

## Highlights

### Displaced DRC Families Want to Return Home but Security Is Not Guaranteed ..... 5

Sitting on a sack filled with clothes on the back of a truck, nine-year-old Faustin flashes a smile...

### Minimal Gains at Doha Climate Summit Call for Greater Church Action..... 8

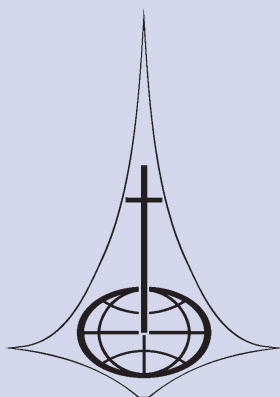
Delegates representing The Lutheran World Federation at the global climate summit in Doha said the negotiations had failed to produce valuable outcomes for the poor and vulnerable communities that are likely to be most affected by climate change...

### LWF Plays Prominent Role in UN Refugee Work..... 13

The long-standing engagement of The Lutheran World Federation in serving displaced people across the world was part of the discussions at a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dialogue with faith-based organizations on caring for refugees...

### LWF Churches Called to Address Link between Faith and Gender Injustice ..... 16

The Lutheran World Federation Action Plan "Churches Say 'No' to Violence against Women," urges LWF member churches to name violence against women as a sin and to confess to such violence, in particular within the churches...



## New Year Message from LWF General Secretary



*LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge addressing the December 2012 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dialogue with faith-based organizations in Geneva. © LWF/Peter Williams*

### Junge Encourages Churches to Be Strong Advocates against Injustice

**GENEVA (LWI)** – In his 2013 New Year Message on 4 January, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge reminds churches that the injustices, violence and conflict in today's world should not discourage them into despair and withdrawal, but should instead inspire deeper engagement in working for justice, peace and reconciliation.

Junge's message is inspired by Hebrews 13:14: "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come," also the Moravian watchword for 2013. He notes that these words to a discouraged and fatigued church in the early days of Christianity continue to remind churches today that "their witness finds its inspiration and orientation in all those things that God makes new."

The general secretary underlines that the watchword invites churches to both joyfully announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the newness it offers and to be strong advocates of God's transformation by challenging the

status quo through proclamation, diaconal actions and fearless public witness.

There is no reason to give up, run away or withdraw from the cities and the complexities in which churches find themselves today, Junge says. God's resolute and passionate love offered through his son Jesus Christ means that "there is hardly any convincing reason for a church to turn its back" on the world.

The general secretary prays for God's inspiration in the New Year so that the words and actions of the LWF may convey hope and joy as the communion of churches continues witnessing for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

Read the full text of the 2013 New Year Message from the LWF General Secretary: [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/new-year-message-2013.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/new-year-message-2013.html)

# Contents

## Communio

- 1.....New Year Message from LWF General Secretary
- 3.....LWF President Younan Speaks of Solidarity with Egyptian Coptic Church
- 3.....Lutheran Church Leaders Call for Safe Humanitarian Access in DRC Conflict
- 5.....Displaced DRC Families Want to Return Home but Security Is Not Guaranteed
- 6.....LWF President and General Secretary Urge Parties to Honor Gaza Ceasefire
  
- 18<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Summit
- 7.....Taking a Stand for the Planet
  - 8..... Minimal Gains at Doha Climate Summit Call for Greater Church Action
  
- 10 .....Global Church Bodies Asked to Help Raise Ecumenical Profile of Reformation Anniversary
- 11 .....Lutheran World Leaders Visit US Areas Marred in Hurricane Sandy's Wake
  
- UNHCR Dialogue on Faith and Protection Challenges
- 13 .....LWF Plays Prominent Role in UN Refugee Work
  - 14 ..... UN Dialogue on Faith and Protection Offers Concrete Suggestions
  
- 15 .....First Trilateral Ecumenical Dialogue Begins Discussions on Baptism

## Features & Themes

- 16 .....LWF Churches Called to Address Link between Faith and Gender Injustice
- 16 .....Soccer Was Her 'New Dawn'
- 17 .....They Target Unsuspecting Youth and Poor Families
- 19 .....Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Young Girls
- 21 .....A Relentless Search for Justice after Her Son "Disappeared"
- 23 .....A Kitty Build on Solidarity and Hope

## News in Brief

- 2.....LWF Offers Prayerful Support Following Shooting at Connecticut School
- 12.....Chad: A Snapshot of Daily Life for Refugees from Central African Republic

### LWF Offers Prayerful Support Following Shooting at Connecticut School

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge extended prayers to the families, community and people of the United States as they struggled to deal with the tragic shooting, 14 December, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

In a letter to Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Junge said, "It is with pain that we received the shocking news about the shooting," in which a gunman shot dead 20 students and six adults, before killing himself.

Junge noted that the shooting happened during the liturgical time when Christians across the world "prayerfully prepare for God's in-breaking into the world through Jesus Christ."

It is the Lutheran communion's prayer, the general secretary said, "that God may come as a Prince of Peace into the troubled and distressed hearts of all those suffering and mourning the loss of defenseless lives in Newtown, and that God's presence may become a seed for powerful transformation in the midst of these difficult realities."

He added, "May God's Spirit empower the church for its witness in these challenging circumstances."

**The Lutheran World Federation**  
– A Communion of Churches

150, route de Ferney  
P.O. Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2,  
Switzerland

**Telephone** +41/22-791 61 11  
**Fax** +41/22-791 66 30  
**E-mail:** info@lutheranworld.org

www.lutheranworld.org

**Head of Communications**

Heidi P. Martinussen  
hpm@lutheranworld.org

**Editor**

Pauline Mumia  
pmu@lutheranworld.org

**Layout**

Stéphane Gally  
sga@lutheranworld.org

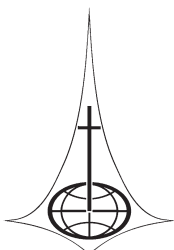
**Circulation/subscription**

Colette Muanda  
cmu@lutheranworld.org

Lutheran World Information (LWI) is the information service of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Unless specifically noted, material presented does not represent positions or opinions of the LWF or of its various units.

Where the dateline of an article contains the notation (LWI), the material may be freely reproduced with acknowledgment.



## LWF President Younan Speaks of Solidarity with Egyptian Coptic Church

Global Church Solidarity with Egyptians Is Crucial

**JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI)** – Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) described the enthronement of the new head of the Coptic Church Pope Tawadros II “as a much-needed sign of unity” for Egypt and for Arab Christianity.

Younan who is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) represented the LWF and ELCJHL at the 18 November installation of Tawadros II as the 118<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa. The ceremony was held at St Mark’s cathedral in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

“We must be aware that this is the largest Christian church in the Arab world. After the Egyptian revolution and the post-Mubarak [former Egyptian President] era, this was the one event that brought under one roof Christians, Muslims, high-ranking government officials and a wide spectrum of civil society not only from Egypt but from other parts of the world,” Younan told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* after the installation of Tawadros II.

Egypt’s population of more than 80 million people comprises an estimated 10 to 12 million Copts, representing the majority of the world’s Coptic Christians.

“The pope’s enthronement was a historic moment for Egyptians—expressing that they want to live together as Christians and Muslims. It is a much-needed sign of unity at this time in the country,” said Younan, referring to the unfolding social political changes after the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak



*Women worshippers in a Coptic church in Cairo, Egypt. © Christian Roar Pedersen*

and the consolidation of new governance under President Mohammed Morsi.

Bishop Younan underlined the significant presence of the ecumenical family at the enthronement including representatives from the World Council of Churches, from Christian World Communion such as the LWF, the Anglican Communion and the Vatican, Patriarchs of Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Catholic churches, as well as heads of several Evangelical churches. He said he saw this as an affirmation of the global church’s solidarity with churches in the Arab world, which are currently facing religious and political extremism.

“Such solidarity is very essential as oriental Christians are spreading not only in the Middle East but are all over the world, wherever our faith takes us,” said the LWF president. “All churches are interdependent, and together we

seek to be a living witness for the core values of love, peace, justice and reconciliation in the world,” he added.

In a message read by one of the Coptic church leaders, Tawadros II reiterated his commitment to work for the good of all Egyptians, Christians and Muslims alike.

Younan said this affirmation of interfaith collaboration was evident in the congregation’s applause whenever Tawadros’ predecessor, the late Pope Shenouda III, was mentioned.

The LWF President brought greetings from the General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and from member churches in the entire Lutheran communion. The pope in turn expressed gratitude for the congratulatory message from the LWF leaders upon his election early November. He said he looked forward to discussing ways in which the two church bodies could collaborate in the future.

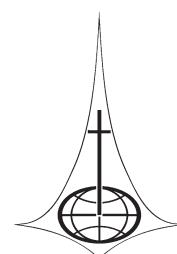
## Lutheran Church Leaders Call for Safe Humanitarian Access in DRC Conflict

LWF General Secretary Junge Assures Congolese Church of LWF’s Prayers and Support

**NAIROBI, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI)** – In response to rebel fighters’ seizure of Goma, the major city in eastern

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 20 November, Lutheran church leaders appealed for safe ac-

cess for humanitarian aid agencies into the country and city.







*A displaced man transports his belongings on a local bicycle commonly known as 'Chukudu' in Goma.  
© LWF DRC/Fred Otieno*

Rebels entered the capital of the North Kivu province amidst heavy shelling, sending thousands of residents fleeing their homes and internally displaced people's camps toward both the neighboring Rwandan and Ugandan borders.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed both sadness and concern on hearing that thousands of people "are bereft of peace and no longer know anything called home even in a country they call home."

In a letter to Presiding Bishop René Mwamba Sumaili of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (EELCO), Junge assured the LWF member church and the people of DRC of prayers from the entire LWF family.

Junge appealed to Lutherans everywhere to pray for all those who risk their lives in order to care for the most vulnerable and those who need humanitarian assistance amidst this violent conflict. He expressed "solidarity with all those struggling for peace and justice in the country and hoped that the violence is brought to an end soon."

Bishop Sumaili confirmed that many residents were fleeing Goma and many others had been killed or injured. He said it had been difficult to reach the people affected due to road blocks, and expressed concern that the humanitarian situation could worsen as more people became displaced.

The volatile security situation was hampering access into Goma. The LWF and EELCO emphasized the need for humanitarian workers in the city to be able to safely reach those caught in the conflict.

The LWF Department for World Service (DWS) as one of the largest humanitarian relief agencies manages a number of refugee camps across East and Central Africa, and is currently working in the only settlement where recent refugees from DRC are arriving into Uganda, said DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler.

The DWS programs in Uganda and DRC are helping people who have been displaced in the conflict, Hitzler said. Additional staff have

been deployed from the Nairobi-based Regional Emergency Hub to assist with assessments and support the scaling-up of humanitarian efforts.

DWS started working in DRC in 1994 in response to a massive influx of people fleeing the Rwandan genocide. The LWF staff in Goma work alongside EELCO and member organizations of ACT Alliance including Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid and FinnChurch Aid.

Bishop Sumaili said he was seeking the "best way to work together" with the staff from these organizations.

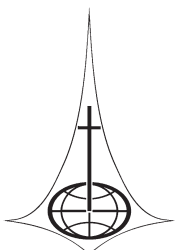
Hitzler noted that many of those living in Goma rely on petty trade and do not keep stocks of food. He said he had received reports that a day after the city had been captured by the rebel group, most people woke up very early in the morning searching for food and that prices had increased sharply.

In the consequent instability, the availability of clean water for affected populations is critical if an outbreak of disease is to be avoided. As DWS focuses on livelihoods, water, sanitation and hygiene related activities in DRC, they are well placed to respond to the needs of the local people but aid workers from all agencies need to be safe to be able to carry out their work, Hitzler added.

*(By Melany Markham, Nairobi based LWF regional communications consultant)*



*A woman balances two bags of maize on her head at a food distribution center for internally displaced persons in Goma, North Kivu Province. © LWF DRC/Fred Otieno*





## Displaced DRC Families Want to Return Home but Security Is Not Guaranteed

**GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo/ GENEVA (LWI)** – Sitting on a sack filled with clothes on the back of a truck, nine-year-old Faustin flashes a smile.

“I’m happy because I will have a chance to go back to school where we live in Rutshuru. I hope to see my friends Antoine and Paul again,” he says as the truck begins to move, perhaps marking the end of his life in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Faustin and his family were among the estimated 140,000 people dis-

placed in November around the city of Goma, when a new wave of fighting flared up in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) North Kivu province. The M23 rebels have conditionally pulled out of the Goma region, and some of the IDPs are beginning to return home. Peace talks between the DRC government and the rebels are going on in neighboring Uganda.

placed in November around the city of Goma, when a new wave of fighting flared up in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) North Kivu province. The M23 rebels have conditionally pulled out of the Goma region, and some of the IDPs are beginning to return home. Peace talks between the DRC government and the rebels are going on in neighboring Uganda.

According to a 7 December report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), the power struggle between government troops and the M23 forces caused “massive population displacement and suffering.”

Faustin’s family was travelling back in a convoy of 11 trucks and 10 mini-buses that transported the first group of 750 voluntary returnees who

had been staying at the Don Bosco Center in Goma. Pregnant and lactating mothers, people with disabilities and the elderly rode in the mini-buses, the rest sat on the backs of trucks.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and partners in the ACT Alliance network have been supporting voluntary return of IDPs to their homes or to settlement centers. But the LWF temporarily suspended the transport facilitation for voluntary returnees because of insecurity in some of the areas.



An LWF staff notes down registration details of vehicles hired by the LWF to transport returnees back to their homes. © LWF DRC/Fred Otieno

“The security situation is not encouraging for people to return to Kibumba, Rugare, Rumangabo, Kalengera and Kabaya areas north of Goma. Cases of women being raped have been reported. Men and boys feel threatened, as there



Rev. Charles Kawaya Ngenda, LWF program coordinator in the DRC, at the Don Bosco center for displaced persons in Goma. © LWF DRC/Fred Otieno

are reports of young men being abducted by the rebels,” said Ms Mapendo, a displaced woman, after returning from an assessment visit facilitated by the LWF to her area of origin.

Emile Mpanya, the LWF representative in DRC and head of the Department for World Service (DWS) country program there participated in the 11 December joint assessment visit that also included the German Protestant aid agency Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) and UNHCR to some of the places where IDPs are returning, especially north of Goma.

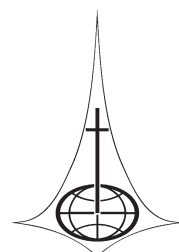
For those who have already returned home, the LWF plans to provide “seeds to plant on their farms and support them with farm implements. But we will also continue giving food aid for three months,” says Rev. Charles Kawaya Ngenda, LWF program coordinator.

Mpanya said the recent reopening of the Goma airport has improved the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid but the nearby presence of the M23 soldiers continued to be a concern for air traffic. Road transport has resumed but in some areas, vehicles have to pay taxes when passing through the rebel-controlled sections.

In the southwest region of Masisi, the heavy presence of government troops in preparation for a possible advance towards Goma, had forced local residents to move in large numbers to the Mugunga and Lac Vert IDP camps, while others are accommodated in neighboring villages and host families in Goma.

Intervention will continue through food distribution at several IDP settlements in partnership with the World Food Program (WFP), targeting an estimated 120,000 people. But there are shortages, Mpanya says.

Banzira Wkizum Wani has been sheltered at the Neema Primary School in the Majengo area of Goma with his wife and six children. “We are farmers. I used to grow enough food to feed my family, now we only share the little food given to us by the humanitarian



agencies. I really wish I could return to my farm," he says.

At the city's Ushindi Primary School, where hundreds of families are temporarily staying, there is scarcity of clean drinking water. Thirty-year-old Bola Muhawe, a mother of six including a six-month-old infant, fled 48 kilometers from Rugare to Goma.

The LWF teams conduct routine checks on the sites to determine the best intervention methods despite the scarcity of resources and ensure that beneficiaries are served with dignity.

Yvonne Doudou does not hide her joy when she receives assistance at Don Bosco. "I now have something to feed my family for the next ten days or so," she

says, after receiving two sacks of maize and beans and five liters of cooking oil.

Mpanya hopes the rebels and government can reach an agreement "so that people can safely return to their homes."

*(Written for LWI by Fred Otieno, DWS Kenya-Djibouti capacity building officer, on secondment to the DRC program.)*

## LWF President and General Secretary Urge Parties to Honor Gaza Ceasefire

### Appeal for Immediate Resumption of Negotiations for Broader Peace

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the ceasefire over Gaza reached on 21 November and urged all parties to honor it and immediately resume negotiations towards broader peace between Israel and Palestine.

In a 22 November statement by LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, the LWF said that the recent conflict had cost innocent human lives and injuries on both sides. The need for a broader peace is urgent, they said.

The ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, which controls Gaza, was announced in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, after a week of cross-border violence including rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza, and Israeli airstrikes on Gaza.

United Nations (UN) teams in Gaza reported that around 140 Pal-

estinians were killed, more than half of them civilians; another 900 were injured; while nearly 10,000 people were displaced. Five Israelis died in the violence and more than 200 were wounded.

The LWF reiterated its call for an immediate lifting of the economic blockade against the Gaza Strip, urged international efforts to relieve the suffering there and appealed to all parties to refrain from violent or provocative actions.

"The humanitarian situation facing the 1.6 million people living in Gaza is dire. Children, the elderly, and other vulnerable people have been bearing the brunt of the conflict," the LWF leaders said.

Younan and Junge stressed the urgent need for a broader peace agreement between Israel and Palestinians, saying the continued failure to resolve the decades-long conflict can only worsen the political and religious tensions in

the region. "It will be no surprise if the voices of violence, militancy, extremism, and intolerance get louder and louder, shouting out the voices of peace, reconciliation, moderation, and mutual respect," they expressed with concern.

They reiterated LWF's vision for the region which includes an end to the Israeli occupation; the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, with secure borders based on the 1967 demarcation lines; and for a shared Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims, as outlined in UN resolutions.

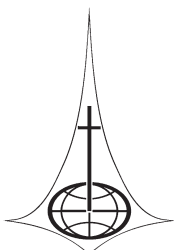
The LWF leaders called upon the Palestinian political movements Fatah and Hamas to negotiate their differences in order to reach a unified Palestinian position. They emphasized the need for "mutual respect and dignity" between the Israeli and the Palestinian sides, and encouraged the Gaza ceasefire mediators especially Egypt and the Quartet (UN, the European Union, Russia and the United States) to redouble their efforts for a broader peace.

The president and general secretary urged LWF member churches and all people of faith to pray for healing, comfort and charity for those affected, and for wisdom and moderation for leaders on all sides of the dispute.



Displaced Palestinian children play inside a classroom in a UN-run school in Gaza City. © Subaib Salem/Reuters, courtesy Trust.org – AlertNet

Read the full text of the statement by the LWF President and General Secretary at [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LWF-Statement\\_on\\_Gaza-20121122.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LWF-Statement_on_Gaza-20121122.pdf)





# 18<sup>TH</sup> UN CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

26 November – 7 December, Doha, Qatar

## Taking a Stand for the Planet

### LWF Youth Urge Concrete Action at Doha Climate Summit

DOHA, Qatar/GENEVA (LWI) – As the most recent United Nations climate change negotiations began in Doha, Lutheran youth from across the globe converged on the Qatari capital to raise their voices for concrete action, and to bring tangible lessons home to their churches and communities.

“Governments need to take decisions that will benefit all of humanity and look beyond their own immediate national interests,” said Tsiry Rakoto from Madagascar, one of the Lutheran delegation coordinators. “We are calling for concrete commitments for the reduction of greenhouse gases and the usage of clean energy sources.”

She emphasized the need for greater commitment to assist developing countries because many communities are already experiencing the catastrophic effects of climate change. “All too often developing countries do not have the means to recover quickly, if at all, from the loss and damage.”

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation of nine youth aged 21 to 29 attending as observers represented every region of the world—from LWF member churches in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Madagascar, Norway, Papua New Guinea and Poland. Their participation included networking in advocacy side events and coordinating with other representatives from ACT Alliance, the World Council of Churches and global youth delegations.

There were among the estimated 17,000 participants at the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 26 November – 7 December.

Warime Gutu, who travelled from Papua New Guinea for the summit, said he believes climate change is the most important issue for his generation. He asked, “Will nations really



Lutheran youth and ecumenical partners joined hundreds of demonstrators on 1 December for a climate march in Qatar to demand action at the COP 18 summit. © LWF/Sidney Traynham

commit themselves for the good of all—both in words and in deeds, and both for developed countries and small minority developing countries?”

The Doha negotiations addressed a range of issues including work towards a new treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2015 and is the only legally binding agreement that commits signatory nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The conference also furthered discussion on climate funding mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, to assist countries affected by climate change.

“Key countries have yet to submit new emission limits and reduction objectives for a renewed treaty, while others have only committed to modest targets,” Rakoto noted.

### Putting Youth at the Front and Center

Lutheran young people have long been involved in climate advocacy at international and local summits but the Doha meeting marked a first for the LWF. “These youth are not only members of the LWF delegation to the Doha summit, they are *the* LWF

delegation to Doha,” stated LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

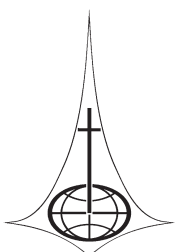
“As a communion, we have taken the clear decision to put youth at the front and center in our advocacy on climate change because they are presently leaders in our churches and in the future, they are the ones who will inherit the planet that preceding generations leave behind,” he added.

Rakoto, an international affairs and human rights intern at the LWF Communion Office in Geneva, said that the LWF understands that “young people are major stakeholders.”

### Significant New Learning

At Doha, two members of the LWF delegation participated in an early youth constituency event that was attended by the UN’s top climate official, Christiana Figueres. She told the global youth representatives, “Putting your time and energy into mentoring others on this process is the most important thing you can do.”

Delegation members said they saw their most important work as what happens back home. “By participating in the COP18 process, I believe that





LWF delegation member Raquel Kleber (from Brazil; right) speaks with Ambassador André Corrêa do Lago, head of the Brazilian country delegation at the climate summit in Doha. © LWF/Sidney Traynham

we have more credibility to influence our churches, communities and governments in the future,” said Rakoto.

Chris Böer, youth nominee of the German National Committee of the LWF, said he takes seriously Figueres’ point about involvement in the event. He noted that while they

are unable to vote, youth monitor the process from the observer section and participate in side events.

“Even with all the significant new learning we are doing as a delegation on these processes and structures, we are excited by the opportunity to be here,” Böer added.

## Minimal Gains at Doha Climate Summit Call for Greater Church Action

Delegates representing The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at the global climate summit in Doha said the negotiations had failed to produce valuable outcomes for the poor and vulnerable communities that are likely to be most affected by climate change.

Despite the lack of progress, the LWF delegation members attending as observers to COP 18 said they remained hopeful.

“If rich governments are not willing to take the necessary action on climate change, then we will have to,” said Warime Gutu of Papua New Guinea. “It’s our future and we have to fight to save it.” The group members said they believed the need for citizen and church action was even greater now, and each delegation member had made a commitment to implement a climate change initiative in their home country accompanied by the LWF.

the LWF and its member churches can be more actively engaged in the issue of climate change. “The church still has an important voice and vital role as a global conscience for our communities and countries,” they noted. “It is up to us—as the church—to speak out, advocate, lobby and influence the public dialogue in each of our contexts so that

The LWF delegation’s participation in the COP18 summit builds upon the Lutheran communion’s long-standing advocacy efforts in the area of climate change. This commitment was re-affirmed in the 2010 LWF Assembly and the LWF Strategy. It also continues the involvement of youth in previous LWF initiatives like the green&just virtual conference held earlier this year.

While the summit may not produce a landmark decision, it is critical to countries and communities already living under the effects of climate change, Rakoto noted. “This meeting will set the framework for ongoing state commitments and provide space for increased and concrete action in the future.”

Gutu, a member of the LWF Council, said he believes that climate change is a greater moral issue than any political or economic topic. “It comes down to moral values and whether we stand with the rights of those most affected—the poor and oppressed,” he added.

people care about this issue and compel our governments to act.”

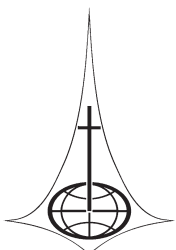
While governments did not commit to significant new carbon emission reductions at the Doha summit, there were some minimal gains to help facilitate transition to the next round of talks. Countries agreed to the future establishment of a funding mechanism to compensate for loss



LWF delegate Jeff Buhse (from Canada; second left) and members of the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance demonstrate for climate finance at the Doha summit. © LWF/Sidney Traynham

## Church Must Speak Out

At the conclusion of the meetings at Doha, the group explored ways in which





and damage that result from climate change-related disasters in developing countries, but many analysts suggest that the ambition for such a system remains very low.

In addition, several countries increased pledges or announced funding for green climate initiatives and adaptation assistance, but overall financial commitment remains low and the path to reaching the previously set global goal of USD 100 billion per year for developing countries by 2020 is unclear.

## With One Voice

The LWF representatives said their participation in the Doha meetings had broadened their insights on the need to develop and update holistic climate change strategies; engage with civil society in joint advocacy; and pursue theological reflection.

One of the key initiatives that they led was an international interfaith meeting of youth from different religious backgrounds to begin networking and planning for the COP 19 climate summit in Poland.

“Small things can produce big changes. I am convinced of this,” said Iwona Baraniec, from Poland, who is also an LWF Council member. “I saw that small communities can even influence the negotiations.” She plans to stay engaged in the interfaith coordination and to help her church prepare as her country hosts the 2013 summit.

“I want to see that all churches and communities work on this one topic of climate change,” Baraniec stressed. “We have many differences among us—Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims—but we can have one voice.”

Leif Christian Andersen said he saw the topic of climate change as an opportunity, and plans to pursue an interfaith perspective as he returns home to Norway. “It is frustrating that the negotiations move so slowly, but this means that we have to work even harder back at home,” he said.

He said he was particularly concerned about the youth in Norway, who, he believes have lost interest

in climate change. “There is not the same urgency any more. People say, ‘Oh, maybe it’s not human-made,’” said Andersen, who is a nurse and local politician. He added that it is particularly difficult in his context, because of the country’s financial dependence on the oil and gas industry.

“Often all that we hear in the media is the conflict between religions,” noted Andersen. “I hope that by starting a new conversation, this could be an opportunity for the media to profile the good work that people of faith can do together.”



Members of the LWF delegation to the COP 18 summit in Doha, Qatar  
© LWF/Sidney Traynham

## Ready to Work

Guti, a member of the LWF Council, said he believes that Lutherans, who comprise nearly 20 per cent of Papua New Guinea’s population, can do more by organizing and speaking out on the issue of climate change “so that the government can better represent the people.

“If the church is silent, it does not have power,” said Gutu, information technology coordinator at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. “We are supposed to be the voice of the voiceless.”

His two-fold plan includes organizing a forum to collaboratively look further at climate change as a cross-cutting issue throughout the church’s work in areas such as food security, social justice, health and education. Congregations’

involvement is crucial, and he noted this could start with practical actions such as collecting plastic litter and collective initiatives to reduce pollution.

Nahún Stürtz from Argentina said the conference was particularly meaningful despite the lack of action from governments.

“We cannot negotiate about acting or not acting,” he said. “Climate change is happening. We have to do something. And I want to get down to work.”

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge commended the delegation for their active participation in the

COP 18 events at Doha. “Their engagement, interactions and experience at the summit constitute a significant contribution to LWF’s commitment to addressing climate change,” he said.

“We will look into ways of bringing their reflections and recommendations to the attention of the LWF Council for further action,” he added.

*(By Sidney Traynham, LWF communications coordinator at the Doha summit)*

The updates from the delegation can be found online:

LWF Youth Blog:

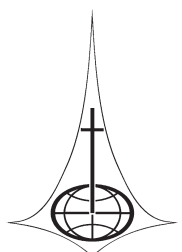
[www.lwfyouth.org](http://www.lwfyouth.org)

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/LWFYouth](http://www.facebook.com/LWFYouth)

Twitter:

[www.twitter.com/LWFYouth](http://www.twitter.com/LWFYouth)



## Global Church Bodies Asked to Help Raise Ecumenical Profile of Reformation Anniversary

### LWF in Discussions with EKD Delegation during Geneva Visit

GENEVA (LWI) – A delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) visiting the Ecumenical Center in Geneva on 28 November upon invitation by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), shared plans with global church organizations about preparations for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

In Germany, the cradle of Reformation, preparations for the Reformation anniversary have been going on for some years now.

Bishop Martin Schindehütte who is responsible for EKD's ecumenical relations and ministries abroad, noted that the ecumenical dimension of the Reformation still needs to be strengthened in the German Protestant church body. He called on the LWF, World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) and all present at the meeting to assist the German churches in making the ecumenical dimension central in preparations for the Reformation anniversary.

The delegation included Rev. Dr Margot Kässmann, EKD special envoy for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee and Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke, general secretary of the LWF German National Committee (GNC).

The LWF is in ongoing dialogue with member churches and with ecumenical partners to explore what is being planned in different organizations and how best it can serve its member churches on the road toward the Reformation anniversary. Discussions with the EKD delegation were part of this process.

A central principle for the LWF in approaching the anniversary is that Reformation is a global citizen and that the anniversary needs to be approached in its policentricity.

“When you go to different churches around the world they will speak

of different places and people of Reformation in their particular region. I hope that the EKD can harvest what is coming back to the cradle of Reformation from its travel to different corners of the world and that this harvest may enrich German churches as they approach the Reformation anniversary,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge at the meeting.

Junge said the LWF is currently exploring and planning how best to celebrate the Reformation anniversary in a way that recognizes the global aspect of Reformation, the ongoing relevance and gifts of Reformation, and that it is ecumenically accountable.

Kässmann said it was important in the anniversary preparations to explain to a wider public that this is not only a celebration for the church. “The Reformation message of freedom is also relevant for secular people,” she stressed.

She noted that in Eisleben, the town in Saxony-Anhalt where Luther was baptized, only seven percent of the population is Christian. In this secularized context churches need a

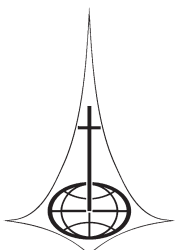
language that resonates with people outside the church to tell them why the messages of Reformation are important, Kässmann added.

Representatives from the church organizations discussed dimensions of the Reformation anniversary and dialogued how to share these with the whole ecumenical movement. WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, himself a pastor in the Lutheran tradition, noted that “Being Lutheran is to have a strong call to be ecumenical ... We are not failing when we recognize our failures. We have the opportunity to find true expressions of humility that can unite us.”

“The LWF Special Committee on 2017” is charged with providing the program framework for the LWF Reformation anniversary celebrations. The Committee will meet in early 2013 to finalize its recommendations from discussions and round-table meetings with member churches as well as with ecumenical partners. It will report to the LWF Council in June 2013.



The EKD delegation visit to the Ecumenical Center in Geneva: (left to right) Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi (WCRC); Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit (WCC); Rev. Dr Margot Kässmann (Special Envoy Reformation Jubilee); Bishop Martin Schindehütte (EKD); Rev. Martin Junge (LWF) and Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke (LWF-GNC). © LWF/H. Martinussen





## Lutheran World Leaders Visit US Areas Marred in Hurricane Sandy's Wake

### LWF General Secretary Junge: A Message of Hope for Those Rebuilding Lives

**CHICAGO, USA/GENEVA (LWI)** – In a historic visit, leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and a delegation of church leaders representing The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) traveled together, 30 November – 1 December, to areas of the United States impacted by storms produced from Hurricane Sandy.

said the visit also indicates that the Lutheran churches in Africa, some among the fastest-growing in the global church, are standing on their own to come to the United States to express their care and solidarity.

“The delegation embodies the presence of the whole of the LWF with its 143 member churches in order to

of being churches in communion, and for which the LWF stands,” he wrote.

The Lutheran communion was represented by Bishop Elisa Buberwa of the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT); Bishop Cindy Halmarson, Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; and Rev. Dr. Veikko Munyika from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The ELCT shares a companion relationship with the ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod, and the ELCIN is in relationship with the ELCA New Jersey Synod.

### Seeing the Damage, Listening to Survivors' Stories

“I’m a strong believer that we need to do communal public lament,” said Hanson, when he addressed a large group of ELCA pastors at a 30 November meeting in West Hartford, Connecticut. “People must weep and mourn that which is no longer, just like in the Book of Lamentations, before they are ready to relinquish the sadness and move on” from the disaster.

The presiding bishop also acknowledged the “tremendous strength people have to hope, and the steadfast love of the Lord that never ceases.” A critical component of the trip, Hanson shared, “is that we accompany you and are here for you.”

Munyika agreed, adding that television news and images viewed from afar was one thing, but witnessing it in person is more powerful. “I came to the United States to do what e-mails, faxes and phone calls cannot do—to express solidarity, love and care in person, [and] to listen to the people who have experienced the reality here.”

Listening to survivors of the storm share their stories was especially helpful, according to Rev. Stephen P. Bouman, executive director for



*ELCT North-Western Diocese Bishop Elisa Buberwa surveys the storm's damage in Staten Island, New York.*  
© ELCA

Eleven leaders of the ELCA and the LWF met with about 200 ELCA members, pastors and residents, particularly in New Jersey and New York, who suffered loss from the storms in mid-October.

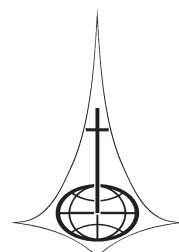
The delegation members surveyed the destruction and damage of ELCA church buildings and residential homes. More than 10 ELCA church buildings were severely damaged, and thousands of ELCA members are still displaced and/or rebuilding after the storm, which caused an estimated USD 50 billion in damage along the northern U.S. Atlantic coast.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson called the pastoral visit historic. The “dividing walls that have separated the Lutheran church bodies throughout the world are gone,” and the federation and ELCA are working in tangible fellowship. He

bring a word of comfort to those suffering and a message of hope for those rebuilding their lives,” wrote LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in a 27 November letter to Hanson.

“Through their physical presence, the LWF delegation wishes to support the ELCA as it sets out to respond to the spiritual and material challenges resulting from Hurricane Sandy,” Junge wrote.

“Indeed, there is no church so big, so old, [and] so well-resourced that it would not heavily depend on the love, care and solidarity of others. Conversely, there is no church so small, so young and with so scarce resources that it does not have gifts to share with others. We wish the accompaniment of the LWF delegation to be an embodiment of these relationships of reciprocity and mutuality that are constitutive of the gift



congregational and synodical ministries, ELCA churchwide ministries. “When you see one disaster, you’ve seen one disaster,” he said. “People’s narratives are very important.”

“My heart is here for you. This is a new mission for the church. Something we learned from Hurricane Katrina is that we can’t overlook the power of the gospel in the community,” said Bouman.

For Halmarson, seeing flood-damaged areas was overwhelming. The LWF “has come to the United States to say, ‘We’re walking with you.’ For the very first time, I will go home and tell them about the caregivers in New York and New Jersey. We’ll keep walking with you in prayer.”

Buberwa told survivors that this show of the Lutheran communion’s support was only the beginning. “I will take all these stories and share them with people at home, and [we] will pray for you. Our prayers are with you.”

## Long-Term Recovery

Prayers are only one part of the church’s response, said Rev. Michael Stadie, who is coordinating the ELCA’s disaster response efforts. Stadie is assessing financial needs and partnering with local Lutheran social ministry organizations.

“Our three areas of focus are providing emotional and spiritual care, volunteer coordination and long-term recovery,” he said, adding that disaster response can come in many forms, such as volunteers mucking out homes.



Bishop Buberwa discussing with residents of Staten Island, New York, a neighborhood hit by Hurricane Sandy. © ELCA

Bishop Robert A. Rimbo, ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod, and Bishop E. Roy Riley Jr. of the ELCA New Jersey Synod, expressed their gratitude for the pastoral visit, acknowledging that they would be working together for many months ahead.

Riley said the New Jersey Synod was only beginning to assess the damages. “Four weeks later, and we’re still in the assessment stage. So many people have been displaced, and two church [buildings] are so badly damaged. It took weeks to even track people down. We will be working on recovery for a long time.”

Herb Nellis, a member of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Keyport, New Jersey, is prepared for the long haul of recovery work. The retired truck driver and small-business owner lost the first floor of his house and was

living in a house offered to him by a friend. “How do I get through this?” he asked. “Knowing that people care. You think that you’ve lost everything in the storm but [then come to] realize that you haven’t lost everything. You have the care and concern of people.”

In addition to organizing relief efforts in the United States, the ELCA is responding in areas affected by Hurricane Sandy overseas. ELCA members are providing basic needs such as food, water and shelter in the Caribbean through ELCA Disaster Response.

The ELCA is the only LWF member church in the USA. It has 4.2 million members in nearly 10,000 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region.

*(From ELCA News)*

## Chad: A Snapshot of Daily Life for Refugees from Central African Republic

Following heavy rains in July and August 2012, tens of thousands of refugees living in Chad lost their homes and crops were destroyed particularly at the Yaroungou refugee camp in the south.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in partnership with The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and other implementing partners has started relocating the refugees to a new site situated on higher ground. The LWF distributes basic household items such as blankets, hygiene products and a hot meal to the refugees.

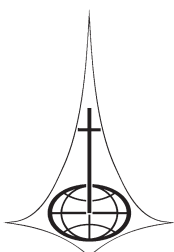


Visit [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/chad-a-snapshot-of-daily-life-for-refugees-from-central-african-republic.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/chad-a-snapshot-of-daily-life-for-refugees-from-central-african-republic.html)

for more images on daily life for an estimated 17,000 people who have fled insecurity in the Central African Republic, and are currently living in refugee camps in southern Chad.

*Photo: A refugee girl from the Central African Republic looks forward to getting back to school in the new refugee camp at Bèlom, southern Chad.*

© LWF/Anna Palmén





# UNHCR DIALOGUE ON FAITH AND PROTECTION CHALLENGES

12–13 December, Geneva, Switzerland

## LWF Plays Prominent Role in UN Refugee Work

### UNHCR Gathers Religions and States to Dialogue on Faith and Protection

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The long-standing engagement of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in serving displaced people across the world was part of the discussions at a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dialogue with faith-based organizations on caring for refugees.

LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge were among the 400 participants at the UNHCR fifth Dialogue on Protection Challenges, 12–13 December in Geneva.

“For the vast majority of uprooted people, there are few things as powerful as their faith in helping them cope with fear, loss, separation and destitution,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, in his opening address at the Dialogue.

The dialogue under the theme “Faith and Protection” was the first time the High Commissioner had convened such a meeting with particular focus on the contribution of faith-based organizations in caring for refugees. Participants included representatives from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist faiths, and

from state and non-governmental organizations (NGO).

“To be a secular organization dealing with refugees does not mean UNHCR should ignore religion, but we must respect and value the faith of the people we care for. [...] to ignore faith would be to ignore its potential for preserving dignity and for finding solutions for the people we care for,” Guterres remarked.

The High Commissioner had invited a select group of faith leaders to a closed session prior to the dialogue.

Reflecting on the session, the LWF president said it “had shown that religions have many commonalities. The question remained, however: how should we translate those commonalities into concrete partnerships?”

The LWF is itself the fifth largest implementing partner of the UNHCR and cares for almost 1.5 million refugees in the world. The work of the LWF is rooted in the biblical and theological notion of “welcoming the stranger,” Younan noted.

Younan said he had underlined at the closed session the value of *di-apraxis*—dialogue through service in

which peace and understanding are built through practical engagement together for the spiritual and physical well-being of the whole human being.

At the Dialogue meeting, representatives from all faiths reiterated the message of welcoming the stranger irrespective of the individual’s creed. They also emphasized impartiality of service to all people in need.

The UNHCR does, as a principle, work on a secular basis and does not support religious activities. From that perspective the Dialogue meeting bringing together faith leaders and state and UN representatives was of particular importance.

“Secularity is inherent in humanitarianism. We can work with faith-based organizations doing humanitarian things. We tend to draw the line between this and the UNHCR supporting religious activities,” said the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees T. Alexander Aleinikoff.

“I think the dialogue has put pressure on these assumptions. It has almost said that a secular humanitarianism is partial because faith means a lot to people and one cannot not take faith into account,” he added.

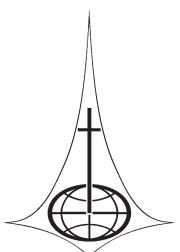
### Governments Recognize Religions’ Contribution

UN member state representatives also praised the role of faith-based organizations in caring for refugees.

Tanzania’s Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Mr Pereira A. Silima commended LWF’s work through the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS). “In Tanzania, we have experience in refugee emergencies and faith-based organizations have rendered their support and offered hope and comfort,” the minister said.



LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan (right) addressing the UNHCR Dialogue meeting with faith leaders, on the left is LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge. © LWF/Peter Williams



TCRS, an associate LWF program under the Department for World Service “is on the forefront to offer assistance before agencies arrive. They offer hosting and ask their members to collect [funds],” Silima said, adding “this is noted by the state.”

A central theme of the Dialogue was the role of faith-based organizations as welcoming communities and the importance of the principle of impartiality when working with refugees.

Whereas it is states that grant asylum, the High Commissioner for Refugees emphasized that “faith-based organizations and local religious institutions can help create and strengthen welcoming communities for refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.”

But welcoming communities is only part of the solution, said the LWF general secretary. “We need to not only create space in the hearts and minds of people. Churches have a particular role to play advocating for physical space for refugees in our societies. We need to know how to interact with member states and governments concretely,” said Junge. “We have a two-fold role: As implementing partners but also in mobilizing politicians when it comes to solutions.”

Junge particularly mentioned prevention of the root cause of refugees and the focus on gender equality as areas of advocacy for faith-based organizations.

Another prominent issue discussed was the need for “religious literacy”—

better understanding of specific religions and religion in general. As co-moderator of one of the round tables at the Dialogue meeting, the LWF general secretary noted that “we need to create a better understanding across religions of who ‘the other’ is but also what religious literacy means to all the actors involved in refugee work and how to relate to their faiths.”

This notion was highlighted in the High Commissioner’s closing address, when he announced that one concrete follow-up to this year’s Dialogue would be a guide on religious literacy with a guidance note and training for UNHCR staff. “The UNHCR should have its own faith literacy program,” Guterres concluded.

## UN Dialogue on Faith and Protection Offers Concrete Suggestions

“Sometimes the problem is not what we teach but what we ignore,” said Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), when he addressed participants at a round table of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Dialogue on Protection Challenges, 12–13 December in Geneva.

At the round table, Younan, who is also bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, shared the example from Jerusalem where a group of Muslim, Christian and Jewish leaders have come together to monitor what they teach about each other. He said the initiative had proved to be a great success in enhancing a common understanding and education about each other.

Younan advocated the example as a possible inspiration for the UNHCR Dialogue meeting. “It is important that religious leaders sign a code of conduct and teach it,” the LWF president stressed.

The idea was embraced by the round table co-chairperson Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, who forwarded it for consideration to the plenary session. When a code of conduct is written into “a document of mutual respect it has the capacity to have a transforming effect,” the Rabbi noted.



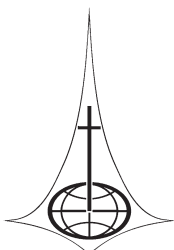
(Left to right) UNHCR High Commissioner António Guterres, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan at the Dialogue on Faith and Protection. © LWF/Peter Williams

Younan said he considered a code of conduct as part of the contribution of faith-based organizations to “strengthen welcoming communities,” a phrase offered by the High Commissioner for Refugees in his opening address to the 400 participants at the Dialogue meeting.

In his concluding remarks, the High Commissioner for Refugees Mr António Guterres summed up the concrete suggestions from this year’s meeting, which included the creation of a common code of conduct for religious leaders. He suggested that the LWF and other organizations involved in preparing this year’s meet-

ing coordinate the preparation of a first draft of a code of conduct to be shared with religious leaders, and eventually presented at the High Commissioner’s annual meeting with NGOs in 2013.

“There are indeed many documents and agreements that could be taken as a starting point of such a code of conduct,” added LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in his concluding remarks at the plenary session following the round table discussions. “Such a document would state our basic understanding and outline the obligations, which faith based organizations engaged in the protection of refugees would commit to.”





## First Trilateral Ecumenical Dialogue Begins Discussions on Baptism

Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics Meet in Rome

**ROME, Italy/GENEVA (LWI)** – The first ever international trilateral dialogue between the Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites was held in Rome, 10-14 December, launching a five-year discussion focusing on baptism.

“Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church,” was the topic of the inaugural meeting attended by representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). The PCPCU hosted the gathering.

The Lutheran – Roman Catholic – Mennonite Trilateral Dialogue Commission comprises five members each from the three Christian World Communions, including staff members as co-secretaries.

Baptism has generally been considered as the ecumenical theological topic where substantial agreement exists within the main Christian traditions. However, emphasis on infant or adult baptism remains a challenge in ecumenical relations where these rites differ.

While Catholics and Lutherans practice infant baptism, Mennonites follow the 16th century Anabaptist practice of adult baptism.

Papers presented at the Rome meeting provided background for the trilateral dialogue, summarized presentations of past dialogues on baptism, and discussed the understanding and practice of baptism. The group agreed that in the course of the process, papers produced will be for internal use only.

The atmosphere of the talks was enthusiastic and promising because of the challenging but central topic and particularly because of the new trilateral method of dialogue, which is being used for the first time at the international level, noted LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecu-



*Lutheran, Catholic and Mennonite representatives at the first meeting of the trilateral dialogue in Rome.*  
© Eleanor Miller

menical Relations Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka.

Lutherans have a history of bilateral discussions with Catholics and Mennonites respectively but this is the first time that all three Christian traditions have met together in a formal ecumenical theological dialogue.

Lutherans’ historic agreements with Catholics on the one hand, and with Mennonites on the other have provided a strong basis for widening the circle of dialogue beyond the bilateral signatory partners. In 1999 the LWF and the Vatican signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, ending centuries of dispute and conflict over the crucial subject of justification. At the LWF Eleventh Assembly in 2010, the LWF formally asked the Mennonites for forgiveness for past wrongdoings and persecution towards Anabaptists, considered as the direct forebears of Mennonites.

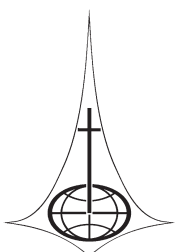
Because of its importance to the nature of the church, baptism

will also feature in discussions at the 2014 meeting of the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, under the theme “Growth in Communion.”

The Rome meeting was co-chaired by Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga (Colombia) on behalf of the PCPCU; Prof. Turid Karlsen Seim (Norway) as proxy for Prof. Friederike Nüssel (Germany) on behalf of the LWF; and Prof. Alfred Neufeld (Paraguay) for the MWC.

PCPCU President Kurt Cardinal Koch and the council’s secretary, Archbishop Brian Farrell, brought greetings to the meeting.

The trilateral commission will hold its second round of conversations in January 2014 to study “Baptism: God’s Grace in Christ and Human Sin.” Future topics will include “Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith” and “Living Out Baptism.”



## LWF Churches Called to Address Link between Faith and Gender Injustice



*In Colombia, a member of the "Manos Tejedoras de Futuro" ("Weaving Hands for the Future") group produces handicrafts in a church-run group to supplement her income. Such gatherings provide women with a support network and a safe place to share life stories. © Luis Eduardo Ramirez*

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Action Plan "Churches Say 'No' to Violence against Women," urges LWF member churches to name violence against women as a sin and to confess to such violence, in particular within the churches.

On the 2012 observance of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November and the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" that followed, LWI featured some of the initiatives by member churches and the Department for World Service programs to raise awareness about this issue and help those affected regain a life in dignity.

### Soccer Was Her 'New Dawn'

#### Bolivian Church Provides Alternative Livelihoods for Vulnerable Families

**SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia/GENEVA (LWI)** – Sundays have new significance for Saturnina Flores and her daughters. In the morning they attend worship. In the afternoon the 27-year-old mother of two plays soccer. Her life has changed.

Soccer brings back memories of her teenage life in La Paz, Bolivia's administrative capital city. Years back, Flores enjoyed playing football on Sunday afternoons with her team "Nuevo Amanecer" (New Dawn), which won second place in one local tournament and received the prize of a cow.

It's been a long journey from "Nuevo Amanecer" to the Faith and Hope Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELB), located in the slums of the country's largest city Santa Cruz.

Flores used to work as a seamstress, sewing up to 300 pairs of jeans

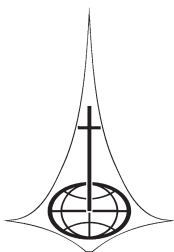
per week. When she lost that job in 2011 she found both work and support at the IELB congregation. She now works at the Lutheran school as a housekeeper and janitor to supplement her USD 90 monthly income at a small restaurant.

#### Poverty, Hardship and Violence

Mother of 10 year-old Reina, and Michel six, Flores was born in the mountain region of Illimani. She was the only daughter among seven children in a poor household. At the age of five, she was given up to a well-off family for care, but she ended up as a manual child laborer, feeding cattle and enduring physical beatings and other forms of abuse from her foster parents. Upon learning about their daughter's predicament,

her parents took her back home, only to send the then nine-year old to work for food in La Paz.

In the city, Flores at the age of 16 befriended Ivan. He later abandoned her after learning that she was pregnant with his child. Disappointed that their daughter had become an unwed mother in her teens, her parents arranged marriage with another man, 20 years her senior. During their ten years together, he subjected her to physical and emotional violence, and during that period she lost three babies, but she also had her second daughter. The situation was aggravated by mistreatment from her mother-in-law. Things got worse, and when her husband attempted to kill her, Flores escaped to Santa Cruz, where she eventually got the seamstress job.





## Support to Families Facing Social Challenges

“The church is a blessing for me and my daughters,” says Flores. “Working as a janitor helps me pay the rent for my house. Only God knows my life and I am hopeful for the future.”

The IELB Faith and Hope congregation has around 200 members who support each other in the midst of difficult social challenges. In recent years, several families moved to

another area of the city in search of better livelihood and many of them are no longer able to come to the congregation due to the long distance.

The congregation comprises families that are mainly headed by single mothers. It supports members with skills’ training to generate income from selling products such as jewelry made from recyclable materials. It also runs a Lutheran elementary school and a kindergarten.

The IELB Santa Cruz congregation hosted representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean for a regional meeting last September, called to assess how to best equip churches for their respective ministries.

The Faith and Hope Lutheran Church pastor Rev. Juan Carlos Chuyma thanked the LWF for coming to Santa Cruz. “To host the regional gathering is meaningful for us. It is an opportunity to let our sisters and brothers know about the service we are providing. We support more families and aim to enhance education through computer classes, bakery training and accounting studies,” he said.

The IELB has 22,000 members organized in 105 congregations served by 26 ordained pastors. It supports community members including women’s groups through livelihood projects dealing with education, water supply and food security.

*(By Bogotá [Colombia]-based journalist, Edwin Mendivelso)*



Saturnina Flores, mother of two and soccer enthusiast, has found employment and support at Faith and Hope Lutheran Church in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. © LWF/Edwin Mendivelso

## They Target Unsuspecting Youth and Poor Families

### LWF-Supported Center Helps Victims of Human Trafficking in Bangladesh

**DINAJPUR, Bangladesh/GENEVA (LWI)** – On 29 January 2010 Ranjona and her cousin Pinky went to visit the holy site Majar Sharif at their village in Dinajpur district, northwest Bangladesh. At a sudden point during the visit, they found themselves surrounded by a group of people. They were knocked unconscious.

When the teenagers regained consciousness they discovered they were being held captive in a strange house by a couple they did not know. For the following weeks, the two young women were forced into sexual work.

Ranjona soon learned that she was to be sold off to another woman in Faridpur district near the capital Dhaka, where the forced sex work continued. Back home, her parents—her father is a vegetable vendor, her

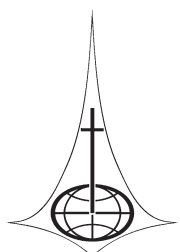
mother a housewife—had reported the girls’ disappearance to the police.

Help eventually came when Ranjona gave her father’s name to a

vegetable seller who had noticed her through a window of her “owner’s” home. Police raided the house and rescued her. The rescue subsequently



A member of an RDRS women’s group talks about domestic violence at a seminar organized by RDRS Bangladesh. © RDRS Bangladesh







*Empowering marginalized communities: Fish farming and floating gardening on the same parcel of land has become a popular means of earning a living for extremely poor women involved in RDRS food security projects. © RDRS Bangladesh*

led to Pinky's freedom as well, and arrest for the offenders. This was after two months of sexual captivity for both girls.

## Rehabilitation Center for Destitute Women

Ranjona's parents knew about a rehabilitation center for destitute women run by the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS), one of Bangladesh's longest-serving and largest NGOs and a lead actor in rural development.

Started by the LWF in 1971 as a country program of the Department for World Service (DWS), RDRS, now an associate LWF program, has continually challenged the causes and effects of poverty, ignorance and powerlessness in Bangladesh, with particular focus on women's empowerment.

At the RDRS rehabilitation center in Rangpur, Ranjona and Pinky were offered counseling, primary health care, legal education and skills training. Despite the harrowing experiences at the hands of traffickers, they were able—with RDRS' assistance—to return home to their families with support and training to help them earn a living on their own.

The young girls are among millions of women and men, boys and girls, who have been subjected to

human trafficking in Bangladesh, a country of more than 160 million people. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), trafficking in persons, including the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation is a major national and regional concern.

But it is rooted in a broader context. Extensive migration of workers necessitated by poverty spawns not only legitimate work but also illegal activities that threaten the poor and vulnerable. "Irregular migration, informal channels of remittance and human trafficking continue to result in serious violations of migrants' rights, and an increasing number of Bangladeshi irregular migrants are

apprehended in destination countries," IOM states.

The RDRS notes that children—both boys and girls—are trafficked in Bangladesh for commercial sexual exploitation, forced begging and labor. Women and girls are trafficked for sex work within the country or sent to India.

A significant share of the country's trafficking victims are men recruited for work overseas with fraudulent employment offers, and then subsequently exploited under conditions of forced labor, RDRS says.

## Job Promises in Neighboring Country

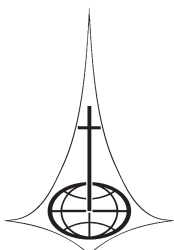
On 5 October 2009 residents in Bhaoalguri village in the northwest district of Kurigram became suspicious when they saw five women and six children wandering in the community. They contacted an RDRS legal volunteer, who determined that the group had come from a village in Faridpur district and had been promised jobs in India by a man they were yet to meet.

Upon consultation with government and police officials, RDRS confirmed that the prospective employer was attempting to traffic them as forced laborers, and he was arrested.

Trafficking persists in Bangladesh but there are efforts by the



*Girls and women rescued from human trafficking or other forms of violence receive skills training in tailoring and hand embroidery at the RDRS rehabilitation center in Rangpur, northwest Bangladesh. © RDRS Bangladesh*





## Empowering the Poor

The federations have become an effective local platform for mobilizing marginalized communities as a positive force for empowerment. The RDRS women's rights program seeks to reduce discrimination and gender-based violence, which are key concerns for the LWF.

*(By Sabrina Sharmin, RDRS communications coordinator)*

government to curb the practice and punish offenders. A law enacted in 2011 categorizes human trafficking as a punishable activity. The legal framework has been broadened to include not only human trafficking associated with prostitution and sexual abuse but also internal trafficking for labor. Convictions for offenders range from several years in prison to life sentences.

RDRS continues to address the root causes and effects of poverty, ignorance and powerlessness in the country.

Its development programs benefit more than 2.2 million people (400,000 households) in almost 17,000 groups and 360 federations in the mainly deprived northern Bangladesh, particularly Rangpur division.

## Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Young Girls

### Kenyan Church Projects Says "No" to Female Genital Mutilation

**KAPENGURIA, West Pokot, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI)** – For seven days, she ran through bushes, climbing trees to escape animals, living off wild fruits and the little water she could find. Her feet were swollen and blistered.

Having endured a painful, dangerous and illegal female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision, imposed on her by her parents, she was determined to escape a forced marriage to an old man and a life without a future.

When Regina Njeri, a teacher and leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), tells this story about one of her students, she laments, "I have heard about so many girls [forced to escape]."

The young girl eventually found help at a refuge center for girls and women escaping FGM, later returning to her family, who did not force her to marry.

Not all are so fortunate. Although the numbers are declining, thanks to advocacy and government policy, FGM is still prevalent in some communities in Kenya, currently affecting around 25 percent of the female population. It is estimated that out of the 140 million girls and women who live with the consequences of FGM worldwide, most are in Africa. In communities where female circumcision is practiced, it is considered as a central part of the cultural rites of passage marking a girl's transformation from a child to a woman.



*Judith Nyaata, coordinator of the ELCK "Say 'No' to FGM" project, leads a training session in Mt Elgon, Kenya. © LWF/J. Brümmer*

### LWF Women's Desk

Concern for this continuing widespread practice led women's groups within the ELCK to initiate the "Say 'No' to Female Genital Mutilation" project, sponsored by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development (DMD).

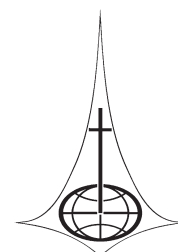
It is linked to the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) program, which includes initiatives to help reduce violence against women and to realize better gender relations among LWF member churches and in society.

The project raises consciousness among the Pokot in northwestern

Kenya. It is one of the rural communities in which FGM is still widely practiced, with as many as 80 percent of the women and girls as young as 10 having undergone the practice, also referred to as the "female cut."

The "Say, 'No'" project promotes an environment where the dignity of young girls is upheld. Since it started in 2008, the project has trained 25 trainers, mobilized 125 local activists and reached more than 15,000 people through awareness-raising campaigns.

The project cares for five girls aged 14 to 16 years who had to run away from their families to escape FGM. This includes paying the boarding



school fees for the girls, while the families of pastors or deaconesses look after them on a voluntary basis.

## Development Is Linked to Women's Literacy

Communities are losing children because of the unnecessary female circumcision, Njeri stresses. "When young girls are forced to undergo FGM they are married off and their education ends; many women end up illiterate and unable to help develop their communities," she says.

She says that as a Christian she sees no reason for FGM. Ignorance about the issues surrounding the practice is a major challenge which can only be changed through education. If parents are educated, their children go to school, Njeri notes.

Hellen Christopher, a deaconess in the ELCK Northwestern Diocese,

non-sterilized knives; while children are born with brain damage as a result of the impact on the pregnant mother.

Having suffered great pain when forced to undergo FGM herself, and again when she gave birth to her children, she says she is determined to see that young girls and women do not follow that treacherous path.

The ELCK deaconess teaches women and girls in the church about the negatives effects of FGM, with the goal to have such information shared widely in families and schools. Some of the effects are encouraging, she notes. "Boys are now coming forward and saying they will never marry a girl who has been through FGM," she adds.

Jeremiah Lokwangir, assistant chief in the administrative area of Chepareria and a member of ELCK, says the cultural practice "stifles the

health implications and mortality rates linked to the practice. "FGM also leads to the spreading of diseases and can lead to death. There are so many women who have died," Lokwangir adds.

## Role Models in the Community

Judith Nyaata, coordinator of the "Say 'No'" project, says the aim is to reach as many people as possible on the dangers of FGM. "Some people do not know their rights, especially the women and children."

She says success is measured by the number of girls who stay in school so it will take time before results are seen. In the meantime role models in the community, who have not undergone FGM, offer leadership.

Church deaconesses counsel girls to stay in school. "It will have a long-term impact on these girls because there will be hope for employment," Nyaata adds.

ELCK General Secretary Rev. John Halakhe says the church fights against FGM because the practice denies young girls the right to receive the best society can offer.

It is not right, he concludes, when a young girl "is forced to marry and denied an opportunity to study like any other human being in the world."

The ELCK is one of the two LWF member churches in Kenya. It has 100,000 members organized in four dioceses throughout the country.

*(Julia Brümmer, LWF/DMD program assistant conducted the interviews for this feature article during a recent visit to West Pokot, Kenya.)*



*Hellen Christopher, deaconess of ELCK North-Western Diocese is one of the leading activists trained through the project. © LWF/J. Brümmer*

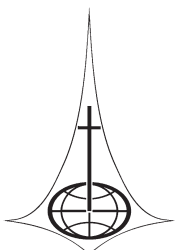
stresses that women's literacy and employment in the region are dependent on ending the practice. As young girls who have undergone the "female cut" are married off, jobs go to men, she says.

Christopher also talks about the serious health risks that are associated with FGM. She has seen many mothers who have undergone female circumcision become infected from

lives of women," blocking out any possibility for professional development. Because of the cultural conviction that it enhances the value of a woman, the practice is widespread in the area. "We are not getting a single woman who can become a professor or become a doctor [from here]," he notes.

As a local government representative, he is very concerned about the

LWF resources to guide discussion on violence against women are available at [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/churches-say-no-violence-women.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/churches-say-no-violence-women.html) and [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/it-will-not-be-so-among-you.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/it-will-not-be-so-among-you.html)





## A Relentless Search for Justice after Her Son “Disappeared”

LWF Supports Victims of Armed Conflict in Guatemala

**GENEVA (LWI)** – When secret agents dragged away 22 year-old Oscar from the Guatemalan city fire station where he worked in 1984, his mother Blanca Rosa Quiroa de Hernández, began to despair about her son’s fate.

Months turned into years of pain and agony, gnawing at her until she and other mothers and family members founded the Association of Family Members of the Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA).

Quiroa is a slight 68-year old woman. She says her weight gradually shriveled to 85 pounds (39 kilos) after her son was taken. As she recounts the years of vain searches for Oscar in morgues, prisons, hospitals and city dumping sites, her facial expressions convey the deep suffering she has undergone.

But she speaks forcefully, saying she could not have survived without FAMDEGUA. “As a woman and as a mother, I have an obligation to fight because I was 16 when he was born. He was like my brother, my son, my friend, my first son. If I wasn’t involved in this fight I would have died.”

“The day after I reported it [Oscar’s disappearance] to the police, I talked to other firefighters. They confirmed



*FAMDEGUA co-founder Ms Blanca Rosa Quiroa de Hernández speaks during the LWF co-hosted panel session at the UN in Geneva. © LWF/T. Rakoto*

that 12 men from the G2 secret service unit of the armed forces, not in uniform, roughed up Oscar, when they took him away. They sped off in three vehicles.”

### Disappeared Without a Trace

Human rights workers say that more people have disappeared after forced

abductions in Guatemala over the last 40 years than in any other Latin American country. The country has a population of around 10 million people; and 45,000 disappeared in that period.

Quiroa believes Oscar was targeted because he could not keep quiet about the atrocities he had witnessed at work.

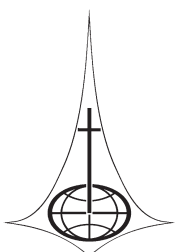
“It’s my duty as a mother to stay active, not only for Oscar, but because of the 45,000 missing. It’s my duty as a citizen and as a woman. We are their voices. If we are silent, it’s as if we were accepting our children were criminals like the army said, and I would feel like a murderer myself.”

In the months after the disappearances, families would hear on the news that bodies had been dumped down a city ravine and would run to find them, hoping to stem their anxiety.

There were several visits to morgues too, and the unbearable site of disfigured bodies. “I remember going to the morgue with others. At first I was afraid because every day



*With support also from FAMDEGUA, DNA samples are extracted from family members to help identify remains found in the military base at Coban in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. © Magnus Aronson*



we went—15 or 20—families to see five or eight dead bodies that had been horribly tortured,” she recalls. In some cases, “acid was poured on them to make their faces unrecognizable,” she adds.

Guatemala’s civil war from 1960 to 1996 involved a variety of military, government and civilian conflicts that cost the lives of an estimated 200,000 people and left more than 1 million displaced persons. Human rights groups say the 1996 National Reconciliation Law which provides amnesty for many crimes committed during the civil war, exempts both soldiers and guerillas from prosecution for killings, kidnappings and acts of torture committed during the conflict.



*Young people take classes at the EPRODEP educational institution in the marginalized neighborhood of Ciudad Quetzal, Guatemala City. The center is supported by Caja Lúdica, a local partner organization of the LWF Central American program. © Magnus Aronson*

## UN Human Rights Day

As the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Day was marked worldwide on 10 December in 2012, FAMDEGUA continues to campaign against granting amnesty to those guilty of genocide during the country’s civil war.

“From 23 February 1984 my life changed radically,” Quiroa says. “We had to leave our home, because we

might get picked up too. We had to take care of Oscar’s child. Our neighbors shunned us, afraid of associating with us, because they did not want the same thing to happen to them.

“Forced displacement is the most serious crime against humanity. The social texture is broken and family nucleus is smashed; social networks are broken with friends, work colleagues or neighbors,” Quiroa stresses.

FAMDEGUA and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) co-hosted a side event on 22 October in Geneva, prior to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Guatemala. At the panel presentation on “Transitional Justice in Guatemala,” Quiroa, flanked by international human

rights workers pleaded that amnesty should not be granted to those who committed genocide and related crimes.

“Quiroa is the light in the darkness along with others,” said Eva Ekelund, LWF regional representative for the Department for World Service (DWS) in Central America, who moderated the panel session. “For justice to prevail truth must pre-

vail and there should be no amnesty for genocide,” she added.

## Despite Threats, Determined to See Justice

Since its founding in 1992, FAMDEGUA collaborates with other civil society groups to provide legal support to families seeking to know the fate of their loved ones, conduct exhumations at burial sites and assist in the burial of victims.

Rights groups and individuals fear for the safety of FAMDEGUA and relatives of “disappeared” Guatemalans, who have been harassed and received death threats.

“The government is saying that we are stubborn mentioning things of the past. But events of the past are our present,” Quiroa insists on FAMDEGUA’s search for justice.

“We set up our association because the government was making people disappear. It gave us the strength to live. Now we want to see justice,” Quiroa said at the UN panel.

## LWF Support

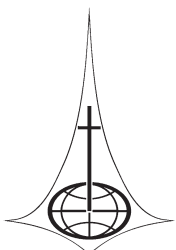
“We are supporting this because at DWS we do advocacy in a setting that can bring about truth and justice,” said Ekelund.

The work of DWS—LWF’s humanitarian relief and development arm—in Central America includes support to various community-based initiatives in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the LWF played a central role in the peace process that led to the end of Guatemala’s civil war. In continuing advocacy, the LWF Council in 2012 condemned the rising tide of violence in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

*(Written for LWI by Geneva-based journalist Peter Kenny)*

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





## A Kitty Build on Solidarity and Hope

### Zimbabwean Church Supports Efforts to Fight AIDS Stigma

*(On the occasion of World AIDS Day on 1 December, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe shared some of its efforts to fight stigma and discrimination associated with HIV. The LWF member church encourages community group initiatives to provide alternative livelihoods for people living with HIV.)*

**HARARE, Zimbabwe/GENEVA (LWI)** – “Mawuya, Mawuya, Mawuya ku Tariro” (welcome to Tariro) is the popular chorus that greets visitors to the Tariro HIV and AIDS support group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ).

On a Thursday afternoon, eight people are gathered at the ELCZ



*A member of the ELCZ Mufakose parish self-help group shows her recently acquired skills-training certificate. © LWF/Stalley Kwenda*



*Fananai Mtengwa, ELCZ Tariro group coordinator, making a presentation about ELCZ AIDS work at the LWF regional consultation held in Harare, Zimbabwe in November. © LWF/Stalley Kwenda*

Mufakose parish to receive an update on activities of the self-support group of people living with HIV. A review of their financial accounts reveals that this month, every member will be taking home at least USD 500 from the proceeds made by investing their money in the local financial markets.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supports ELCZ AIDS response initiatives in the Eastern Diocese, which includes the Mufakose parish, which is located in one of the low-income suburbs of the Zimbabwean capital, Harare.

When the self-help group was started in 2009, it initially attracted many people who thought it was going to give hand-outs, but most then left after realizing the goal was to generate support from what members themselves could give.

The small membership of ten, mainly women, does not worry the members. “We are not worried about the numbers because we continue to grow in our minds and ideas,” says Fananai Mtengwa, coordinator of the group comprising mainly widowed and single mothers.

### Investments from Small Contributions

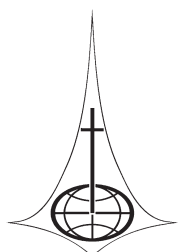
Tariro’s long-term sustainability is currently dependent on investments from monthly contributions by each member to a central pool. Varying amounts are then loaned to individuals depending on their respective needs.

“We take some of the money to the money markets and earn a profit, which is distributed to members,” says Mtengwa.

In October, every member took home about USD 1,000 leaving a balance of USD 6,855 in the kitty, adds Future Mandondo, the group’s chairperson. The goal is to establish an income-generating project “to help us look after ourselves, and buy food for our families because many of us don’t work,” she adds.

“We are all lodgers [tenants]. We sometimes get kicked out of our rented accommodations and the children are chased away from school for failing to pay school fees but we are all getting assistance from the group,” says Kossam Mathe, Tariro’s vice-chairperson.

He hopes they can start a chicken rearing project as a new source of income. “We need help but we don’t want handouts,” Mathe adds.



## Fighting Stigma

Despite widespread awareness-raising in Zimbabwean society about AIDS, stigmatization of people living with HIV remains critical. “We don’t have AIDS, we just have HIV. But unfortunately there are people who are not tested who continue stigmatizing us,” Mathe says.

Celine Mangena says the group has done a lot of work to fight stigma. “In the past it was very difficult for someone to drink Coca Cola next to an HIV-positive person, but now it is possible because of the widespread education,” she says.

dry and poor rural area located about 500 kilometers south of the capital, Harare, and wait for my death. But the church members helped me until I was able to take care of myself. Now I run a brick-making business which makes 10,000 bricks a month and I can look after myself,” she adds.

## Church’s Role in Awareness Raising

Reflecting on ELCZ’s support to groups such as Tariro, the Mufakose parish pastor Rev. Lazarus Maposa notes that Bible teachings must be

We must destroy stereotyping within the church [and] build a state of mind which teaches people to accept people as they are,” he adds.

Despite its good work, Tariro is challenged by inadequate finances and staff, and Mtengwa hopes a fund can be created to assist with recreational activities for stigmatized children. The ELCZ has successful HIV and AIDS programs in some parts of the country, but funding has been an issue in other regions. A national meeting this December will look at how to support programs for people living with HIV.



Mergie Nyoni shows a photo of her brick-making project. © LWF/Stanley Kwenda

Group members agree the church has an important role to play in addressing the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS.

Mergie Nyoni recalls the support she received from the church when she learned about her status. “When I discovered that I was HIV-positive, a lot of people in my neighborhood said I should be taken to Mberengwa, a

used to strengthen the role of the church in supporting people living with HIV. This includes seminars for pastors, who will then raise awareness in their respective congregations.

“The idea is to apply the Word of God with relevance. We should not be seen to be perpetuating stigma. When we get to the pulpit we should try and say things that are inclusive.

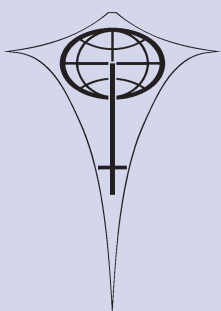
## Declining Rates

Over the past decade in Zimbabwe, vigorous educational campaigns with emphasis on protection against HIV transmission, and access to antiretrovirals have pushed down the prevalence rate from 26 percent to 14 percent between 1997 and 2010. An estimated 1.4 million people are living with HIV in the population of 12.6 million.

A five-year national AIDS strategic plan launched by the government last year prioritizes prevention of mother to child transmission with a goal to reduce the rate from 14 percent in 2010 to seven percent in 2013, and less than five percent by 2015.

According to the United Nations AIDS body UNAIDS, the expansion of HIV treatment globally has resulted in fewer people dying of AIDS-related causes. Declining death rates meant that there were more people living with HIV in 2011 than ever before: 34.2 million.

*(Written for LWI by Stanley Kwenda)*



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