

## Significance of Reconciliation Action toward Anabaptists Affirmed

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*At the Europe Pre-Assembly Consultation: Former LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs, Rev. Sven Oppegaard, explains the significance of a 2009 LWF Council statement on the reconciliation process with Anabaptists. © LWF/E. Neuenfeldt*

### A “Deep Sense of Regret and Pain”

**BRATISLAVA, Slovak Republic/GENEVA (LWI)** – For Mennonites of the Anabaptist tradition, looking back on the history of the Reformation is very painful, said Rev. Sven Oppegaard at a consultation of European Lutheran churches held from 13 to 17 March in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

Addressing participants in the European region pre-assembly consultation of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Oppegaard, who was assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs at the LWF from 1997 to 2006, explained the significance of a 2009 LWF Council statement on the reconciliation process with Anabaptist churches.

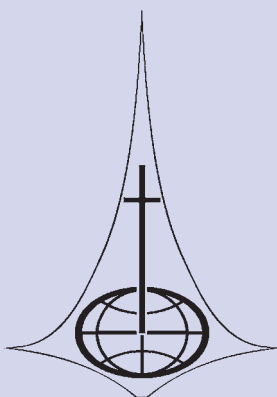
At its meeting last October, the LWF Council adopted a statement asking for forgiveness for the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutherans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and for the hurtful portrayal and similarly by Lutheran authors to the present day. The

LWF governing body thus recommended that the LWF Eleventh Assembly, to be held in Stuttgart, Germany, in July 2010, endorse the “Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of ‘Anabaptists.’”

The statement expresses a “deep sense of regret and pain” over the legacy of brutal persecution of Anabaptists, especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers supported this persecution with theological arguments. The statement asks for forgiveness “from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the harm that our forbears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists.”

The statement goes on to request forgiveness for “forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits

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**LWF Publication on Practice and Understanding of Diakonia**

*Serving the Whole Person* is the title of the latest publication in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Documentation series. Documentation 54/2009 focuses on the practice and understanding of diakonia within the Lutheran communion.



consultations; and provides elements of current discussion, understanding and challenges of diakonia.

It is edited by Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke in collaboration with Mr Frederick Schlaghaft.

The publication documents the rich variety of diacanal engagement within the Lutheran communion; reports on a process of reflection on the understanding of diakonia including findings and recommendations from LWF

Orders at USD 17 per copy can be placed with Lutheran University Press at [www.lutheranupress.org/new-titles](http://www.lutheranupress.org/new-titles) For further information please contact

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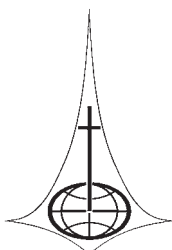
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**Includes Assembly Update No. 9**



## LWF Pre-Assembly Deliberates Challenges in an Increasingly United Europe

### Meeting in Bratislava Prepares Delegates for Eleventh Assembly

BRATISLAVA, Slovak Republic/GENEVA (LWI) – The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic (ECAC-SR) hosted the regional meeting to prepare Lutheran churches in Europe for the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The Assembly will be held in Stuttgart, Germany, under the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

Participants in the 13-17 March European region pre-Assembly consultation in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, included 67 delegates, stewards and advisers from 35 LWF member churches in the region, as well as representatives from national committees, church networks, church-related agencies and LWF staff.

In addition to preparing delegates for the forthcoming LWF assembly, discussions at the meeting also focused on some of the core issues to



Youth representatives met in Svätý Jur, Slovak Republic, prior to the pre-assembly consultation. (From left to right) Rev Miiika Abola (Finland), Ms Viola Lichtblau (Germany), Ms Eszter Kalit (Hungary) exchange views during a group discussion. © LWF/E.Neuendorf

be deliberated at the Assembly, said Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, LWF area secretary for Europe at the Department for Mission and Development (DMD). She pointed

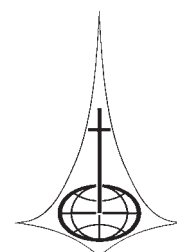
out that many of the delegates were newcomers to the LWF network, thus the consultation’s inclusion of a sort of training exercise to prepare for full participation in the Assembly processes.

The agenda of the Bratislava consultation included global issues such as the environment, social engagement, diakonia and migration, seen from the perspective of the various regions of Europe, Vogel-Mfato explained. These are some of the challenges “with which we in an increasingly united Europe will be more frequently confronted.”

Participants also explored how the European member churches “can live in close fellowship with sister churches throughout the world.” Europe, she noted, had a particularly important role to play on a “trans-continental level, for example, in the international diakonia carried out jointly with churches in the global South. Even in Europe we can learn



Church representatives follow a working group session on the environment, diakonia and migration in Europe. © LWF/E.Neuendorf



a great deal from the South about how to overcome social ills, as well as in the area of ecumenical dialogue and bearing living witness in the midst of divisions within church and society.”

Vogel-Mfato pointed out that it was particularly important for the consultation’s participants to approach these discussions as a means “of deepening their involvement in the communion and of playing an active role in shaping and nurturing it. The sense of joint responsibility for the LWF as a tightly-knit fellowship must be strengthened, for in this way, we also strengthen ourselves, including beyond the Assembly.”

The preparatory consultation provided a new opportunity to “pause and take stock of what has been achieved since the preceding 2003 Assembly in the Canadian city of Winnipeg, and to evaluate and identify new challenges and tasks for the future,” Vogel-Mfato went on to say.

Welcoming the pre-assembly to Bratislava, Bishop Dr Miloš Klátik said it was a great honor for the ECAC-SR to host the LWF gathering.

“I believe that we all must be aware of our responsibility before God and before humanity. ‘Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making

the most of the time’ [Col 4:5]. As Christians, these words call upon us to proclaim the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ through our words and through our deeds,” he added.

Meetings of youth and women delegates were held prior to the LWF pre-assembly.

The LWF has 43 member churches in Europe representing around 37.2 million people.

More information on the LWF Pre-Assemblies is available under the “Journey” section of the LWF Assembly Web site at:

[www.lwf-assembly.org](http://www.lwf-assembly.org)

## LWF General Secretary Calls for a “More Hospitable” Europe

“Europe is a superpower, at least in terms of its economic power. What does that mean for the Lutheran churches, what potential do they have within this European space?”

The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko raised these questions in his opening address to the European preparatory consultation for the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly, held in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

Noko said these questions should also be discussed at the Eleventh Assembly to be held this July in Stuttgart, Germany, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg.

Speaking to delegates from the LWF member churches attending the regional LWF gathering, Noko asked: “Is Europe becoming a fortress?” In view of the worldwide reality of migration, “Europe should become more hospitable,” he suggested. He underlined the need for “creative spaces” for inter-religious dialogue.

and to the Wider Lutheran Communion.” He said another task for European Lutheran churches would be to promote dialogue with the southern hemisphere. Europe, he noted, could contribute its specific experience with “minority churches.”



*LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko delivers his opening address at the pre-assembly.  
© LWF/ECAC/E. Škodová*

Noko said the Stuttgart assembly would also focus on the diaconal challenges confronting Lutheran churches in Europe. Churches should provide models on how to address ethical and moral challenges, he noted, saying he expected the European churches to be more outspoken on justice issues.

## Five “Categories” of Churches

At the delegates’ request, the general secretary divided the worldwide Lutheran communion into five “categories” of churches, according to their theological traditions. There are churches of the historical Reformation, whose theological formation is based on university training; churches that “emigrated” from universities, for example, in the USA, of which ecclesiastical training takes place in seminaries, with a strong sense of being Lutheran; missional churches with a pietistic tradition; churches springing up as a result of local mission; and churches which have emerged directly from migration movements.

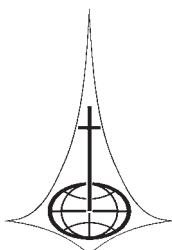
Earlier during the consultation’s opening worship, Noko recalled Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, and underlined: “We have become God’s children by grace through Christ’s death and resurrection.” The general secretary urged the delegates to continue on the path toward the Stuttgart assembly in a spirit of harmony grounded in this knowledge.

## Affluence Does Not Necessarily Bring People to God

Greeting the LWF pre-assembly participants, Bishop Dr Miloš Klátik’s of the host church, Evangelical Church

## Dialogue with the Southern Hemisphere

The general secretary spoke under the topic “Expectations from the European Contribution to the Assembly,



of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic, expressed his wish for “wisdom and God’s blessing, so that you can fill the Lord’s Prayer with Christian content.” Describing the development of his church before and

after the political change in Central and Eastern Europe, Klátik stated: “Our church senses that affluence does not necessarily bring people to God.”

LWF youth representatives who held their conference the day before,

summarized their message in the keywords “Identity – Communion – Credibility,” presented to the pre-assembly gathering in the form of a joint prayer.

## Slovak Bishop Klátik Underscores Church Responsibility for the Hungry

Bishop Dr Miloš Klátik of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic (ECAC-SR) reminded churches of their responsibility in securing food for the hungry.



ECAC-SR Bishop Dr Miloš Klátik addresses the LWF gathering. © LWF/E. Neuenfeldt

“The shocking fact that millions of children and adults are undernourished calls us Christians to take responsibility for our brothers and sisters and to do everything we can to change the situation so that those who

are hungry today will tomorrow have their daily bread, basic food, drinking water and health,” said Klátik, in his 14 March sermon to the European region pre-assembly consultation.

“The prayer for daily bread teaches us to trust in God’s providence. It teaches us to rejoice in the apparently small things of daily life as gifts from God’s hand,” said the ECAC-SR bishop.

“We thank God for his blessing, above all for the greatest gift of all, for our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us in love and saved us. He is the bread of eternal life,” said Klátik, reflecting on the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly theme.

Those assisting in the service held at the Lutheran Church (Veľký kostol/Big Church) in Bratislava included Rev. Martin Sefranko, curator Michael Sebesta and some of the pre-assembly participants.

### LWF Vice President Affirms Call to Care for Others

Greeting the pre-assembly, Bishop Dr Eero Huovinen from Helsinki (Finland), who is also LWF vice

president for the Nordic Region, affirmed the message from Klátik’s sermon with the words, “God gives, God creates, God blesses us. It is thus a challenge for us to do something for our brothers and sisters.”

Klátik and Sefranko presented LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and the LWF Europe secretary, Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, with pictures on the history of Christianity and of the Slovak Protestant church.

### Bratislava Mayor Underlines Christian Heritage

In a message read out at a reception in Bratislava town hall, Lord Mayor Andrej Ďurkovský urged the churches to preserve their “mission” and their Christian heritage, while not forgetting the future. The greeting also expressed appreciation for the contribution of the Protestant church to the country’s development.

## Prior to LWF Assembly: Criticism of European Lifestyle

In Christian tradition, justice is not just a matter of distributing material resources. The creator God enables justice, “by endowing us and all creatures with good gifts, first of all the gift of life.” Lutheran pastor Kilian Dörr, from Sibiu/Hermannstadt (Romania), emphasized this in his 14 March keynote address to the European region preparatory consultation for the LWF Eleventh Assembly.

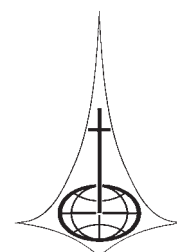
Christians have the task “to take people with them into the yearning

that sustains us as Christians and on the way to offer them some of the manna that we, too, have received,” Dörr told participants.

The Romanian pastor offered reflections on the Assembly theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” from a perspective of churches in the changing Central and East European region. Analyzing the historical developments and present situation of the Transylvanian church he stated: “Probably people in western Europe will have

to get used to spending a major share of their income on food, as has always been the case in eastern Europe.” In his view, it would be necessary today to hold an “East-West dialogue” on the topic: “Teach us to become a bit less affluent and we will teach you to be happier with a bit less affluence.”

On the present situation in Europe, Dörr remarked critically: “Our present lifestyle consumes too much forest, water and land, too much coal and oil, gas and uranium.”



Although these facts are known and the solutions are obvious, the governments of most countries are incapable of reacting appropriately, he added.

Dörr called on the worldwide Lutheran communion to “start doing structural lobbying.” He especially highlighted the “dubious mass tourism project” of a “Dracula Park” near Schässburg/Sighisoara in Romania. Churches and civil society there had joined forces to prevent the development in a natural reserve of this park, which, according to Dörr, is “as unnecessary as it is monstrous.”



*Lutheran pastor Kilian Dörr from Sibiu/Hermannstadt (Romania) presents the keynote address at the pre-assembly. © LWF/E.Neuenfeldt*

## Significance of Reconciliation Action toward Anabaptists Affirmed

*Continued from p. 1*

of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day.”

The voluntary commitments contained in the statement include an affirmation of the present consensus in “repudiating the use of the state’s power either to exclude or enforce particular religious beliefs,” as well as to “work towards upholding and maintaining freedom of religion and conscience in political orders and societies.”

Oppegaard explained that the only remaining differences between Lutherans and the Anabaptist tradition identified in the report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International

Study Commission (2005–2008) concerned the theology of baptism, and relations of Christians and of the church to the state. All other condemnations pronounced by reformers are unfounded, stated the Norwegian theologian.

He told the pre-assembly gathering that as early as 1980, the LWF Executive Committee had expressed its regret for the pain and suffering that the condemnations brought in their wake. In 2002, the LWF Council and the Mennonite World Conference established the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission. As regards Lutheran churches, Oppegaard said “their attitude is one of gratitude and repentance.”

## The Four Most Effective Steps

Dörr suggested “four most effective steps” that individuals, congregations and churches should take in order to avoid “sabotaging” the prayer for daily bread. One should take: air travel only as a last resort; as far as possible never driving alone in one’s car; eating less meat and ensuring heat insulation in one’s home.

He said he was convinced it would be impossible to bring about a significant reduction of our personal “ecological footprint” without these efforts.

## Important for Society and Families

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko emphasized importance of the anticipated reception of the statement and the report by the forthcoming Assembly. The Zimbabwean theologian noted that in many countries reconciliation has significance not only for society, but also for families, pointing out that his mother was from the Mennonite tradition.

The LWF area secretary for Europe Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato added, “The reconciliation process with Mennonites can serve as an example for other cases where healing is needed.”

## European Lutheran Churches Demand Food Justice

Lutherans from across Europe have called for political, economic and ecological action to establish food justice.

In a final message from the preparatory consultation for the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly, representatives from the region’s LWF member churches pointed out that people suffer from lack of access to sufficiently nutritious food “due to unjust systems and structures.”

The message stated, “We recognize that as European Christians we have failed in many ways, including a

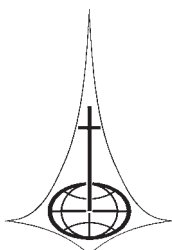
wasteful use of resources and tolerating a spirit of greed and carelessness.” It went on to express repentance for the churches’ “role in the breakdown of relationships between Creator and creation, Savior and saved, Sustainer and sustained.”

The consultation’s participants called for strengthening of the church’s identity as a community, where sharing is a fundamental value. “Advocacy for those who do not have a voice, for example, refugees and asylum seekers,

is also an important feature of our mission in this world,” they said.

## Human Dignity

The European consultation emphasized that the task of the church is to “uphold human dignity and assist people in retaining their personal integrity.” Delegates called for cross-border cooperation between worldwide Christian communions, non-governmental organizations



The LWF and all its member churches were urged to consider concrete actions on the environmental front, including the adoption of consistent ethical investment policies and practices, CO<sub>2</sub> neutral event management, and sustainable administration and use of buildings and estates.

## LWF's Unity

The delegates insisted that a unified LWF had to allow for a variety of opinions and ideas that respect the various heritages, cultures and societies represented by member churches. "Differences can also be understood as richness, bringing diversity in unity," the final message stated.

Living in a secular and pluralistic context calls for practical theological discourse and ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue to enable Christians to live together with people of all faiths, delegates added.

The final message from the European region pre-assembly is available on the LWF Assembly web site at:

[www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Europe\\_Pre-Assembly\\_Message.pdf](http://www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Europe_Pre-Assembly_Message.pdf)



Rev. Dr Jean A. Ravalitera (right), president of the Malagasy Protestant Church in France, follows German Bishop Maria Jepsen's comments about migration in Europe. © LWF/E.Neuendorf

and governments as well as political action to tackle human trafficking. The LWF was urged to engage in a process involving theologians, pastors, service providers, those who have been trafficked and those who have been involved in trafficking to share experiences and develop strategies toward restoration of human dignity.

## Sustainable Lifestyles

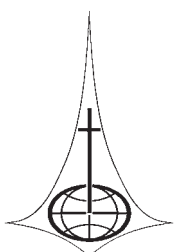
Participants in the Bratislava consultation called upon all Lutherans to model a sustainable lifestyle and to find happiness and peace in God rather than endless material growth. They called upon individuals and churches to "encourage society toward institutional change and political advocacy."

## Gender Justice and Women's Ordination

The church representatives said they deplored the fact that "there are still member churches that do not ordain women, and hinder women from leadership in decision-making bodies in the church. Prayerfully, we encourage and continue our solidarity with women who long to live out their God-given vocation." They reaffirmed their commitment to the partnership between men and women in the LWF. The Lutheran communion was asked to evaluate the impact of the 20-year old gender quota system in its member churches and "respect gender balance in all its governing bodies."



Women delegates debate the meaning of food justice in the European context. © LWF/E.Neuendorf



**LWF AFRICA PRE-ASSEMBLY CONSULTATION**  
 24-28 March 2010, Abuja, Nigeria

**African Lutheran Churches Urged  
 to Intensify Efforts in Holistic Mission**

Cameroonian Bishop Nyiwe  
 Preaches at Pre-Assembly Opening Worship

**ABUJA, Nigeria/GENEVA (LWI)** – Cameroonian church leader Bishop Dr Thomas Nyiwe called upon The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa to intensify their engagement in holistic mission despite the myriad challenges they face. This calling remains an integral part of the mission to proclaim the gospel, he emphasized.

when Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread.” Nyiwe is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC).

An estimated 90 participants attended the pre-assembly, including some 70 delegates from the 31 LWF members in Africa. Other participants included representatives of the churches’ mission partners, local

Germany, under the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

In his sermon based on Mark 6: 30-44, Nyiwe compared the challenge of limited resources versus great need faced by most African churches today to the situation confronting the disciples when Jesus asked them “You give them something to eat.”

The EELC bishop noted that although “human possibilities are always limited, always, asking questions about what to do, where to start, what strategies to use, Jesus transforms such possibilities into something new and different.” He emphasized the need to respond to such need as the disciples did—with confidence—which allows for new perspectives and ways of dealing with the responsibility to care for the needy.

Nyiwe challenged the churches to share even the little they had with those in need. “As caretakers of the people around you, you don’t need to have all the wealth in the world in order to share,” he said.

On the pre-assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread – The Church in Africa Today,” Nyiwe noted that the question of bread “is part of the vocabulary in which the world gives expression to this human hope. Hope means learning to wait, and the Lutheran church in Africa is a symbol and inspirer of hope.”

The bishop emphasized that “since their foundation Lutheran churches in Africa had given a great deal of attention to the challenge of holistic mission by nurturing the faithful, doing acts of mercy, seeking justice for all human beings and as stewards of the gift of creation.” But “Lutheran

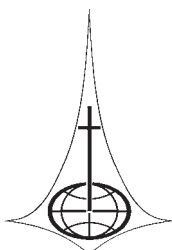


*LCCN pastor Rev. Rachel Dibal (left) and Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure (right) from Tanzania lead a procession of Lutheran clergy prior to the opening worship of the Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation in Abuja, Nigeria. © LWF/Simon Djibdi*

Nyiwe was delivering the sermon at the opening worship of the LWF Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation, 24-28 March in Abuja, Nigeria. He said the church’s calling to “show special compassion and love to people in need, to give hope and serve the poor is as relevant today as it was

ecumenical guests and LWF staff. The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and The Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) hosted the meeting.

Pre-assemblies prepare delegates for the LWF Eleventh Assembly, to be held in July 2010 in Stuttgart,



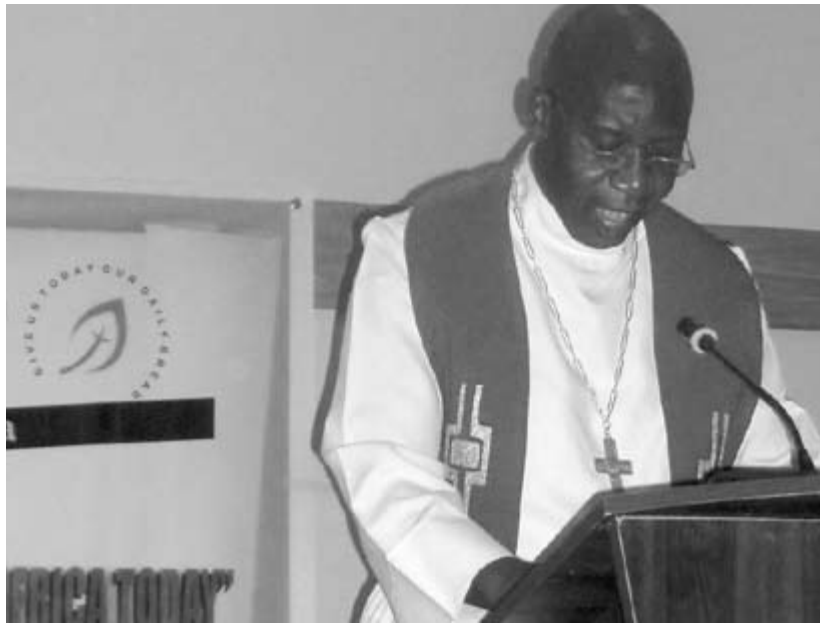


churches in Africa have [also] lacked the confidence in what they have to offer, uncertain and intimidated whether they have what people need for Christian health and healing and well being,” he said.

Today’s mission agenda had not changed from what Jesus confronted with his disciples. “This [agenda] must continue in Jesus’ way as he takes into account the complex realities of our times, with needy people including the poor, the sick, foreigners, and women and children,” added Nyiwe.

More information is available under the “Journey” section of the LWF Assembly Web site at:

[www.lwf-assembly.org](http://www.lwf-assembly.org)



Cameroonain Bishop Dr Thomas Nyiwe delivers his sermon at the opening worship of the Africa Pre-Assembly in Abuja, Nigeria. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

## Namibian Bishop Kameeta Urges Global Lutheran Communion to Uphold Its Unity

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches have been challenged to focus on upholding the unity of the global Lutheran communion and on working together to ensure justice for all people in society.

“We must not pride ourselves in the fragmentation, but in our unity. It is only in unity and in nothing else that our strength is anchored,” said Namibian Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta, when he delivered the keynote address at the 24-28 March Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation held in Abuja, Nigeria.

Kameeta, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), is LWF vice president for the African region. His keynote address emphasized the urgency for the global Lutheran communion to act together to ensure justice prevails for the many marginalized people throughout the world. He reflected on the theme of the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” and its relevance for churches in Africa and for the entire LWF.

“Let the communion be communion and let bread be shared among

all of us as with the feeding of the 5,000,” said Kameeta in his address on 25 March. He noted that the Eleventh Assembly theme “must result into the reawakening and opening of the eyes of the [Lutheran] communion toward concrete action in our world today.”



Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta, LWF vice president for the African region, delivers the keynote address. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

### Witnesses Today

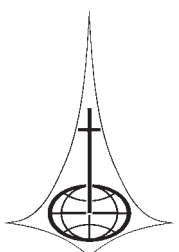
The “today,” said the ELCRN bishop, emphasizes the urgency of the situation today. He cited the poor living at rubbish dumps, eating whatever they

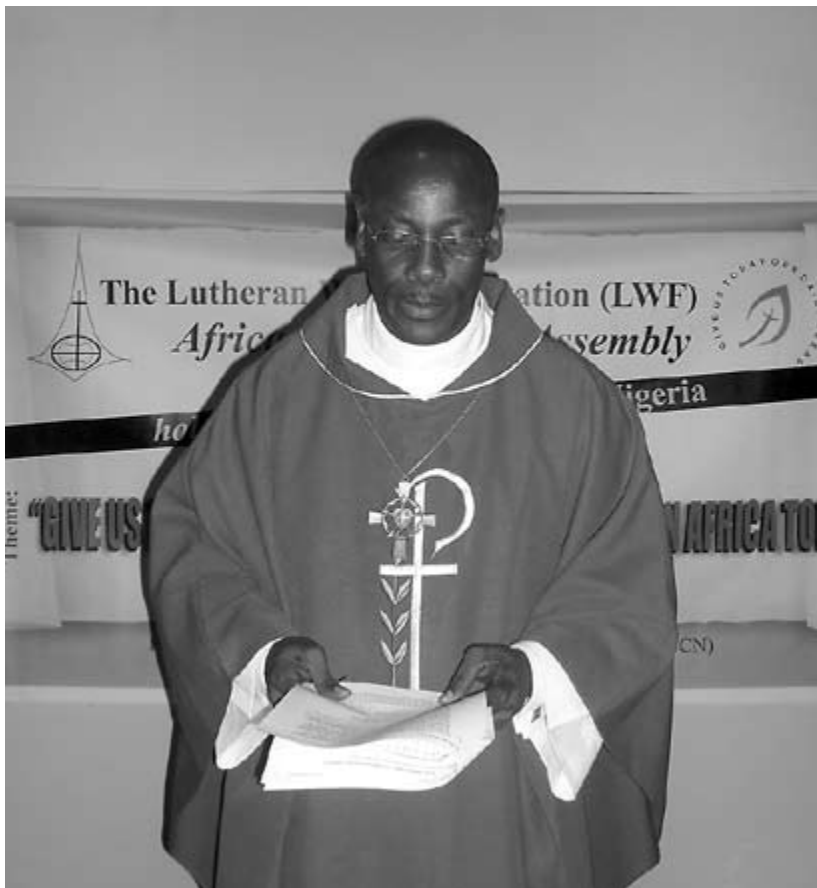
find there. There are also students going to school on empty stomachs, failing to concentrate and eventually dropping out of school and university only to find themselves “on the dark streets of despair and destruction.”

Ensuring bread for all also calls for sustained advocacy in challenging the unjust structures that perpetuate hunger, poverty and despair, and in establishing justice in society, said Kameeta. He challenged churches and their leaders to affirm their role and authority in society by confidently confronting “the world powers” that established these “unjust structures and protect [them] tooth and nail.”

Therefore, noted the LWF vice president, “our calling does not end with organizing a soup kitchen but continues with the observation of mercy and justice in a merciless and unjust world, prophetically challenging the powers of the world in the Name of Lord God of hosts.”

The Eleventh Assembly theme “is a call to the communion of Lutheran churches to stand together and work together for the realization of this prayer for the many in the world. Let this not be postponed for next year





*LCN president Rev. Christian Ekong greets participants in the LWF regional gathering.*  
© LWF/Simon Djibdi

or the years to come, but let it happen today. Let justice prevail today,” stressed Kameeta.

On the assembly theme relevance for Africa, Kameeta emphasized that at the Stuttgart assembly the continent’s churches would be witnesses of people “who are denied and robbed of their fundamental human right to daily bread by unjust structures in a world driven by greed and selfish individualistic perception of life. What we bring is not library research and

photos about the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless and the naked people, but a living witness from the midst of hunger, thirst and despair.”

### Act Locally and Globally

On unity among the African Lutheran churches and the subsequent consequences for the global Lutheran communion, the LWF vice president urged the churches to “stop thinking in terms of sub-regions only, but

rather in terms of the whole continent.” He said such unity must be seen in the wider perspective of “our worldwide communion,” and also as proclamation of the prophetic voice calling for the unity of a fragmented and still exploited continent.

He emphasized the need to focus on the potential contribution of individual church representatives to positions of responsibility as delegates to the Assembly, as Council members and in other important LWF positions. Such persons, he cautioned, “should not be representing a village somewhere in Africa but the whole continent and they should be able to deal with issues related to our churches and regions, but also to the global LWF.” He stressed the need to “think and act locally and globally at the same time.”

Kameeta challenged the African churches to affirm with pride and dignity their contribution to LWF’s sustainability “without comparing ourselves in self-pity with others. We should stop anything that makes us seen as beggars. What we need is self-confidence, courage, vision and, above all, faith,” he said.

His concluding remarks underscored the responsibility of all LWF member churches in sustaining the Lutheran communion as a gift from God, irrespective of the various issues that the churches were dealing with including that of human sexuality. “Our communion is a gift of God. When divided we weaken it, when united we strengthen it,” added the LWF vice president.

## Call to African Churches to Embrace the Gift of Women in Leadership

Women church representatives attending The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation, have called on LWF member churches on the continent to “embrace the gift of women in leadership” while at the same time “promoting inclusivity in all structures of governance.”

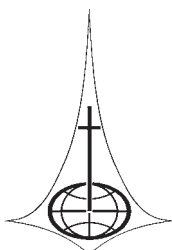
In their message presented to the pre-assembly today, the women ex-

pressed their conviction about the essential perspectives that women bring to the ordained and lay ministry, especially in an increasingly fractured world.

“We affirm the wholeness of God’s creation; whereby women are integrated within all structures of governance within church and society. Embracing full participation of women and men is a sign of continuous reformation and transformation of the church,”

they said. “Women are responsible for the management of their homes and their children’s education, why not in society and the church?” they asked in their message presented at the Abuja gathering.

Affirming the message from the October 2009 LWF Women’s Pre-Assembly, they recommended that churches in the region take action also on the issues of human traffick-



ing and food justice and that they continue work on HIV and AIDS, violence against women and children, human sexuality and gender justice.



Lay theologian Ms Jeanette Ada, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, reads out a section of the women's message. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

The women pointed out that poverty in Africa “has a woman’s face.” They cited its relationship to harmful cultural practices and traditions, prostitution, human and organ trafficking, child labor, forceful abandoning of the faith, and HIV and AIDS among other issues that require the churches’ urgent attention.

They urged the churches to speak out publicly against human trafficking, as “too many women and children are leaving our villages, towns and cities, to be trafficked across our borders within the African continent as well as abroad, being exploited for cheap labor or as sex workers.” They said the church “is called to engage in advocacy and awareness programs and developing strategies in order to

overcome ignorance and in denouncing the sin of human trafficking.”

Diverse interpretations and application of traditional African culture do not favor women in some parts of Africa, stated the pre-assembly women’s message. The women cited the case of women who are barred from inheriting or owning land, which consequently reduced the once cultivators and food producers to the level of buyers, thus perpetuating a cycle of dependency and poverty.

In a separate pastoral letter addressed to the African church leaders and all delegates to the pre-assembly, the women participants urged “you, our church leaders and bishops, to act in solidarity, encouraging women to take up leadership positions and listening to the female theologians in their call into the ordained ministry.”



ELCRN pastor Rev. Sopbi Garises, also joined in presenting the women's message. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

They expressed appreciation for the LWF’s longstanding support for the equal participation of women and men in leadership. “We [are] greatly

impressed by the expected 40 percent involvement of women, and wish to highlight that the upcoming Eleventh Assembly is a wonderful opportunity for our member churches in the region to mobilize and afford female church leaders an opportunity to attend as delegates.”



Ms Selina Sibiya, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, speaks at the LWF regional gathering. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

The pastoral letter underlined that “there are still voices of women in our region, crying for inclusivity within the church structures, leadership and in the ordained ministry. Women, who have been divinely called by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are not afforded the opportunity to fully practice their calling.”

The letter was received officially by LWF vice president for the African region Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta. It was discussed in the small group sessions and integrated into the final message from the Pre-Assembly.

## Emphasis on Theological Formation That Is Relevant to African Mission Priorities

Zimbabwean church leader Bishop em. Dr Ambrose Moyo has reminded African Lutheran churches of the urgent need to adapt their theological education and ministry formation to the continent’s needs.

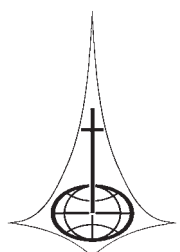
Moyo elaborated the churches’ crucial role for the continent’s Christian leadership when he addressed

church leaders and other representatives of the LWF member churches attending the Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation in Abuja, Nigeria.

He pointed out that while the number of members in African Lutheran churches showed a steady growth over the years—with 18.7 million in

2009—there was “a crisis of leadership in most of our churches with most of our seminaries almost closing down.”

“This [membership] growth places significant challenge on the churches in the South to develop capacities and credible leadership” to respond to the relevant issues in church and society. “It is critical that we come up with struc-



tures and programs that will build the capacity of the global South to assume leadership roles in all aspects of God's mission," said Moyo, who led the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) from 1996 to 2001.

In his presentation, the former ELCZ bishop provided an interpretation of the LWF Eleventh Assembly theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread" for African Lutheran churches in view of the continent's enormous mineral and other resources; the dependency syndrome and its effects on the region; public policy implications for food production; theological education and leadership development; diakonia and the reception of ecumenical agreements by the continent's churches.

He challenged churches to reflect from an African perspective on Martin Luther's explanation of the petition for daily bread in the Small Catechism. Would Luther have elaborated daily bread the way he did "if he was an African [dealing with] hunger and starvation, bad governance, the many wars and the cry for peace, justice, reconciliation and

healing?" posed Moyo. He stressed the need to write "our own African catechism which will be simple and relevant, dealing with bread and butter issues in Africa today."

Similarly, liturgies in some of the Lutheran churches in Africa had not changed since they were produced by the early missionaries, with symbols that no longer relate to the African experience today, remarked Moyo.

He said it was, however, encouraging to note that some of the LWF member churches or regional bodies had produced their own Sunday school and confirmation materials, which should be shared so that all can benefit or enrich each another.

## Options

Moyo pointed out that the quality of theological education and ministerial training and formation in most African Lutheran churches "leaves much to be desired." However, turning to academic universities to bridge this deficiency "has been disastrous in some cases," as such institutions

could not augment academic religious studies with programs that are clearly formulated for the church's mission.

Solutions could be found in the sharing or pooling of existing resources or by learning from the experience of institutions such as the Makumira University College of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

## Ecumenical Agreements' Reception

Moyo reminded churches of their responsibility in involving congregations in the reception of ecumenical agreements between the LWF and other Christian World Communions. He explained the significance of the anticipated LWF Eleventh Assembly action of reconciliation with churches of the Anabaptist family, and the October 1999 signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Roman Catholic Church. He called on churches to facilitate the ownership of such agreements, rather than treating them as "property of the top church leadership."

## Prophetic Diakonia

Moyo cautioned the continent's Lutheran churches against being passive recipients of development initiatives, urging them to become actively engaged in the decision-making processes concerning the region's diaconal activities.

Reminding churches of their responsibility as caretakers of God's creation, the former ELCZ bishop called for the churches' prophetic role in seeking solutions to environmental degradation and the causes of climatic changes, and on issues of good governance, economic justice and politics. Lutheran churches on the continent should "revisit our doctrine of the two regiments of God to understand its implications for our search for food for all," he added.



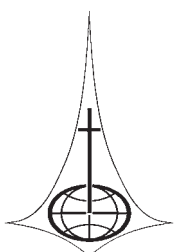
*Bishop em. Dr Ambrose Moyo, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, presents his paper at the LWF regional meeting. © LWF/Simon Djobdi*

## African Youth Insist Their Full Participation Will Improve the Whole Church

Youth representatives from Africa's LWF member churches attending

the March 2010 pre-assembly in Abuja, called on the continent's

church leadership to accord young adults their rightful place and par-



ticipation in order to enhance better development of the church.

Presenting the youth message to the Africa Pre-Assembly gathering, the 22 young men and women reiterated that the youth in any human society represent the strength and future of humanity.

Their message was based on a one-day consultation held prior to the pre-assembly opening in Abuja. The concerns deliberated included information dissemination by the LWF; roles allocated to youth in the church; leadership conflicts and Christian responsibilities in the church; human sexuality; climate change and food security; and solidarity with youth from the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa with regard to the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

The young adults called for recognition and attention within the churches as they play major roles in evangelism and in Bible study and Sunday school teaching. They urged the LWF to ensure implementation especially in Africa of the 1990 Curitiba Assembly decision to have 20 percent participation of young people in the communion's decision-making processes.

## Poverty and Ignorance

They asked the LWF to provide financial support for the proper functioning of sub-regional youth activities that would help facilitate meaningful contribution of youth to strengthening the Lutheran communion.

## Land, Water, Education and Gender Justice Constitute Africa's Prayer for Daily Bread

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa affirmed their commitment to ensuring access to land, water, and education and attainment of gender equity as urgent priorities for the continent's people.

In the final message from the 24-28 March Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation, representatives of the 31 LWF member churches on the continent said the Eleventh Assembly theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," was "both



Youth delegates Ms Maggie Hansen from Namibia and Ms Sindisirwe Ndalu from South Africa, lead one of the evening devotions at the Africa Pre-Assembly. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

Human trafficking is dehumanizing in all manifestations, insisted the African Lutheran youth representatives. In calling the churches' attention and action to this issue, the young adults noted that the strongest reason behind human trafficking was poverty and ignorance.

On food insecurity, the youth representatives encouraged engagement in agricultural activities such as dry season farming in order to alleviate the challenges of poverty. It is also important to organize awareness campaigns to provide people with more information and knowledge

about the effects of deforestation. Tree planting should be prioritized in arid areas to reduce drought, desertification and flooding, they said.

They said they expected leaders of the LWF member churches in Africa to make efforts at breaking the spirit of division resulting in leadership conflicts, and in building a communion of unity and mutual solidarity among the continent's churches.

The youth called for "clear leadership on the issue of marriage, family life and human sexuality for our further discussion on this crucial issue."

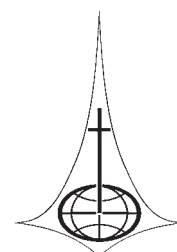
most relevant and urgent within our context and other parts of the world because it is a matter of survival."

The Africa Pre-Assembly participants affirmed that the continent was "the most vulnerable, most affected, yet least capacitated to cope with the effects of climate change, resulting in food insecurity and hunger, internal displacement and conflicts over land and water."

They called the church's attention to the trend of a new wave of

colonialism in Africa involving the purchase of land by wealthy nations and multinational corporations to produce food and other agricultural products for their home countries while local communities were rendered landless and further pushed into perpetual poverty.

Reaffirming the critical role of diakonia in bringing transformation in church and society throughout the Lutheran communion, the pre-assembly participants urged the LWF to intensify





Participants in the Africa Pre-Assembly and Church Leadership Consultation follow proceedings. In close view, far right, is ELCT Presiding Bishop Alex G. Malasusa. © LWF/Simon Djobdi

efforts and collaboration in addressing systems and structures that perpetuate injustice, poverty and deprivation.

On gender justice, the participants expressed concern that some LWF member churches in Africa “still do not heed the voices of women in the region crying for inclusivity within the church structures, leadership and in the ordained ministry.” They urged churches to fulfill their commitment to gender justice by putting in place concrete steps to address these issues.

## Youth Participation

Similarly, some churches had not fulfilled the commitment to the 20 percent LWF requirement for youth representation and participation in leadership and decision making processes. The Africa pre-assembly pointed out that “the risk of not implementing this resolution is that member churches may lose the gifts that young people bring to the life of the churches and may lose them to other emerging churches as a result of frustration.”

The participants called the attention of member churches in the communion to increasing levels of

unemployment and underemployment among the youth and the phenomena of child poverty.

The final message reiterated the African churches’ concern for contextually relevant theological materials, the urgent need to share available resources, and to increase networking between the region’s theological seminaries.

On the issue of marriage, family and human sexuality, the LWF

member churches in Africa said they affirmed their position at the 2007 LWF Council meeting and Church Leadership Consultation in Lund, Sweden, that “marriage is holy, ordained by God and is a relationship between a man and woman.”

In the pre-assembly message, the continent’s LWF member churches said they “are extremely disturbed and deeply regret the recent developments taking place in some member churches of the communion who have taken unilateral decision on same sex marriages, disregarding the strong sentiments expressed by other members of the communion.” They noted that such unilateral action had “negatively impacted our life together as a communion, something which could have been avoided.

“We pray for the Spirit of discernment and for the grace of God to abound as we seek to resolve these issues,” stated the final message of the Africa Pre-Assembly.

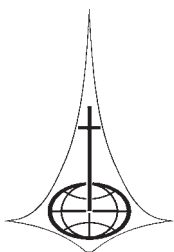
The full text of the message from the Africa Pre-Assembly is available on the Assembly Web site at:

[www.lwf-assembly.org/  
uploads/media/Africa  
\\_Pre-Assembly\\_Message.pdf](http://www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Africa_Pre-Assembly_Message.pdf)



The “church presents itself” session at the LWF regional gathering included a song and musical instruments’ display by members of the Nigerian Lutheran women fellowship. LWF/Simon Djobdi

**More LWI News at [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)**



# LWF Executive Committee Welcomes “Clear and Forceful” Middle East Quartet Statement

## Support for Call to Freeze All Israeli Settlement Activity

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Executive Committee of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the “clear and forceful language” used by representatives of the United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union (the Middle East Quartet) in denouncing new settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The Quartet, meeting in Moscow, Russia, on 19 March, issued a statement reaffirming its previous declarations urging the government of Israel to stop settlement activity in the contested areas, dismantle outposts erected since 2001 and refrain from demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem.

The LWF governing body said it concurred with the Quartet’s call

tarian and human rights situations of the civilian population.

On that subject, the LWF leaders said, “We reiterate our special concern about the accelerating emigration of Christians from the land of Christ’s birth. We call for urgent and continuing international solidarity with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and its sister churches in the Holy Land and for enhanced support for their ministries for education and social services, and for justice, peace and reconciliation.”

### Humanitarian Services in Jerusalem

For many years, Lutheran churches have provided humanitarian services to people in Jerusalem and the West Bank, largely through the Augusta Victoria Hospital and related programs. The LWF remains committed to continuing those services, the Executive Committee said.

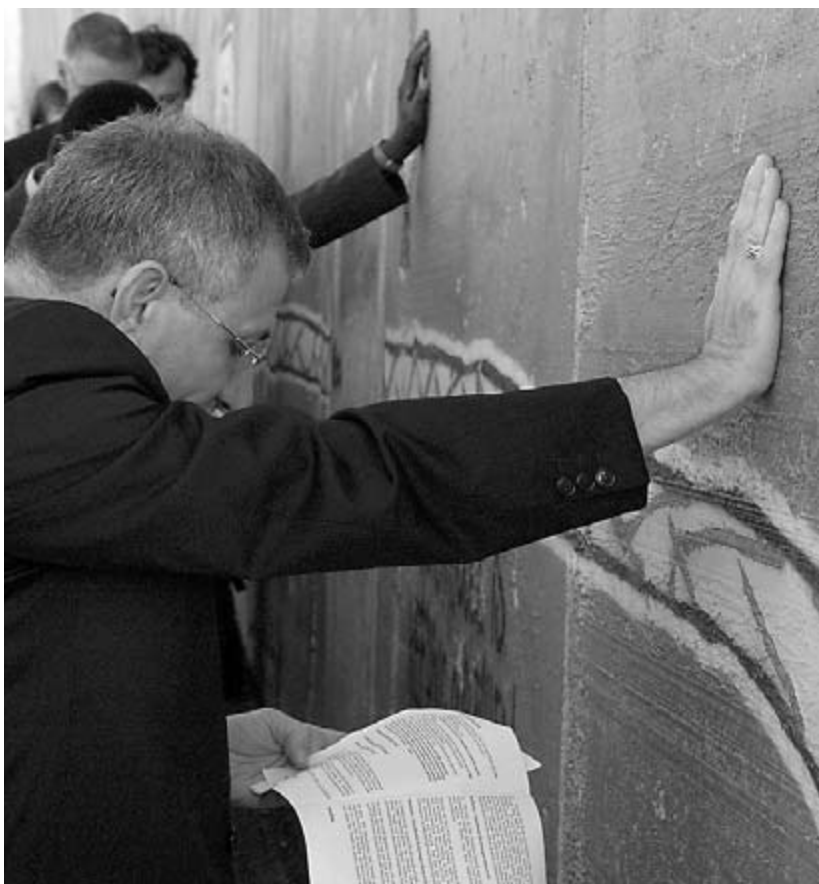
The 13-member Executive Committee met in Geneva from 19 to 21 March. It comprises the LWF President—Bishop Mark S. Hanson, as chairperson—five Vice Presidents, the Treasurer and chairpersons of the Program Committees. It oversees the proper functioning of the LWF between meetings of the Council, and acts as the LWF Board of Trustees and Personnel Committee.

The LWF governing body further called for the immediate lifting of the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip, for urgent international action to alleviate the suffering of its people, and for all parties to refrain from violent or provocative actions.”

The full text of the LWF Executive Committee statement is available on the LWF Web site at:

[www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

20 March 2010

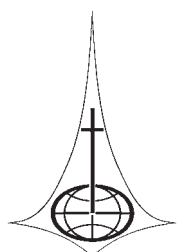


*Palestinian Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan (in close view) joined participants in the 2005 LWF Council meeting for a ‘morning prayer’ at the Israeli separation wall near Betlehem. © LWF/John Brooks*

In a statement issued in Geneva on 20 March, the LWF Executive Committee said such activity was a “principal obstacle” to progress toward the objectives of “a two-state solution, to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, to peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, and to Jerusalem as a city shared between the two peoples and three religions.”

“for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity (including ‘natural growth’)” It endorsed the group’s expressed support “for the negotiated resolution of all final status issues, the end of the occupation, and the establishment of a Palestinian state within 24 months.”

The Quartet expressed deep concern about the continuing deterioration in Gaza, including the humani-



## ACT Alliance Launched as New Global Humanitarian Organization

LWF Welcomes Merger of Relief and Development Networks



Guests at the ACT Alliance launch in Geneva included (left to right) Ms Beris Gwynne, director for global accountability, World Vision International; Ms Jane E. Bennett, finance and administration director at the World Young Women's Christian Association (WYWCA); and LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran P. Martin. © ACT Alliance

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the creation of ACT Alliance, one of the world's largest networks of church and church-related humanitarian relief and development organizations.

In a greeting at the launch of the ACT (Action by Churches Together) Alliance on 24 March, at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran P. Martin assured the new organization of the Lutheran communion's support and solidarity. The LWF had been instrumental in the formation of ACT Alliance, he emphasized, and, through its programs and partner organizations, offered the global body the largest possible network for its operations.

Worldwide the ACT Alliance comprises more than 100 agencies, churches and organizations. Of these, 72 percent are from the global South and the remaining 28 percent

come from the North. With a total of 30,000 employees, ACT members have combined annual revenues of close to USD 1.5 billion. Members operate in 125 countries around the world.

The new alliance resulted from the merger of ACT International, a global network of churches and related agencies founded in 1995 to respond to emergencies, and ACT Development, which was established in 2007. Martin said the ACT Alliance was neither an alliance of convenience nor one of competition. "This is an Alliance for greater cooperation and synergy among the churches, ecumenical organizations, faith-based organizations and communities to respond to the challenges of poverty and humanitarian need," he emphasized.

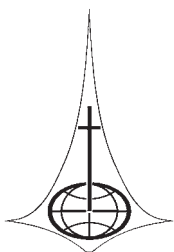
According to Martin, ACT Alliance would help churches engage in

transformation, reconciliation and empowering toward more justice in the world. "This is also the diaconal affirmation of the LWF," he noted. He said he hoped the LWF's decision to join the Alliance would encourage more of its member churches to also join the global network.

Martin added that the LWF's country programs and associate programs in over 36 countries and its 140 member churches in 79 countries all over the world, representing over 70 million Christians, offered the new organization the best basis of support for its work.

### Ecumenical Movement Expression

Delivering the sermon at a prayer service to launch the new humanitarian organization, World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary





Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, described the ACT Alliance as a genuine expression of the ecumenical movement, the call to be one so that the world can believe that God is a loving and caring God for all humankind.

“Therefore, we must also be inclusive in our work and our intentions, including all human beings in those who benefit from our service and acts, whatever culture, belief or color they might have,” Tveit underlined. “And therefore, we are aiming at being inclusive in bringing churches from the whole world into this fellowship of service.”

## Strategic Collaboration

For John Nduna, general secretary of the ACT Alliance, unification also provided greater opportunities to work together more strategically. “We are already seeing the benefits of this, especially in Haiti and Chile. Joint strategies enable us to address more effectively the persistent challenges of emergency preparedness,

disaster risk reduction, recovery and reconstruction,” he commented.

He expressed his conviction that the new Alliance would have a stronger and more coordinated approach to advocacy, and determination to speak out with even greater courage against injustice and abuse of human rights. “We believe we will have greater impact; bringing together extensive knowledge and experience into one Alliance. We have more opportunities for shared learning rather than working independently, divided by differing humanitarian and development perspectives,” he said.

In the new Alliance membership criteria, the emphasis on quality and accountability had increased significantly, Nduna indicated. “ACT emphasizes its zero tolerance to fraud and corruption and sexual abuse and exploitation,” he added.

For the LWF, the establishment of ACT Alliance was an important step toward closer cooperation between churches and their related agencies, said Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS).

As a common platform for both relief operations and development work, “the ACT Alliance is a unique chance to enhance ecumenical cooperation, and thereby, the efficiency and visibility of the churches’ development and humanitarian work,” the DWS director told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*. Hitzler is member of the ACT Alliance’s governing bodies on behalf of the LWF.

The LWF and ACT Alliance cooperate closely in several countries including Chad, Colombia, Haiti and Myanmar. Through worldwide emergency appeals, funding and humanitarian action, the Alliance coordinates humanitarian operations all over the world.

More information on the ACT Alliance is available at: [www.actalliance.org](http://www.actalliance.org)

More information on the global work of the LWF Department for World Service can be found on the LWF Web site at: [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

## LWF Mourns Founding Figure Howard Hong

### General Secretary Noko Pays Tribute to Refugee Resettlement Pioneer

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) mourned the 16 March death of Dr Howard V. Hong, who in the years following World War II laid the foundations of international Lutheran service to refugees. He was 97.

“Howard Hong was above all things a builder,” said a statement issued by LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko. “As a teacher, he formed young minds with his own passion for knowledge and enquiry. In the midst of the devastation caused by war, he offered help in rebuilding lives and societies, first with prisoners of war and then with refugees. And he was one of the creative minds behind the construction of the Lutheran service to refugees and displaced persons in the aftermath of World War II.”

The Minnesota native began teaching philosophy at St. Olaf College in Northfield in 1939, but left the school in 1941 to work with German and Japanese prisoners of war held in the United States.

When the war ended, Hong went to Germany under the auspices of the World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Association - YMCA - to work with war prisoners. In 1947, the National Lutheran Council in the United States asked him to develop a program to aid refugees in war-torn Europe. That work eventually became The Lutheran World Federation Service to Refugees (LWF-SR) and continues today as the LWF Department for World Service.

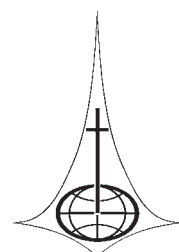
Working with the international organization of Lutheran churches, Hong pioneered a model of resettlement that asked congregations in the United States to receive refugees and aid in their resettlement.

“In doing so, he set an example of compassion and reconciliation, transcending the still jagged boundaries of wartime enmity,” noted Noko.

Today in the United States, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service continues to use Lutheran congregations throughout the country as bases for resettlement of refugees.

A life-long conscientious objector to military service, Hong’s work was rooted in his Christian faith. Throughout his life he would challenge those who found wartime killing compatible with Christianity.

Noko commented that Hong built other lasting legacies after his time with the LWF through decades



of inspiring teaching and research, through conservation work, through friendship and wise counsel, and through simplicity of life and care for local community.

“At the LWF we cherish the heritage of his example of Christian love and compassion, by which he helped to set this communion on its course of witness through service to the destitute and the oppressed,” said Noko.

For Hong, this diaconial action did not respond only to human need. He emphasized LWF-SR’s work was intended neither as relief nor social

work, but had the purpose “to actualize an idea, an attitude, a relationship between persons and churches.”

In the face of suffering caused by war, Hong found inspiration in Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard’s “Works of Love,” in particular the conviction that “love builds up by presupposing that love is present in the ground” of human lives.

After the war, Hong returned to his academic career at St. Olaf, where he collaborated with his wife Edna in more than thirty books of much-honored scholarship. With Edna, who died in 2007, he became

internationally known as the premier English-language translator and interpreter of Kierkegaard’s writings.

Hong, together with his wife, was also honored for conservation work in Minnesota.

The LWF joins all those around the world who were touched in different ways by Hong’s life and witness in honoring him, affirmed Noko.

Hong is survived by his eight children, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was scheduled for March 27 at St. Olaf College.

26 March 2010

## Tribute to Indian Church Leader Kunchala Rajaratnam for Commitment to Justice

### Kunchala Rajaratnam Dies in Chennai

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, a layman who served the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) for over four decades, and was formerly Asian region secretary for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), died on 7 April at his home in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, southern India, at the age of 89. He was director emeritus of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute.

A former president of the National Council of Churches in India, Rajaratnam was a leader who “challenged not only the church in India but the global ecumenical church to make Dalit liberation a primary missionary objective,” said Rev. A. G. Augustine Jeyakumar, UELCI executive secretary.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko paid tribute to Rajaratnam as a leader who “challenged his colleagues to redefine partnership in mission.

“He was forthright in his views and seldom compromised his commitments to justice and fairness. He did not mince his words and when necessary he spoke in capital letters,” said Noko in a statement issued at the LWF headquarters in Geneva.



*Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam displays a commemorative plate during the July 2006 tercentenary celebrations by India’s Lutheran churches. © UELCI/M. Lankapalli*

“Yet, even on those occasions, those of us who knew him well realized that deep down in his personality there was a softness that made him likable,” he noted.

The general secretary said that in Rajaratnam’s death, Lutherans and the ecumenical movement have lost “a voice in pursuit of justice.” The Indian church leader “served the Lutheran churches and the ecumenical movement in India with distinction, passion and a very high level of commitment for a period of over five de-

cadec,” said Noko. “He demonstrated tremendous imagination when he encouraged in specific ways self-reliance among the churches in Asia.”

Rajaratnam held various positions in his church and was leader of the Gurukul college beginning in 1971.

From 1975 to 1979 he was the secretary for Asia in the then LWF Department of Church Cooperation and was a member of the LWF Executive Committee from 1985 until 1990.

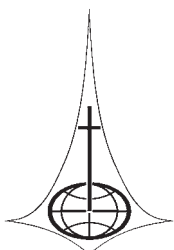
Rajaratnam founded the Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, based in Chennai, in 1979. In 2006, his church elected him as executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in India.

He had been executive secretary of the UELCI—which brings together 11 Lutheran churches—until 2002 and was formerly chief editor of its magazine, *The Indian Lutheran*.

LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran Paul Martin represented the organization at Rajaratnam’s funeral on 10 April at the Gurukul auditorium.

Rajaratnam is survived by four children, seven grandchildren and a great grandchild.

10 April 2010



## FEATURE: Saving One Tree Each Day

### Climate Change Impact Leaves Rwanda's Rural Communities Vulnerable

**KIGALI, Rwanda/GENEVA (LWI)** – Pointing at the healthy banana trees and cassava on his small farm in Kirehe district eastern Rwanda, Athanase Mugabo expressed hope that the overall harvest this time would be better than the previous years. But he still recalled his withered crop of maize and beans during the last season. “I did not get any harvest the last time, even after replanting,” Mugabo told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

“The rains were not sufficient. They came in torrents at first, but went away after a few weeks. By the time they returned, the crops had withered,” explained Mugabo, who also serves as a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda in Rusumo parish.

His plight, like that of many other farmers here, is a stark reminder of how ordinary people across Africa are affected by climate change. Experts have warned that droughts and famines in Africa will worsen as weather-related uncertainties increase.

There is an increasing number of droughts, floods and landslides, aggravating food insecurity and weakening the agriculture-based economies. Between 2004 and 2005 a vicious drought swept across the country, affecting three harvests and prompting appeals for food aid.



*Athanase Mugabo points to other plants intercropped with the bananas on his farm in Rusumo, Kirehe district, eastern Rwanda. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili*

Schadrack Bazubafite, project coordinator for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) program in Rwanda explained that small rivers, springs, swamps, wetlands and lakes—the main sources of domestic water—are diminishing.

“It is common to hear complaints that it is much drier than it was about 10 years ago. The people are also saying the seasons have changed suddenly and they cannot successfully

predict if the rains will come or not,” said the DWS project coordinator.

“Many farmers, unaware of the climatic changes in the seasons, are still preparing their land for planting as usual, but get disappointed when the rains delay or fail,” said Bazubafite. “It is very discouraging for the people.”

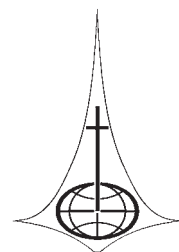
#### Tree Planting

Adjusting to climatic changes is a major challenge in Rwanda, according to the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) report, published by the government in 2007. Use of adaptable crop varieties remains crucial in a country where most people grow bananas, maize, beans and cassava for subsistence.

NAPA called for the development of an integrated water management strategy and early warning systems for weather pattern changes. It also urged an end to the widespread use of firewood for cooking, as it was decimating the tree cover and exposing soils to erosion. Reports indicate that Rwanda has lost about 60 percent of its forest cover in the past two decades.



*A man transports a bundle of firewood on his bicycle. Tree cutting for cooking and charcoal burning has significantly contributed to the depletion of Rwanda's forests. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili*



In 2002 the LWF program launched an environmental rehabilitation, conservation and protection campaign to promote reforestation. Nearly 164,000 people are participating in agro-forestry in the DWS project areas in eastern Rwanda. Between 2007 and 2009 the program maintained 13 nurseries in the eastern province, which produced 1.5 million seedlings. The saplings were transplanted on 620 hectares. In 2009 alone, more than 500,000 tree seedlings were planted.

The government is promoting the use of alternative energy sources, aimed at changing rural communities' dependency on firewood. In 2009, the LWF program signed an agreement with the government to construct 100 biogas systems.

A farmer needs two cows (improved breeds) for cow dung to sufficiently run a biogas system, which produces gas that can be used for cooking and lighting, while the residue is used as fertilizer on farms.

"Since the day we installed a biogas system, my family no longer makes the journeys to the hills to collect firewood," said Gahigi Stanislaus, a farmer from Ruyumba area in southern Rwanda.

But many of the rural farmers cannot afford installation costs estimated at around 800,000 Rwanda francs (USD 1,400) and the improved cow breeds. The government is developing smaller and more affordable systems.

## Energy-Saving Stoves

In 2000 DWS Rwanda introduced in its working areas energy-saving stoves known as *Rondereza* (to ease or quicken in Kinyarwanda), which



Mary Nkerenke places a cooking pot on a Rondereza energy-saving stove. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili

rural communities say are a more feasible measure toward cutting down on fuel wood usage.

The stoves came as a relief for many families that previously relied on the traditional three-stone stoves, which not only consume huge quantities of firewood but also produce a lot of smoke, endangering especially the health of women and children. Subsequently the government issued a directive to all rural communities to use these energy saving stoves.

"When women started using the new stove, they realized that they could cook with two or three pots at the same time. They also realized the stove made cooking easier, faster and used less firewood," said Mary Nkerenke, a 42-year-old farmer from Rukira sector in eastern Rwanda.

Nkerenke, like thousands of Rwandans, says she uses less wood and "saves a tree a day," to help safeguard planet Earth.

DWS Rwanda started as an emergency response initiative following the 1994 genocide in the

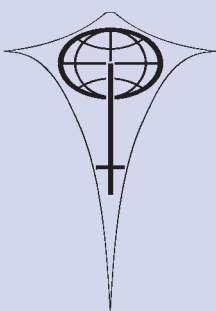
country, and gradually evolved into humanitarian development work. As the program phases out its activities there to focus more on needs in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler expressed deep appreciation for the support from various donors, Rwandan government collaboration and community members' active participation.

"It is a successful transition from relief to development, with local people willing and able to carry on many of the initiatives jointly begun with the LWF," he added.

*Nairobi (Kenya)-based LWI correspondent Fredrick Nzwili wrote this feature during a March 2010 assignment for DWS Rwanda.*

28 May 2010

**\*This article is in the continuing LWI features' series focusing on the topic "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly, which will take place 20-27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.**



Published and distributed by:  
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