LWF humanitarian development programs in Asia have focused on disability as a core commitment in each country program, drafting disability-inclusion policies and offering training for teachers and those requiring assistance towards earn their own incomes.

Such support incorporates capacity development, training in project management, policy and guidelines, and rights-based approaches to strategic planning and human rights policies.

As a disabled girl with only one leg, Chaudhary was dependent on her family, which includes her mother, one older brother and two younger brothers. She was forced to quit school at 10 because of family financial difficulties.

“Family members were not happy with me as I was unable to contribute to the household economy due to my physical condition. For a poor, excluded disabled girl surviving on what she could

do with her bare hands and uncertain about the future, FKWDF offered guidance, selected me for training, making a handicapped person a priority.”

At first Chaudhary was nervous and felt there was little hope. But, drawing on her determined spirit, she slowly gained courage. She knew nothing about knitting buttons, handling a sewing machine, cutting or folding clothes. But after one month, she started to feel more confident.

“As the result of that training, I now work mostly for lady customers sewing and hope to take advance training so I can offer new clients additional clothing items. There was no other alternative for earning a living. Before learning these skills I had a very miserable life,” she adds.

Today Chaudhary earns NPR 5000 (nearly USD 50) per month sewing clothes for people in her community. She is independent. The training pro-

vided by FKWDF with assistance from the LWF Nepal country program should support her in the coming years.

“I am very happy that I learned to sew and earn money even though I have a disability. Now I think that I can depend on my own skill and sewing capacity. There is no tension in my life and I have increased my willpower to learn more skills through such training programs.”

Married with a family of her own, Chaudhary has social standing in the community, a bank account in a nearby micro finance institution and is saving some money for the future.

As secretary for the local network of people with disabilities, she knows how fortunate she has been to get training from the LWF-supported FKWDF. “I would urge employers to look past people’s disabilities and value what they have to offer for their employment,” she adds.



Despite her disability, Balami Chaudhary can depend on the skills she has acquired to support herself and her family. Photo: LWF Nepal

Flood relief in Arauca, Colombia

“You are a helping hand”

ARAUCA, Colombia/ GENEVA (LWI) – “It is one thing to tell the story,” Alexis Mendoza says, “but it’s another thing to experience it. It is difficult to lose

your animals and have all your crops damaged. You already have very little and then, on top of everything, nature punishes us that way.”

The 39-year-old farmer lives with his mother, his wife and three young children in Cobalongos village in the municipality of Saravena, department



Alexis Mendoza and his family received a water filter in Saravena in early October, so they can improve their health after severe floods in May and June. Photo: LWF Colombia

of Arauca, located in the eastern part of Colombia near the border with Venezuela. His family was among the 1,296 households affected by the floods caused by the overflow of the Arauca, Bojabá, Banadías and Madre-vieja rivers during the months of May and June 2015. They lost their entire harvest of the staple cocoa, bananas and corn – in the muddy waters.

Although floods occur every year, they are usually mild and help main-

tain the area's fertility. However, they reached an unprecedented level and duration. In addition to material losses, the disaster reduced clean drinking water and increased the danger of waterborne diseases.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Colombia program and ACT Alliance responded by delivering 850 water filters to the affected families recently. The Mendoza family was among the recipients. LWF is also con-

ducting training on water, sanitation and hygiene, sustainable livelihoods and risk management, to prepare the families for future emergencies.

"These donations mean a lot to us, because we had not received support from anyone until you came," Alexis Mendoza says. "To me, you are a helping hand that is being extended without asking anything in return. You have shown us the light at the end of the tunnel."

While the immediate danger has been mitigated, several farmers like Mendoza still live in fear of the next disaster: "I was born and I raised on this piece of land, but never experienced anything like that before. We're wondering what will happen next year."

Although Alexis Mendoza has resumed farming, he incurred debts as he still had to pay for the seeds lost. "Some residents have even thought about leaving because they are afraid, but do not know where to go. It is very difficult," he adds with a worried face.

Contribution by Nubia Rojas, LWF Colombia. Translation and edits by LWF Office for Communication services.

Struggling to protect human rights in Arauca

"Work to do" in Colombia's context of conflict and displacement

ARAUCA, Colombia/ GENEVA (LWI)— "We were left alone with our children. Suddenly we had to be like both parents to them. It was a terrible burden and seemed to be getting worse each day," recalls Yaneth Perez, a leader of the Women's Association for Arauca (Asociación Amanecer de Mujeres por Arauca, AMAR), in Colombia.

Mass arrests in early 2000 after the Colombian government publicly accused the people of Arauca and local leaders of having links with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) movement marked a turning point for the inhabitants of the district, especially women.

Located in the eastern part of Colombia, near its border with Venezuela,

Arauca has about 250,000 inhabitants including Afro-Colombians, indigenous people and native peasant populations from neighboring towns. Some came looking for opportunities; others fled armed conflict between legal and illegal armed groups that have been dominant in the territory for decades.

The local population struggles to obtain basic services, such as drinking water, education and health. According to a United Nations report in August 2014, the forced recruitment of children, abductions, killings, displacement and extortion are common human rights violations in the department. Antipersonnel mines and unexploded devices pose an additional

danger to the local population and humanitarian organizations working in the area.

Learn to work together

Women are especially vulnerable to stigma and abuse by armed actors. With the male members of the family—fathers, brothers, sons and husbands—detained, most women are forced to organize themselves to defend their rights and to support their families.

Thanks to intervention by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its local partner, AMAR, the women of Arauca have turned a situation of helplessness into one of opportunity

for community leadership. They work with the LWF in a pineapple cultivation project aimed at generating income and empowering them and their families.

The AMAR women plan to grow more local varieties such as passion fruit, citrus, borojó, arazá, peach palm, avocado, guava and mango to generate more revenue. They want to join other fruit growers in the country and dream of selling fruit and pulp.

“We have work to do”

Since its inception in 1996 the Joel Sierra Human Rights Foundation—a social movement for the rights of farmers—has been advocating for the rights of the rural population to access public services, health and education, and defending them against abuse

from armed groups. The organization which started working with the LWF in 2007 is part of the Arauca women's pineapple cultivation project.

“Thanks to the support of the LWF we could successfully make visible the problems people face,” says Yilson Torres, member of the board of the Joel Sierra Human Rights Foundation. For him, as a social leader and human rights defender, it is important to continue to strengthen the organization in the department, to expand its influence throughout the region and continue working on the promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights to all people, especially peasants, who he believes are often marginalized.

“While there are people who violate their human rights, we have work to do,” emphasizes Yilson Torres.

“Not an office job”

Because of the constant violation of human rights, the fact the conflict fails to attract global attention and that the government fails to address the issue, LWF Colombia has contributed to the care and protection of people affected by armed conflict.

LWF Colombia is working with the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights-PCHR East Region on the project “Building Pathways of Peace in our Territory.” The initiative seeks to involve the local people in academic and recreational activities, and share information about peace building.

As part of the peace project, the rural population receives training through workshops on human rights, land rights and international humanitarian law so they can demand their rights. These workshops provide opportunities to discuss common issues, generate proposals and in some villages, lead to the establishment of human rights committees.

“It's not an easy job,” says Guillermo Diaz, PCHR legal representative in Arauca. “Being a human rights defender is not a desk job. It requires a lot of dedication and sacrifice, but our people deserve that their dignity is respected and that their voices are heard.”

Contribution by Nubia Rojas, LWF Colombia



Colombian women have learnt how to demand their human rights, through AMAR.
Photo: LWF Colombia

Human Rights: Working for a just society

How a youth network changes society in Central America

VILLANUEVA, Nicaragua/GENEVA (LWI)—“The activities I participated in have allowed me to strengthen my self-esteem and learn to value myself as a woman,” says Vanessa Martinez, a 20-year old from San Ramon, a community of Villanueva municipality in Chinandega, Nicaragua.

Martinez has been taking part in socio-educational activities run by the

network “Youth Promoting Success in Villanueva” since March 2014.

Martinez comes from a close-knit farming family. During the day, she helps with farm chores, and in the evenings she sells cosmetics and accessories for women. The income goes towards college fees for her studies in social work, now in the third year. “I

feel encouraged. I love to be involved in activities because I acquire knowledge, allowing me to share with other youth in the community,” she says.

Identity and autonomy

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Central America program, together

with the Association for Survival and Local Development, runs the network, which aims to strengthen young people in three communities each in the municipalities of Villanueva and Somotillo.

Young people attend workshops, cinema forums and camps on topics such as identity and autonomy in decision-making, expression of ideas, and involvement in community affairs.

“Participating in sexuality workshops has allowed me to reflect on gender roles,” Martinez says. “I learned to value myself as a woman and to express limits to my partner about my physical integrity but also because I do not want to be dependent on him. I have my own goals to achieve as a woman and want to make it clear that I am not his employee, that we must share responsibilities at home.”

The communities in which LWF is running the youth workshops are still very traditional. It is usually the men and elderly people who make the decisions. Martinez is one of the young people who try to change that.

“In my family there are several men and when they make a macho comment I try to tell them that this is not right, although it is difficult. I am struggling to change their attitude,” she says.



Camp of the “Networks in motion” project. Photo: LWF Central America

“It helps to be involved in community activities where I can easily express my ideas and discuss the problems of the community. It’s good to be organized in a youth network where we can continue working for change, for a more just society with gender equality and recognition of women’s work.”

Bringing about economic change

The economy in San Ramon is mainly based on agriculture and livestock. Most families live by cultivating basic grains, such as corn and sesame, al-

though droughts in recent years have forced the inhabitants to seek other sources of income.

The youth workshops help young people to look for alternative means of income and to think about new business models.

Martinez dreams of running her own business. “I dream that we will have a cooperative of young entrepreneurs,” she says. “Another of my goals is to finish my studies and so implement my knowledge of social work in the community.”

Healing wounds of isolation and deprivation

Myanmar Lutheran churches contribution to education in the country

YANGON, Myanmar/GENEVA (LWI) – Shwe Lone wanted to go to school so he could help his congregation with its spiritual and community work in the village of Pyaingcho in Myanmar – but he wasn’t sure how it could happen.

“One day an old man told me to attend the Bible school in Yangon. But, I had no money for my studies. God knew my desires. God opened the door to my life in 2015 to study at the lay leaders training program in Yangon. Now I’m ready to go and assist my pastor,” the 20-year-old said.

The Myanmar Lutheran Church (MLC) runs the training program with support from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It is one of the first LWF projects in the country targeting small vulnerable churches at a time of great change.

LWF is providing EUR 51,700 for three years for the church’s eight-month training program for 27 lay leaders on spiritual and practical issues including Bible studies, community building and organic farming.

Myanmar is experiencing major political transition. After decades of

military rule, for the first time since 1990 the country held open elections on 8 November. Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy gained a majority in parliamentary and presidential voting.

While this political evolution offers hope of a brighter future, the socio-economic situation in Myanmar remains critical and living standards have remained unchanged for most of the population.

“Previous international isolation and inadequate economic policies have left

open wounds that will be difficult to heal,” said Ilona Dorji, LWF secretary for project coordination and monitoring at the Department for Mission and Development (DMD), during an assessment visit to projects implemented by the four LWF member churches in Myanmar.

The Lutheran Church of Myanmar (LCM) runs the Educational Rights for Marginalized Children project, which promotes education, helps children of marginalized communities attend school and advocates for their rights.

“It is a very positive contribution to the cause for education in the country,” Dorji said of the LCM- managed Hope Education Center, which the LWF supports with EUR 44,800 over a period of three years.

In Myanmar, public school teachers provide after-school tuition in order to help children get better results and also supplement their income. LWF pays the salary of five teachers at the center which provides free afterschool classes five days a week for 25 children and kindergarten classes for 15 children.

“These are just some concrete examples of how the LWF affirms its

strong commitment to small and vulnerable grassroots churches to build their capacity. This is what our worldwide Lutheran communion is all about, supporting one another,” Dorji said.

Thein Aye, an 18-year-old who was displaced from her village because of the armed conflict between the Arakan rebels and the government troops, is thankful for such interventions by the MLC, which paid for her transport.

“I came here with an empty but sincere heart to study His words and to share about His love to the nations (...) and I’m so thankful to you for supporting this training,” she told the LWF team.

The four LWF member churches also include the Mara Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar (Lutheran Bethlehem Church), which altogether have around 28,000 members.



Thanks to the work of the Lutheran churches in Myanmar, children from marginalized communities can go to school and aspire to a brighter future. Photo: LWF/I. Dorji

Help for traumatized women in Iraq

“Feel safe, free, and express themselves”

DOHUK, Iraq/ GENEVA (LWI) – When the Islamic State militia (IS) advanced on Asna’s (not her real name) village in the Sinjar mountains, her neighbor convinced the Yazidi family to stay. “I will take care of you, nobody will harm you,” their neighbor and friend, promised them. An hour later he knocked on their door again: “You have to leave now, we cannot protect you anymore. IS is capturing women and girls.”

The warning came too late. 17-year-old Asna and her entire family were captured and separated. The girl was under the custody of the militia fighters who abused her until she managed to escape. Today, she is one of the women who regularly visit a women-friendly

space run by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Northern Iraq. She receives counseling, medical treatment and psychosocial support to help her survive what she has been through.

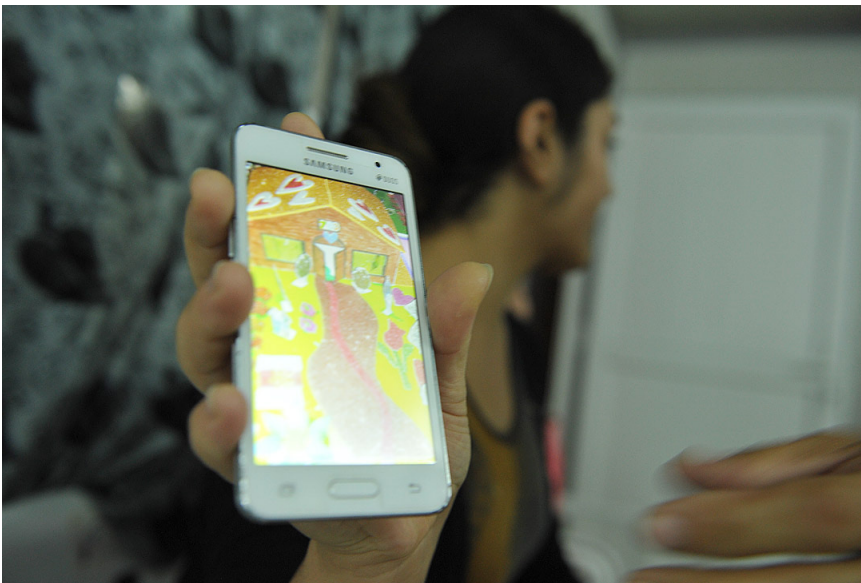
“She is a non-believer”

Sitting in the container used as a women-friendly space together with a cousin, Asna relates her story. After the militia had captured the family and separated women and men, Asna, her mother and sisters were imprisoned in a school. One of the militia leaders took Asna and two 13-year olds to his house, where she was locked up in the bathroom, as her captor took the

other girls with him. After a week and a failed attempt to escape, Asna was taken to another fighter’s place.

“I stayed with that man and his wife and children for two months”, she recalls. “Every time I asked about my family, he would beat me. He raped me in his home, but his wife only said: She’s a non-believer, you can do with her what you like. One evening, when her captor let down his guard, she jumped out the window and ran down the streets of Mosul city in search for help.

This time she was lucky, someone took her in, called her uncles and with a fake ID helped her to get out of the IS occupied territory and into the



A house with many colors and hearts: Asna (not her real name) shows a painting she made in one of the crafts workshops on her mobile phone. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

Kurdish Autonomous region, where her relatives were. She now lives in a camp near Dohuk, like other displaced people sharing a crowded tent with distant relatives.

“She is very precious to us”

Asna has come a long way since then. “When she first came here, she was depressed and thought about killing herself. Every day we encouraged her

to continue living,” says Nadia Braim Morad, supervisor of the LWF women-friendly space. The LWF counseling and other activities help Asna to escape her congested living situation and her memories for a few hours each day. “We tell the women to be especially careful with her. She is very precious to us,” Morad says.

Asna was asked to participate in workshops and arts, to draw and to engage with other women in the center.

She has made friends and sometimes even flashes a smile. She dreams of her own sewing machine and a job making clothes. She would like to finish school, but is still too traumatized to engage with people who speak Arabic. Her way back into life is done in many careful little steps.

“We could help to make her see that she is not alone,” Morad says. “She comes here every day. There is another girl with a similar experience. We try to make them feel safe, to feel free and to be able to express herself.”

Most of the time, Asna’s thoughts are on her family which she has not seen since that fateful day she was captured. She still hopes to be reunited with them. “I can’t stop thinking about my mother and sisters. I don’t know if my parents are still alive,” she says. “I pray to God that I will see my family again.”

LWF works with local partners the Jiyana Foundation to give counseling and psychosocial support to traumatized women and girls. Please support our work to protect these women and girls from further harassment, deprivation and suicide.

LWF supports winterization in Northern Iraq

“Every day feels like dying”

DOHUK, Iraq/ GENEVA (LWI) – “We thought it would be a few days, until things calm down”, Nadine says. “My parents said: Go visit your uncle. It’s just a short field trip. That field trip has been lasting for a year and a half now”.

The young woman has been living in Davudiya refugee camp, Northern Iraq, for a year. The Christian family fled from their home village, Bartolla, in August 2014, when IS militia started advancing on the Ninewa plain. They now live in a camp for internally displaced people in Kurdistan – together with Yazidi, Muslim and Turkman families. All of them fled from a militant group who killed and enslaved everyone who did not share their faith.

Davudiya camp, located about an hour from the Kurdish city of Dohuk, Northern Iraq, is one of the camps supported by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF installed water pipes, storage tanks and latrines and provided people with hygiene kits. “Thank you to all the people who are helping us,” Nadine’s father Theriakos says. “We really appreciate that. This is a stupid war of narrow-minded people”.

Young people want to leave

The family is among the lucky ones to have a container to sleep in – the camp’s location in the mountains makes it impossible to house people in tents like in the 17

other camps for displaced people around Dohuk. In winter, the temperature drops below zero and it snows. Already cool autumn rains have turned the streets and grounds within the camp into a mud pit, where children play, some of them still wearing sandals and socks. In the containers, families of 4-6 people share a small room for sleeping.

There is no work for the people in the camp, many of whom do not speak the local Kurdish language. Theriakos’ wife Sara, a nurse, sometimes helps neighbors who have fallen ill and has applied with the camp management to work at the health post. Other than that, the family passes the time visiting neighbors and playing cards.



The LWF is helping camp residents prepare for winter in northern Iraq. LWF/Seivan Salim

“We don’t know how to continue like this”, Theriakos says. “I am an old man, I want to stay, but the young people want to leave.” While he speaks, images of immigrants crossing borders in Europe can be seen on TV in the small room, where ten people have assembled around an improvised dinner table.

Safe but exhausted

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 8.2 million people in Northern Iraq need humanitarian assistance as a result of the IS advance and terror. Around the city of Dohuk 18 camps have been set up for internally displaced people, four more for refugees, housing more than 550,000 people.

Most of them will spend a second winter in extremely run-down tents which were only meant as a short-term solution. More than 700,000 people live outside camps, many of them in communal shelters, churches and unfinished buildings.

“It’s difficult for us. Nobody knows us, nobody understands us”, 75-year-old Rejena Pulse Isaa says. She and her son, who lost a leg in the Iraq-Iran war, share a room in a sports center with an elderly couple: Four people on about/approximately 16 square meters. They have pinned church calendars and images of saints on the walls, above the piles of blankets and household items they received in previous distributions. Outside, in the hall, families have used cardboard

boxes to build walls about one meter high and separate some private space.

Dread of winter

The situation is even more congested in St Peter and Paul church, Dohuk. The congregation has taken in nine families. 31 people live in one room, the noise level is exhausting, men, women and children have black circles under their eyes. “We feel safe here, but we are very tired,” Ban, 48 years old and mother to two girls says. Her 12-year-old daughter will miss this school year, as there are not enough classrooms in Dohuk. “Winter is coming, the toilets are outside and it gets very cold in here”, another mother says. “We do not have enough warm clothing for the children”.

Even the families with small children are now thinking about making the dangerous journey to Europe. “We are afraid, we know we can die crossing the Mediterranean”, they say. “But we prefer that to staying here. Here, every day feels like dying.”

LWF is supporting the IDP and refugees in and around Dohuk with food boxes, winter clothing, hygiene kits, water and sanitation, kerosene and psychosocial support. The ACT alliance has issued a new appeal, calling for donations to distribute food, winter clothing and kerosene for heaters to 400,000 IDP and refugees around Dohuk.

The youngest victims of conflict

How children in Iraq deal with violence and displacement

DOHUK, Iraq/ GENEVA (LWI) – At age 12, Besna has already learned what it means to lose your home. “I miss my books and things, my video games and my laptop,” the girl with the green T-Shirt says. “At home, I could just go out and play with my friends. But I have no home here, and I don’t know where my friends are. I heard one of them lives in France now.”

Besna is the eldest of the six children who live with their families

in St Peter and Paul church, Dohuk. The 51 people who share one room have fenced off their living areas with donated furniture to have some space of their own. What looks like children were trying to build a hut with some furniture, has been the dire reality for these eight families since Mosul was taken by IS militia in June 2014. There are infants and adults, parents and grandparents, all sharing two bathrooms and a small kitchen.

No school, no place to play

Like everybody else sheltered in this place, Besna has dark circles under her eyes, testament of exhaustion and a lack of sleep for a long time. “It is very loud here,” she says. As the cold season approaches, the people are spending more and more time indoors. Although the school term started two months ago, the blue backpacks lie unused on the sofas and makeshift shelves.

After being home to displaced people for months, many schools in Dohuk are in need of repair. The remaining classrooms are crowded with local children and those from displaced families, who learn in two shifts each day. Until the situation is resolved, Besna and the other children in St Peter and Paul will have to study on their own.

"This situation is most difficult for the children," Nura, a mother to two other children in St Peter and Paul, says. "They don't have a place to play, to do homework, they can't sleep." When she fled Mosul, her youngest child was 14 months old.

Nightmares from the shooting

About an hour from Dohuk in the rural area of Chamanke, Aqela Ibrahim is trying to put her nine-month-old baby niece down for an afternoon nap. The baby girl was born in the shelter with no medical assistance to her mother, save for the other women who share the space. "Thank God we are still alive," Majeed Alli, the child's father, says. "When we fled there was shooting and bombing, my [other] daughters were scared. At night they still cry out in their sleep, they stay awake because they fear the nightmares."

The living situation in Chamanke is similar to Dohuk's, the only difference is that families here have partitioned rooms with high walls of cardboard and plywood. A TV in the center of the communal space is the only entertainment. Wailing children, scolding adults and the TV news can be heard everywhere.

As Majeed Alli speaks, his elder daughters disappear behind one of the cardboard doors and return soon after in grey school uniforms and blue backpacks: The displaced children attend school in the afternoon, as the

local school cannot accommodate all of them at the same time.

"We are lions"

"Who are you?" the teacher asks the students by way of greeting. "We are Kurdish! We are lions!" the children shout back with one voice. The 70 students in the afternoon classes are from families which were displaced from Sinjar. Teacher Saad Hassan Ahmed is a refugee in his own country himself; he even knows some of the students from home. "It is hard for them," he says. "They are not learning well." Many students live in congested communal shelters; there is no quiet space for homework.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) provides the students' families with food, clothing and sanitation items. The United Nations gives the students, school uniforms and the trademark blue backpacks containing books and stationery. But while the material aid helps to ensure their school attendance, there is no undoing

the memories the children carry with them. According to the teachers, they often talk of home, of friends and toys they left behind, and of the things they experienced when they had to flee.

"Months later they still remember vividly," Ahmed says. "My children sometimes shout in their sleep: They're coming! We passed dead people when we fled, and they asked me: 'Why are they sleeping?'" All the teachers in the school noticed the children's fatigue, they are often tired and have trouble concentrating, Ahmed adds. "We teachers are traumatized; we forget things because of what happened. Imagine what it is like for the children."

LWF is supporting displaced families in Northern Iraq with food, sanitary items and other relief goods such as winter clothing. LWF also runs women-friendly spaces where women and children can engage in arts and crafts and receive psychosocial support. Together with its local partner, the Jiyan Foundation, LWF provides counseling and psychological support for traumatized people.



Shemaa (8) and Bushra (9) getting ready for school. The girls and their family live in a communal shelter with 31 other people. Photo: LWF/ Seivan Salim

Developing a culture of peace

LWF Peace Oasis in Jordan counters the effects of Syrian war

AL Mafraq, Jordan/ GENEVA (LWI) – "I wish to become a teacher," Salam says. The

six-year-old girl has just started school and is one of the many children visit-

ing the Peace Oasis in Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan. The Peace Oasis, a

psychosocial center run by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), offers peacebuilding activities and workshops to children and youth in the camp.

Five years after the start of the war in Syria, life in Za'atari has become difficult for the more than 79,000 Syrian refugees in the camp and the thousands who live in the neighboring host community Al Mafraq. On top of often traumatizing experiences like witnessing atrocities at home, the refugees from Syria have to deal with the challenges of surviving as refugees and the prospect of an uncertain future.

Arts, music, conflict mitigation

Salam's father was arrested by the Syrian regime more than three years ago. The family has not heard from him since. Salam's brother was killed at the age of 20 in military clashes between the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian regime in Dar'aa. Salam's life in the camp consists of attending school and playing with the other children after school hours. Although she smiles most of the time, Salam says she misses her home in Syria and most of all, her father.

The LWF Peace Oasis provides psychosocial support to youth and children like Salam. It is a safe and child friendly space, where children and youth participate in activities such as drama, visual arts, games, group discussions, and workshops on conflict mitigation skills. They learn communication skills, solve problems and build their self-esteem. There are clubs and activities such as art, music, karate, football and computer courses.

The Peace Oasis program aims to develop a culture of peace and to build resilience in dealing with the impacts of the conflict situation. The need is great. "The refugees often say that the overall situation has deteriorated over the past year. They feel that there are a lack of opportunities for children and few, if any, spaces for children, youth and adults to escape their worsening household conditions," Rachel Luce, the LWF Team Leader in Jordan, says.

Prevent lasting effects of trauma

Increased stress levels have also contributed to a rise in gender-based violence. Many Syrian women and girls are afraid to walk to school, the washrooms, the store or anywhere else to access services. Early marriage is increasingly a concern, as families believe marriage contracts protect their daughters. In 2016 therefore, LWF plans to offer workshops to caregivers

on child protection, to alert them to the dangers of child labour, the need for child education, and to engage in discussions on abuse, gender-based violence and child marriage.

"Conflict can have serious long-term effects on the mental health of children and youth," Dawid Odén, LWF Program Support Officer in Jordan, says. "They manifest later as social isolation, self-harm, aggression and depression. These effects can impact an entire generation of young people and threaten future peace and development in areas recovering from conflict."

During 2015 LWF psychosocial work reached 2662 Syrian refugees in Za'atari camp. LWF has also improved the infrastructure of the Peace Oasis by covering the sports field with artificial grass to make it a safer place for boys and girls to benefit from physical exercise.

Contribution by Dawid Odén, LWF Jordan. Edited by LWF Communications.



Salam (left, in red T-Shirt) with her grandmother and younger sister in their shelter in Za'atari camp. Photo: LWF Jordan/D. Odén

Food support for refugees and hosts in Jordan

Relieving the burden of hunger

AL MAFRAQ, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI) – Raba'a's children were hungry, but they didn't complain. They knew the pressure their mother was under to provide for the

family. "They notice there's a difference in the amount of food I give them, but they keep quiet because they know the situation," she says.

It is a heartbreaking decision for any mother to give her children less food. But Raba'a didn't have much of a choice until she started receiving vouchers she



Raba'a explains the situation in her family. Photo: Jennifer Clark, CLWR

can redeem for food at local grocery stores. The widowed mother of four children is one of the participants in The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) cash assistance program funded by Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) in Jordan.

Tackling two responsibilities

Her family had lived in the Yarmouk neighborhood of Damascus for about 10 years when they fled the Syrian war for safety in Jordan. Their home has been laid to waste; the remaining residents in Yarmouk are currently under siege and enduring horrific conditions.

Raba'a became a single mother after her husband died of cancer shortly after they arrived in Jordan. "I'm tackling two responsibilities: mother in the house, and father outside the home," who needs to work and look after expenses, she says.

To be able to support her family, she enrolled in a hair-dressing course given

by a local non-governmental organization. She works from home; business is better in the summer, she says. She does not earn much, but she says it's enough to pay rent, utilities and her children's expenses, like school supplies.

Nevertheless, it's a bare new home for herself, her two daughters (ages 15 and 11) and her two sons (ages 9 and 6). They have no furniture in the two rooms she rents. When you add in the food needs of a young family on a low income, it's a struggle to make ends meet.

Food vouchers for the most vulnerable

Raba'a's family is especially vulnerable since they are of Palestinian descent. Instead of receiving food aid from the United Nations World Food Program, which supports Syrian refugees, they fall under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which supports Palestinians. UNRWA how-

ever is seriously underfunded and has limited resources to help Palestinians who have fled homes in Syria.

The food voucher programs in Jordan aim to fill this gap. Through agreements with UNRWA and the Jordanian government, LWF can distribute food vouchers to Palestinian-Syrians. Since last month, Raba'a receives 60 Jordanian dinars (about USD 110) each month for six months to help feed her family.

"The vouchers relieve some of the burdens I have," she says. They are simple to redeem at grocery stores in her area and allow her to cover the basics: rice, sugar, cooking oil, frozen vegetables, milk and sometimes meat. She says she relies on the vouchers for about 60 per cent of her family's food needs.

"I feel more relaxed because I've secured food for my kids. I can start thinking more about how I can support my kids in other ways," Raba'a says.

The support from CLWR and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank enables the LWF to provide vouchers to supplement the nutrition requirements of 4,700 Palestinian-Syrians and a number of vulnerable Jordanians in Mafraq, Zarqa, East Amman and Irbid Governorates in Jordan. This way the needs of both the refugees and the over-burdened Jordanian host communities are addressed.

Contribution by Jennifer Clark, Communications Officer, Canadian Lutheran World Relief. Minor edits by LWF Communications.

See original article on <https://clwr.wordpress.com/2015/11/13/relieving-the-burden-of-hunger/>

Cry and dance at the same time

Lutheran women bishops visit Za'atari camp, Jordan

AL MAFRAQ, Jordan/ GENEVA (LWI) – "One moment you want to cry, the other you want to dance," Antje Jackelen, Archbishop of the Church of Sweden (CoS), summed up her impressions.

"We have seen both the strength and the vulnerability of life, hope and destroyed lives."

Together with Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church of America (ELCA) and LWF Vice President Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas, former president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELC), the Swedish Archbishop on 14 December visited



Rev. Dr. Gloria Rojas Vargas, LWF Vice President and former president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, shares a joke with little Ahmad at the LWF Peace Oasis in Za'atari refugee camp. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

the LWF Peace Oasis in Za'atari camp. At this center, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) offers psychosocial support through workshops, training, music and crafts to Syrian refugees in the camp.

“They miss home”

“The Syrian refugees are incredibly resilient,” Bishop Eaton recalls the visit. “We met a family where the father lost two of his sons in the Syrian war. He had worked 30 years to have his own farm and lost it all. A young girl was showing me images of burned bodies on her cellphone. And yet the parents are doing everything to keep their children engaged and out of trouble. Some have painted their houses, trying to bring some beauty to such a stark place. It’s incredible,” she said.

“They miss home, you can tell that. Still they were hopeful, they wanted to return,” she added.

The Lutheran leaders also met with Syrian families as well as three imams from the refugee camp. “It was very important to hear and see emotionally,” said Rojas. “I have seen people with hope and peace, but also with pain, because their families have been separated. In my home church, we are not so much aware. When the media talks about the Middle East, it’s mostly about terrorism.”

Populists frame discourse of immigration

The three church leaders emphasized the need to not let “populist groups frame the discourse about immigration,” as Jackelen put it.

“In Europe, we have all these discussions about ‘streams of refugees’ now,” she said. “What we saw were ordinary families. It makes you think about the fact that Jordan with its infrastructure is receiving so many, and in spite of our

wealth, our systems in Europe are not geared for this sort of challenge.”

Rojas recalled the time when many Chileans themselves were refugees during the time of the military dictatorship. “We should know how that feels,” she said. “They are not in a good situation, and they must be allowed to go home.”

“The suffering of the people in Syria is real. Bombs are falling on these people who just want to live their lives,” the ELCA presiding bishop Eaton said.

Cross of life with those who are suffering

The bishops also voiced their appreciation of and pride in the work of the local LWF staff, many of whom are Syrian volunteers from Jordan who are now devoting spare time to help their countrymen and –women in need. “I am especially thankful for their work,” Rev Rojas said. “They have empathy for the pain the refugees must feel, and are very committed. I also compliment the work of the communion office to promote peace and justice.”

“We believe that the cross of life is where there is suffering,” Bishop Eaton said. “It certainly is in that camp in Jordan, and it’s our calling in God’s world to alleviate these people’s suffering.”

Za’atari camp in Jordan is home to almost 80,000 refugees from Syria. The LWF Peace Oasis in 2015 has provided psychosocial support to 2,662 people in the camp. Activities are a combination of activities such as sports, music, arts and crafts and workshops for conflict mitigation, problem-solving and building of self-esteem.

Published and distributed by:
The Lutheran World Federation
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel. +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org

