



THE
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LWF COUNCIL STATEMENTS JUNE 2024

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1. LWF Council statement on the Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Lutheran World Federation Council, meeting under the theme 'Abound in Hope – Rom 15:13' issues the following statement:

The Council recognizes that faith, religion and belief are gifts with a great potential to nurture our society and communities. It is for that reason that the Freedom of Religion or Belief is included in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our own Christian Lutheran faith and its values inspire and guide us, enabling us to respond to contemporary challenges and to equip ourselves for a more vibrant and effective witness.

The Council is concerned that over several years, the freedom of millions of people to have and to express their belief individually or collectively has been severely eroded and in some contexts completely violated and denied for example through actions by government or other religious groups. The Council particularly stands with churches which are marginalized in their societies. The Council expresses its solidarity with people from all faiths and none across the world affected by suppressions and oppression.

The Council acknowledges that the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief has clear gender dimensions. Women's bodies are often used as battlefields for the honor of the communities and women's right to choose their religion, for instance when they marry, is often violated.

The Council calls for greater solidarity with and between people of all faiths affected by violations of their Freedom of Religion or Belief around the world and affirms the ongoing process of developing a report on the Freedom of Religion and Belief led by the LWF and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The Council calls on governments, as the primary duty bearer for ensuring this right, and the international community to:

- Ensure that all people enjoy the right to practice their faith and belief freely without any hinderance or interference.
- Pay particular attention to the rights and freedoms of faith and religious groups who are marginalized to ensure that they are protected from targeting, attacks, and systematic discrimination.
- Recognize, affirm and support the contribution of faith communities and faith-based actors to the well-being of communities within their countries and across the world.
- Ensure that women of all religions enjoy the freedom to choose religion freely without being subjected to limitations or oppression, including honor-based threats and violence.

2. LWF Council statement on the war against Ukraine

The Lutheran World Federation Council, meeting under the theme 'Abound in Hope – Rom 15:13' issues the following statement:

The Council finds it appalling that Russia's war against Ukraine has persisted since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022. The Council laments the massive casualties, suffering and forcible displacement of almost 10 million people due to this ongoing war and reiterates its deep concern about its impact now and in the years to come.

The Council strongly rejects the instrumentalization of the word 'holy' by the Russian Orthodox Church to declare and justify the war against Ukraine as a 'holy war'.

The Council stands in solidarity with and is encouraged by the work of the LWF member church, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine and the LWF World Service country programs to support the people affected by the war. The Council is grateful for the solidarity visit of the LWF President, the General Secretary, together with other leaders from the communion to Ukraine. The Council furthermore affirms the work of Lutheran churches and partners in neighboring countries and across the world that continue to respond through humanitarian assistance, pastoral care, advocacy and solidarity.

The Council calls for:

- An end to the war against Ukraine and a withdrawal of the Russian military from Ukrainian territories, in accordance with the principle of territorial integrity as enshrined in the UN Charter
- The parties to the armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and human rights.

The international community to continue humanitarian support to the affected parts of Ukraine to ensure that the people affected by the conflict are assisted and protected according to humanitarian principles.

Continued support for internally displaced persons and refugees from Ukraine by churches and societies in neighboring countries and beyond.

3. LWF Council call for justice and peace in the context of global conflicts

The Lutheran World Federation Council, meeting under the theme 'Abound in Hope – Rom 15:13' issues the following statement:

The Council notes with deep concern the dramatic escalation of armed conflicts in every region of the world and the negative global trends of violence, injustices, including based on gender, displacement of people, humanitarian and climate crises and threats to democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The Council is appalled by the overall lack of sound political leadership at national, regional and global levels, which has jeopardized the ability of the institutions at all levels to adequately respond to crises and challenges facing society. The Council decries the fact that some members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council are involved in warfare, which has negatively impacted on the Security Council's ability to deliver on its mandate. These members must end the wars immediately and move to tables of dialogue and peace. The Council welcomes the ongoing intergovernmental processes related to the reform of the UN Security Council.

The Council recognizes the UN Secretary General's call for the Summit of the Future and its planned outcome, the Pact of the Future, and notes their potential to meaningfully address the ongoing intersecting global crises.

As the LWF launches its global strategy that will guide programs and work until 2031, the Council affirms the need to cultivate and share hope at all levels. The Council reaffirms the global solidarity shown by the global communion and calls on member churches of the LWF to continue their work on responsible theology, diakonia, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

In line with the work, presence and ministries of The Lutheran World Federation and its member churches, the Council calls on the international community to:

- Support urgent action at community, national and international levels to address the ongoing violence, conflicts and wars in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Central America, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, the Korean Peninsula, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, Palestine, the South China Sea, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and other countries.
- Provide stronger, predictable, sustainable and more meaningful support for people and communities affected by crises globally through adequate humanitarian assistance, protection and livelihood support.
- Ensure that the Summit of the Future and the Pact of the Future that will be issued by member states of the United Nations in September 2024 brings hope and prioritizes the protection and dignity of the people and communities affected by humanitarian crises, displacement, poverty, hunger, conflicts, climate change and violation of human rights.
- Redouble its effort toward addressing the scandalous reality of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, and other forms of discrimination and violence including gender.

4. LWF Council statement on the crisis in Gaza, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Israel

The Lutheran World Federation Council, meeting under the theme 'Abound in Hope – Rom 15:13' issues the following statement:

The Council is horrified about the ongoing war which is destroying the dignity, lives, and livelihoods of the people living in Palestine and Israel especially those living in Gaza. The violence has been escalated by the brutal killing and hostage-taking by Hamas, by Israel's war on Gaza, which have brutally killed tens of thousands of people, and by the holding of countless Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons without charge. All of this has further deepened the crises in the region. Consistent with the LWF longstanding witness, the Council condemns the violations of International Humanitarian Law, human rights and human dignity, including sexual and gender-based violence the destruction of civilian infrastructure including homes, hospitals, schools, and religious sites.

The Council expresses sympathy and prays for the individuals, families and communities who have lost loved ones, suffered injuries, have been displaced from their homes and who are affected in other ways by the ongoing war. The Council notes with deep concern the huge and disproportionate impact this crisis continues to have on children. The Council further expresses its solidarity with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land whose situation, presence and access to their holy sites has significantly deteriorated and is at permanent risk.

The Council reaffirms the statement of the LWF Thirteenth Assembly, noting the appeal of the church leaders in Jerusalem who expressed the "growing fear that the already diminished Christian presence could disappear altogether from the Holy Land." The war is affecting all parts of the land including the West Bank and Jerusalem where the threat and reality of settler violence is creating insecurity and fear.

The LWF is also deeply concerned that the war in Gaza has led to increased polarization across the world, rekindling hate against Muslim, Jewish, Palestinian and Israeli people, leading to instances of violence against individuals and communities.

The Council is grateful to and reaffirms its strong support to and solidarity with the LWF member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and in the Holy Land in its ministry, witness and service during these challenging times and recognizes its continuous work and outspokenness on the war. Similarly, the Council also commends the LWF World Service program in Jerusalem for exemplary work, particularly the provision of specialized healthcare to the Palestinian people through the Augusta Victoria Hospital. The Council also expresses its support and appreciation to other member churches who have called for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid and the release of all hostages and prisoners.

The Council believes that there is hope for an end to the war and therefore calls on:

- The warring parties to agree on an immediate ceasefire and cessation of all hostilities to pave way for unimpeded humanitarian access and protection of the affected people and aid workers.
- Hamas to immediately release all hostages it is holding.
- Israel to immediately withdraw its forces from Gaza, and to release all the prisoners it is holding without charge.
- Israel to guarantee access to Jerusalem for patients from Gaza and the West Bank seeking medical services and for staff working at the Augusta Victoria Hospital and other hospitals in Jerusalem.

- The warring parties in particular, and other national, regional and international actors to respect International Humanitarian Law and particularly ensure the safety, dignity and human rights of the affected populations.
- The international community to support the rebuilding of Gaza and its social infrastructure.
- Israel to prosecute and prevent settler violence in Jerusalem and Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- The international community to redouble its efforts toward finding a lasting solution to the crisis in Israel/Palestine. We renew our call for an end to the occupation and for the two-state solution as has been envisaged and agreed upon by the Oslo Accords and numerous UN resolutions.
- The LWF and its member churches to address the scourge of anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish, anti-Palestinian and anti-Israeli hate in church and society.

5. LWF Council statement on transparent, participatory and accountable governance

The Lutheran World Federation Council, meeting under the theme 'Abound in Hope – Rom 15:13' issues the following statement:

The Council affirms the importance of transparency, equal participation and accountability in governance and leadership at all levels for a peaceful co-existence and the advancement of public good and well-being for all people nationally and internationally.

The Council expresses its concerns over the threats to these principles and values in today's world. The pervasive governance crisis is due to multiple violations of human rights, including unjust economic and legal systems, the persecution and killings of human rights defenders, journalists, environmental defenders, the shrinking of civil society space, and many other factors.

The Council reaffirms the crucial role and importance of having independent judicial and representative parliamentary institutions, free and fair democratic elections, effective mechanisms to hold public authorities accountable, freedom of the press, and the strengthening of multilateral institutions.

The Council recognizes the role of member churches in the public space and encourages them to strengthen ecumenical, interfaith and civil society alliances to advance transparency, equal participation and accountability globally and in their contexts.

The LWF Council calls on governments and the international community to:

- Strengthen fair and equal governance processes and systems at national levels, including independent, accountable and transparent institutions.
- Promote inclusive and pluralistic societies and effective participation of civil society, including churches and other faith actors in decision making processes.
- Strengthen multilateralism, peaceful solution of conflicts and support to United Nations systems and processes.
- Respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including the protection of human rights defenders, according to international and regional instruments and standards.