

ADDRESS
OF THE LWF PRESIDENT
ARCHBISHOP DR PANTI FILIBUS MUSA

- (1) My dear fellow Council members and advisers, observers, ecumenical guests, and representatives from the network of LWF partners, dear friends, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,
- (2) Welcome! Here we are, by the grace of God. Together, despite physical distance. Connecting with each other, despite the challenging disruptions of these times. Following God's call to be one, despite tensions and polarizing forces that get hold of people and communities and push them apart. Indeed, here we are by the grace of God!
- (3) "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope". And "The Spirit creates – the Spirit reconciles – the Spirit renews". I am so deeply grateful for the Assembly Committee, which has been undertaking its work online, not able to meet in person, but nonetheless bringing forth beautiful gifts for our journey as a communion, such as the theme and sub-theme of our Thirteenth Assembly in the city of Krakow, Poland in September 2023.
- (4) I couldn't think of a theme more fitting to our time. We can't stress enough the oneness of our world, of the human family, of the one **body**, which the Triune God forms through Baptism and ongoing calling. A oneness, which is focused on continuing to include in order to be one. Therefore concerned about those who have been left out or excluded. A oneness driven by the powerful biblical narrative of the Good Shepherd, who went out again to look for the *one*, knowing that this one missing was such an important member of the community. So important that it couldn't be lost, because without that one sheep, the whole community would be incomplete. This is what the crucified Christ stands for. This is what the cross stands for.
- (5) Into this journey we have been drawn by the power of the Holy **Spirit**, who creates, reconciles and renews us. What a privilege, indeed. Like the fishermen then, we are called today into new journeys, asked to shift, to let go, to leave behind so that we can open up our lives for the transforming presence of God in our world, sharing the gifts of new life as we receive them through Christ.
- (6) In recent years, we have been speaking more in our communion about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. The Spirit that creates, reconciles, and renews. That is a good development which helps us uncover the sources that nurture our lives and our witness as people of faith and as churches. We are endowed with a new spirit, one we cannot produce from within ourselves, but which we need to receive as a gift. The Holy Spirit makes us less fearful for the new, because we pray for the Holy Spirit to come so that we and the world are all renewed. The Holy Spirit steers our hearts, minds, and actions towards reconciliation with God, among us and with God's good creation.
- (7) And therefore we have one **hope**. I believe this is one of the most powerful gifts we can offer to our time. Hope. A hope that is not only waiting for the new to come into our lives and our world, but which knows that all of this has already come into our world in the gift of Jesus Christ. Sisters and brothers, if we have a reason to wait, if we have a reason to hope, it is because all that we expect to still happen has already

happened in Bethlehem, at the cross in Golgotha, and in Christ's resurrection. This is the difference between hope and wishful thinking: the knowledge of what God has done already and of what God is still doing among us to accomplish the promises that are still ahead of us. We have a reason to hope, namely Christ and God's ongoing work through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- (8) I want to call upon the LWF member churches around the world: let our witness be one of hope. A witness that frees and empowers, that lifts yokes of oppression and imposed burden, that sets hope free, never fear or hate. Let us be generous in doing so. Freely we have received, freely we shall give: as we proclaim the good news of Christ, as we stand with our suffering neighbors, as we speak in the public space. Let that be our question at the end of every single day in our various ministries around the world: have I passed on the hope which I received in Christ?
- (9) Friends, lately I have been comparing the current state of the world with the situation in 1947, when the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in the city of Lund, Sweden. It looked bad then. Radical evil had ravaged the world, leaving destruction, pain, and death. Millions had died. However, waking up from the nightmare of the radical evil, humankind came together to juxtapose signs of radical hope. It is within this dynamic that also Lutheran churches came together, eager to become themselves such a sign of radical hope. "Who will we be in the midst of all of this?" Lutheran churches asked themselves as they gathered in Lund 1947. As a response deeply rooted in their faith, this fundamental commitment which we embrace until this very day took shape: "we do care". "We don't look away, but hear our calling to rebuild justice, peace and reconciliation in this broken world." Thus our story as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) unfolded, driven by this commitment: we do care. For the church and for the world.
- (10) As I compare that situation with today, I see similarities. I see much devastation around us, created by human hate and injustice to one another, manifesting in violence and destruction of lives and livelihoods. Now it has been compounded by a pandemic which has taken so many lives, traumatized communities, destroyed economies.
- (11) But there are also differences: as we come together today, we are still in the thick of it. Not only the pandemic, but also – and this worries me – hate speech, racism, fundamentalism, autocratic and oppressive leadership styles, exclusion and inequality are on the rise. The victims are always the same: those seen or defined as different. The "other," those subordinated and subjugated, the minorities. Rights that were secured and achieved in past years are being curtailed today. Women are among those suffering the most from this backlash. Human trafficking is a daily reality in many parts of the world, calling on us to restate forcefully our message and commitment from the last Assembly: "human beings are not for sale."
- (12) Who will we be in the midst of all of this?
- (13) My heart is deeply grateful that the pandemic pushed us closer together as a communion, it did not tear us apart. We have remained in contact as churches, helping each other to process and understand what is going on today, praying for each other, advising each other, and sharing resources. I want to express my deep gratitude to this Council, which has worked together with an intensity that has been remarkable, despite challenges and all the things we needed to learn while working online.
- (14) We turned our faces towards each, we didn't turn our backs on each other. We didn't allow this challenging time to disrupt our journey as a communion of churches. We continue carrying each other's burdens. Unable to meet in person, dealing with fears and anxieties resulting from the pandemic, we stood together. We held fast to each other and worked together, supporting, discerning, discussing,

sometimes also disagreeing. This is what I would call a sign of radical hope, which I want to encourage us to continue holding fast to.

- (15) Here I want to make special emphasis on our ongoing work and service as a communion: because we care, we shall not let the poor fall aside in this challenging time. Although there are signs of hope towards the end of the pandemic, I'm afraid, we have not yet seen all the devastation of the virus on the lives of those at the margins. Let us remain steadfast in our vocation to serve them.
- (16) Inequality is growing. It is an inequality that hurts, for instance, when a large section of the world goes without vaccination. Thus far, we have seen individualism and nationalism, which seems to build on the illusion that the virus will respect a checkpoint at the border. It won't. Neither will climate change. We live in one world. We are one human family. Only as one will we prevail.
- (17) We are going through times of transition. This is true for the whole world. It is true for our communion. We are mid-way between Assemblies. It is a time like when the tides change: still feeling the push from the beautiful and empowering experiences of the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia (2017), and already drawn by the excitement of meeting again in 2023.
- (18) As an organization we are also in a time of transition. Our General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, offers analysis in his report what this transition might mean for our ongoing journey, what we need to do as a Council so that we take our own responsibility in this time of change.
- (19) We are in transition also in view of our General Secretary, who will be leaving the office later this year. On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Council and the member churches of the LWF, I want to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation for his many gifts, selfless service, and commitment in building the LWF Communion of Churches to where we are today.
- (20) Rev. Dr. Junge's stewardship of LWF has been characterized by deep theological and strategic reflection and, most valuable, tireless efforts to remain focused on the vision of the LWF communion of churches, for the sake of the church and the world and, ensuring our service in the world, our commitment to unity. He has forged good relationships within the communion and with our partners and stakeholders, ensuring we hold on to each other as communion and in our care of the suffering world. He has set a wonderful example for the rest of the staff and all those who look to him for his leadership. As president, I appreciate the mutual confidence and the joy of working together during the past few years. Dr. Junge, thank you for your dedication and the ministry you accomplished during your years of service as General Secretary. We wish you all the very best in your future endeavours and we look forward to your ongoing involvement in the LWF.
- (21) At this Council, we will be electing a new General Secretary for the LWF. Let me start by commending the churches for nominating candidates to be considered by the Search Committee. To see these vocations readily available to serve the communion is a true gift, as is the care of churches to identify these potential leaders for our ongoing journey. The LWF is indeed alive.
- (22) I want to thank the members of the Search Committee for their excellent work, undertaken diligently and in full compliance with their Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure. The Search Committee has completed its work by proposing two strong candidates for election by the Council. The Committee has taken up its responsibility on behalf of the Council, mandated to receive nominations, review them, undertake interviews, assess and discern, before proposing these candidates to the Council.

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- (23) We honor their time, diligence, their discernment, and their conclusions and all they did with our mandate and on our behalf. Now, it is up to us. We shall take up the responsibility that is given to us as the Council of the LWF by our Constitution and proceed with the election of the new General Secretary. I want to encourage you to take up this responsibility. It is critical for the LWF and its ongoing journey that we do so at this meeting.
- (24) Sisters and brothers in Christ, more could be said, but I must end my address here, given the format of our meeting. Again: thank you for being here. Let our being and working together as a Council continue to enable us to become a sign of radical hope in our world. Christ is our hope, and what we hope is not in vain. It is hope in the midst of us. Because of it, we do care. For the church and for the world.

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa

LWF President