

Lutheran World Information

1405

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(left to right) Rev. Caroline Richter, Dr Phumzile Mlambo- Ngcuka, Rev. Martin Junge, Lopa Banerjee and Dennis Frado. Photo: Christine Mangale

LWF General Secretary Junge Affirms Commitment to Gender Justice

Meeting with Executive Director of UN Women Mlambo-Ngcuka

NEW YORK, USA/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlined the communion of churches’ commitment to gender justice and the empowerment of women at a meeting with United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“The Gender Justice Policy, approved by the LWF Council in 2013, was received with great appreciation by the Executive Director of UN Women and affirmed as a very important contribution for a discussion among faith-based

organizations,” Junge said of the 16 April meeting in New York.

“We discussed ways to support each other in fostering civil societies’ participation in the review process of the situation of women and girls in the context of Beijing+20. Their emphasis on youth participation connects in strong ways with the pivotal role that LWF Youth is playing regarding the Reformation anniversary in 2017,” he added.

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by the



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Scheduled Accompaniment Visit of the LWF with the Church of Sweden

On 7-9 May 2014, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, accompanied by Bishop Tamas Fabini of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hungary and Rev. Dr. Suneel Bhanu Busi, Council advisor and dean at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College in India, met with the bishops council of the Church of Sweden (CoS) in the Communion Office in Geneva, Switzerland.

The visit with the CoS is the final in a series of three following a decision by the LWF Council in June 2013. The Council asked the LWF Communion Office to offer an accompaniment process to the three LWF member churches that are affected by a rupture of relations over the issues of family, marriage and sexuality.

"I appreciate the endeavours of the LWF to uphold and enhance the talks between us and in building and upholding a common future" Anders Wejryd, Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, said.

"This was a meaningful conversation as was the case with the meeting with EECMY and ELCA," LWF General Secretary Rev Martin Junge added. "I am confident that we can bring a meaningful report to Council and be able to continue our journey."

In February, the LWF visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in April with the Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia. The LWF Communion Office will offer an account of the accompaniment process to the LWF Council in June this year.

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Lutheran World Information (LWI)

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

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Fourth World Conference on Women and subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1996. The Beijing Platform for Action constitutes a global framework for realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

It calls upon governments, the international community and civil society, encompassing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, to empower women and girls by taking action in 12 critical areas: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of

women, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child.

At the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting last month, Mlambo-Ngcuka emphasized the crucial role churches and church-based organizations play in eradicating gender inequality. She named violence and discrimination against women as a moral issue that requires churches to assume their prophetic role and put women at the centre.

“I have come to offer our own journey as a Christian World Communion on issues related to women’s empowerment and gender justice. Important steps have been achieved by the LWF already, yet we are also aware of the

important stretch that is ahead of us,” Junge said.

“Violence against women continues to be a reality in this world, and unjust relationships continue to characterize the interaction between genders. Our engagement in these issues is our own way to live up to our vision to be a communion of churches that works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.”

Junge and Mlambo-Ngcuka, the first woman to hold the position of Deputy President of South Africa, also discussed “the need to strengthen civil society in its involvement for an enhanced implementation of human rights commitments related to women.”

LWF Addresses Gender Justice at the Commission on the Status of Women

Women in Church and Society participate in UN platform

GENEVA (LWI) – “The commitment toward an inclusive communion promoting equal participation of women and men must be deeply rooted in a society that values the gifts of every human being,” said Maria Cristina Rendón, Program Assistant at the Lutheran World Federation Women in Church and Society (WICAS). “Advocacy efforts in upholding and protecting women’s rights by WICAS are built upon this belief and for almost 20 years has been the impetus behind us attending the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in New York.”

CSW – part of the United Nations Economic and Social Council - is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. Every year, representatives of member states gather at the UN headquarters in New York to evaluate progress, identify challenges and formulate policies aimed at promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. The theme of the 58th session of the CSW in March 2014 was “Challenges and



(Left) Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of UN Women and (right) Rev. Elitha Moyo, coordinator of the ELCZ Gender Justice Project. Photo: Christine Mangale.

Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Women and Girls.”

Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women, underlined the crucial role churches and church-based organizations play in eradicating gender inequality. Mlambo named violence and discrimination against

women as a moral issue that requires churches to assume their prophetic role and put women at the centre.

“Men dehumanize themselves by victimizing women; men that are not vocal and continue silently sitting on boards and other decision-making instances where there are no women, take part in the conspiracy of exclusion,” she said.

WICAS invited Rev. Elitha Moyo, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ), to attend the session in her capacity as coordinator of the ELCZ Gender Justice project. In the panel “Toward a Post-2015 Development Agenda: A Faith-based Gender Perspective,” organized by the Ecumenical Women network, she discussed the contributions the program (with the support of the LWF Department for Mission and Development) has made towards gender justice, and the challenges that remain for women in Zimbabwe’s political and social arenas.

Rev. Moyo’s presentation addressed progress in her dioceses in gender awareness training for pastors, the growing participation of women in ordained ministry and tackling violence against women. She outlined the importance of LWF’s Gender Justice Policy as a tool that frames ELCZ’s efforts to ensure its congregations and structures are more inclusive.

Christine Mangale, Program Coordinator of the Lutheran Office for World

Community in New York, spoke on behalf of Ecumenical Women and WICAS during the UN’s main plenary session. Mangale expressed their support of the UN Women’s call for a stand-alone goal in the post-2015 agenda. She also gave examples of ecumenical partners’ initiatives reaffirming the deep engagement of faith-based organizations in achieving MDGs. These included the LWF project in Mauritania to combat Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which illustrates how religious precepts do not encourage harmful practices but instead promote health opportunities for women and girls.

After two weeks of consultations, member states issued an agreement in which the Commission acknowledged that in spite of advancement in some areas, progress for women and girls across all MDGs remains slow and uneven. The fact that feminization of poverty persists and targets on hunger eradication remain unmet were outlined as major concerns.

Although the agreement divided countries around issues such as

sexual and reproductive health and resulted in a high level of abstentions due to this lack of consensus, this year’s session provided a unique platform to revise and redefine policies. These included persistent gender pay gaps, women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work and the low levels of women in decision-making.

“Being part of CSW as a platform to achieve the substantive participation of women in key spaces of policy-making is part and parcel of our programmatic focus,” affirms Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, executive secretary for WICAS. “This effort upholds gender justice holistically by addressing issues that are not only women’s concerns; they should be pivotal to churches, governments and civil society so that every human being’s dignity is placed at their core.”

See link for more information:
www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/3/executive-director-statement-on-csw58-outcome

Tanzania’s vice-president addresses LWF interfaith conference

“Build new structures to promote peace”

DAR ES SALAAM/Tanzania, GENEVA (LWI) – Sixty-five religious, political and civil society leaders from Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania are currently meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, May 6 – 8. The interfaith dialogue meeting, hosted by the Lutheran World Federation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Mission EineWelt, will discuss peace-building, democracy and development and calling for active citizenship in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Formally opening the international conference, the Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency Dr Mohamed Gharib Bilal,



Bishop Dr Malasusa and Dr Mohamed Gharib Bilal. Photo: LWF/I. Benesch

stated that “peace is a process and not an event” and that “jointly we have

to work towards eroding old barriers and build new structures to promote

peace.” Dr Bilal called for religious leaders to come together, to listen to one another and to form a unit bigger than their own group of followers. As such they will be able positively and proactively to engage with the government and political leadership.

He assured participants that his door was always open to religious leaders and that he personally would ensure that the government of Tanzania would be happy to receive recommendations from this high-level interfaith dialogue meeting. The government, said Dr Bilal, remained committed

to work with all religious leaders to maintain peace, good governance and to promote sustainable development.

In his introductory remarks, Bishop Dr Malasusa, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, thanked the Vice-President for making time to address the conference and stressed the importance of religion in shaping people’s identities. He encouraged participants to address poverty and injustice since these are fertile ground for division and hopelessness. “We are all victims of conflicts—especially women, children and the marginalized,” said Bishop Dr Malasusa.

Sheik Suleiman Lolila, General Secretary of BAKWATA (the National Muslim Council of Tanzania) and Sheikh Khamisi Haji Khamis, Chief Kadhi of Zanzibar, welcomed this opportunity together with other religious leaders and politicians to develop proposals on how to foster peaceful coexistence.

Participants acknowledged the timeliness of this interfaith conference and in the coming two days will formulate concrete joint commitments and recommendations to be shared among the different faith communities in Africa.

Joint Interreligious Declaration on Peace Building, Democracy and Development

Christian and Muslim Leaders Sign at Dialogue Meeting in Tanzania

DAR ES SALAAM/Tanzania, GENEVA (LWI)—A high-level interreligious dialogue meeting, convened by The Lutheran World Federation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and Mission EineWelt, closed on 8 May with the official signing of a “Joint Interreligious Declaration on Peace Building, Democracy and Development.”

For three days, representatives of various Christian denominations as well as different Muslim institutions

discussed such issues as national constitutions and the freedom of religion in Sub-Saharan Africa, current complex developments in Christian Muslim relations in Africa, the contribution of religious leaders to political democracy and good governance and poverty alleviation.

Examples of pioneering interreligious initiatives, the Great Lakes Initiative, TEKAN Peace Desk (Nigeria), the Zanzibar Interfaith Center and the Interreligious Council for Peace in

Tanzania were shared to illustrate concrete ways in which people of different faiths are committed to cooperating on issues of common concern.

The participants strongly affirmed their solidarity with one another in the process of building peace, promoting democracy and ensuring sustainable development in their region in the full awareness that as Dr Johnson Mbillah of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) said, “Building peace is a long process, taking many years that can be destroyed in a second.” Mbillah underlined that traditionally African societies had always been religiously plural and warned of the politicization of religion.

The statement was signed by all participants, including high level representatives of several churches and Muslim institutions; ELCT Presiding Bishop, Dr Alex Malasusa; Anglican Archbishop Jacob Chimeledya; the Rev. Raymond Saba, General Secretary of the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic); Khamisi Haji Khamis, Chief Kadhi from Zanzibar and Suleiman Lolila, General Secretary of the National Muslim Council in Tanzania (BAKWATA). It reflects



(left to right) Dialogue participants Helen Haggai and Amina Ahmed.
Photo: LWFI, Benesch

the faith communities' firm commitment to respect religious differences, adhere to democratic principles, guarantee the rights of everyone, support interreligious initiatives, refrain from the misuse of religions to advance

partisan political agendas and to do their utmost to combat sectarian and religious conflicts.

Participants unanimously condemned the use of violence and committed themselves to empower people

to become active in building peace, to promote gender equity in their communities and to build interreligious platforms at all levels to foster peace building, democracy and poverty alleviation.

No Place for Violence

LWF Expresses Solidarity With Church and Victim of Explosion in Tanzania

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has expressed its concern over the explosion at the Lutheran hostel in Mwanza, Lake Victoria Diocese on 5 May.

In a letter to presiding Bishop Alex G Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) LWF General Secretary Rev Martin Junge expresses solidarity with those affected by the explosion, the injured victim and her family.

“We know of the many ways in which your church has been actively contributing at all levels of society to

healthy communities where violence doesn't have a place and the respect and the dignity of each human being is upheld. We pray for the authorities so that their response to the current challenge is guided by wisdom and diligence” Junge writes.

The origin of the homemade explosive device which was placed on the church premises and seriously harmed a maid working at the rest house is yet unknown, according to authorities. “We don't know what is happening to us,” ELCT Bishop Alex G Malasusa says, emphasizing that

ELCT is not blaming any political group or religion.

He is urging authorities to investigate the cause for the explosion. “People have a right to feel safe. We hope that the government can do more to protect them,” Malasusa says.

He also encourages Christians not to be afraid of attending worship. “Keep coming and pray that this spirit of hatred will not spread in our country,” he says, adding that “it is high time for religious leaders to encourage people to work for peace.”

The violence coincides with an interfaith meeting of Christian and Muslim religious leaders in the capital of Dar es Salaam. “We encourage you to let the current meetings you are having in Dar es Salaam bear witness to your ongoing deep commitment to work at all levels of society towards creating and upholding communities who live together in justice and peace.”, LWF General Secretary Junge writes, reminding Tanzanian Christians of Saint Paul's exhortation to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

“Let this word guide the prayers and reflections of your church as it continues engaging in God's works of reconciliation”, Junge concluded.



ELCT bishops at the church's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2013.
Photo: LWF/H. Martinussen

LWF Communion Joins in Prayer for Abducted School Girls

Special Prayers and Fasting in Nigerian Congregations

GENEVA (LWI) – The call and prayer for the 276 abducted Nigerian school girls has been shared by member churches of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

worldwide. Congregations in all regions took up the call to join the Anglican

women's network in a special Sunday worship for the student's safe return.

In many countries, the prayer received special attention as the second Sunday in May is also celebrated as Mother's Day. Congregations in Nigeria joined in a special worship on 11 May, wearing black and fasting in remembrance for the abducted girls.

"Thank you for your concern, sympathy and solidarity as well as that of the LWF communion office" Ms Titi Malik, LWF council member from Nigeria, said in response to the call to prayer. "This is a trying moment for Nigeria and we appreciate the global community's concern and commitment fighting this crime against humanity."

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) is a member of has condemned the abduction as a "criminal act" and called all churches to fast and pray for God's intervention in the rescue of the girls.

"Women in all churches are holding special prayer sessions in their various churches for the safe return of the girls and peace in Nigeria" Ms Malik said. "In many Nigerian cities, protesting women groups comprising women of different faiths, youths and men are demanding government to expedite action in rescuing the girls."

"Because of our faith we will never get used to the idea that human beings could be regarded and treated as a



LWF Communion Office staff says "Bring Back Our Girls!" Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

commodity. They are not for sale!" LWF General Secretary Rev Martin Junge said. "This is true for the abducted girls in Nigeria as it is also true for the many human beings, in particular women and children, who are subject to trafficking today."

We join hands in a prayer written by Elizabeth Smith from the Diocese of Perth, Anglican Church of Australia.

Prayer for the kidnapped Nigerian girls May 2014

O God, we cry out to you for the lives and the freedom of the 276 kidnapped girls in Nigeria. In their time of danger and fear, pour out your strong Spirit for them.

Make a way home for them in safety.
Make a way back for them to the education that will lift them up.
Hold them in the knowledge that they are not captive slaves, they are not purchased brides, but they are your beloved daughters, and precious in your sight.
Change the hearts and minds of their kidnapers and of all who choose violence against women and girls.
Cast down the mighty from their seat, and lift up the humble and meek, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Call to Prayer: www.lutheranworld.org/blog/join-hands-and-pray-together-bring-back-our-girls

Hong Kong: Ecumenical Translation of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

"Show that Unity Exists"

HONG KONG, Hong Kong/GENEVA (LWI) – In spite of it being a document to bridge Catholic-Lutheran relations, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification had two different Chinese translations: One by a Catholic, one by a Lutheran. Nearly 15 years after the signing of the document, Chinese speaking Christians have now received

a new ecumenical translation which was ratified in a joint celebration of Lutherans, Catholics and Mennonites on 25 May 2014 in Hong Kong.

In an interview Rev. Dr. Nicolas Tai, dean at the Theological Lutheran Seminary who also initiated the new translation, speaks about the different meanings of "justification" in Chinese

and the power of Christians in Hong Kong.

You decided to translate the JDDJ into Chinese nearly 15 years after it was signed. How did that come to be?

There were already two translations. After the JDDJ was signed in 1999, I did a translation into Chinese, and

Father Joy, my Catholic college, also translated the document. We thought there should only be a single translation, so we presented this proposal to the Catholic church, and the Bishop agreed. We then formed a group of three persons from the Lutheran and the Catholic churches respectively and used my version as a basis to form a common translation.

What was the difficulty in having a joint translation?

There were some language issues that also became a theological issue. The English word “justification” for example has two possible Chinese translations. You could translate them into either “proclaimed justification”—as I did in the Lutheran version—or “already completely justified” as a completed action, as did the Catholics. Of course it makes a difference which term you use. But now it is finished, and on 25 May we celebrated these joint efforts.

How are you going to celebrate?

Fifteen years ago, at the signing of the Declaration, we had a joint devotion. We could not call it a joint service since we do not share communion, but I am sure that something similar will be held this time.

How are Lutheran-Catholic relations in Hong Kong?

Under the umbrella of the Hong Kong Christian Council, Lutherans and Catholics have a very close relationship. As Lutherans we have always worked on that relationship. Each year there is an ecumenical co-workers service. The Catholics can’t join in the Eucharist, we have to accept that broken link, but we use the opportunity to show that unity still exists.

There is also the project of a united Bible translation. It was never realized due to a lack of money, but both churches are still making efforts. I think the Catholic translation is 80 years old, our Chinese translation was revised a bit more recently, but maybe



(l. to r.) Lutheran Bishop Jenny Chan, Catholic Cardinal John Tong, Methodist President Rev Tin-yau Yuen present the common Chinese JDDJ translation. Photo: Francis Wong

I should once more talk to the cardinal about it! We engage in many practical things to make the churches come together. A common creed or use of Bible in a common language would probably bring us even closer.

What does the Lutheran message of justification mean in the context of the Asian work ethic?

I think humanism is most important, ethics and doing good deeds. Chinese know that even if they work and try to be good people, they are still not good before God. It is like Luther said: Am I ever enough? In Buddhist tradition they pray, they fast, they eat vegetarian, but still they can never be sure of the life to come. The concept of grace is the opposite of all human efforts in faith. Grace means that work is out of the scope. For many Chinese people, this is hard to accept.

Of course we are still very alike. As Protestant denominations we have been in dialogue with Taoists, Buddhists, Muslims and Confucianists for 30 years. Each year we have a topic we address, like market economy or violence in family. These are things that affect all religions, and the approaches are not very different. But as Christians, through grace we know how God helps us and motivates us. The other religions are lacking this power from outside.

Where are you going to distribute the translation?

The Catholic Church and we will put it up on our website, and it is also going to be distributed among the other Protestant denominations, especially the Mennonites who also signed the JDDJ in 2006.

Is it possible to distribute it also in China?

I have many students from China who can take it back into their country, and I’ll also give it to church leaders in China. There is a freedom of religion, so it’s no problem. The government cracks down on Christians in other ways.

In Hong Kong, Lutheran and Catholic Christians also find themselves in a minority situation. According to recent numbers half of the population is atheist, and the predominant religions are Buddhism and Taoism. How do you as a church deal with that?

I think the percentage of atheists is even higher, probably around 90 percent—like in Europe. Many people call themselves Christians but they never go to church. As Luther said: A real Christian is always a minority. But in Hong Kong, Lutherans still have great influence which has to do with the history of colonialism. Back then, we were given the privilege to run schools,

hospitals and work places, and the Christian influence is still very great. I think there are a lot of Christians in high government positions, the Christian churches are well represented. Hong Kong is almost like a Christian society. They are running good services, half of the education is in Christian hands. The concept of citizenship is very Christian.

Christians may be a minority, but our influence is big.

Many members of the Lutheran churches in Hong Kong are younger than 30 years. What attracts young people to the congregations?

Theology certainly is not the point. Most youngsters became Christians

because they have a positive attitude towards Christianity. Many of them attended Christian schools. Also, evangelization is common, it is a very strong and powerful witness. Friends bring their non-Christian friends to youth gatherings. A lot of young people become Christians because of their friends.

Lutheran Church in Chile Ordains First Woman Pastor

All LWF Member Churches in Region Now Welcoming Women as Ministers

SANTIAGO, Chile/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran Church in Chile (ILCH) has ordained Rev. Hanna Schramm as its first woman pastor in a historic move that means all Lutheran World Federation (LWF) churches in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region now embrace women ministers.

“The ordination of a female pastor in the ILCH is of relevance for the entire communion of churches in the LWF,” said Rev. Patricia Cuyatti, DMD area secretary for LAC. “It invites us to engage women from different backgrounds to explore ministry from their life experiences and contribute in witnessing the relevance of living liberated by God’s grace to serve.”

Germany, Dresden-born Schramm studied theology in Leipzig before completing a two-year vicariate in Chile. She was ordained last month in the Church of the Redeemer in

Santiago de Chile by Bishop Siegfried Sanders of the ILCH.

“I want to express gratitude for the journey that made possible the ordination of the first female pastor in our church. We thank Hanna Schramm for her courage, sensitivity and courtesy during her vicariate, which made people appreciate her service,” Sanders said. “We realized that many people who had doubts and reservations regarding the service of a female pastor have been changed by Hanna’s ministry. For the ILCH, this means a change of mind, openness, and a more inclusive theology. The ILCH has moved to another time, to the reality of today.”

The LWF’s Gender Justice Policy, approved by the Council in 2013, underlines the global communion of churches’ commitment to the empowerment of women and gender equality both within the LWF and wider society.

Schramm hopes that her ordination will also encourage women in Chile to study theology and join the ministry.

“The fact that a woman has come along and has been ordained and accepted as a minister is certainly a great contribution towards encouraging more young women to be interested in this calling. They can see that this possibility is now open to them as well,” Schramm said.

“The ordination of a female pastor in the ILCH puts both churches in Chile in equal relationship and fulfilling the principle of equality,” said Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas, Vice President of the LAC region and a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH). “With this accomplishment, the LWF member churches in the region meet the LWF guidelines that are studied, understood, internalized and followed in the everyday activities and relationships in our churches.”

“A genuine alternative”

Interview with Rev Hanna Schramm, the first woman minister of the Lutheran Church in Chile (Iglesia Luterana en Chile, ILCH)

SANTIAGO, Chile / GENEVA (LWI) – Hanna Schramm is breaking new ground in two senses: previously the ministers of the Lutheran Church in Chile (Iglesia Luterana en Chile, ILCH) were trained and ordained in Germany. After her studies in Leipzig, Hanna Schramm completed her ministerial training with a place-

ment in a congregation in Chile—and was then ordained as the first female pastor in the ILCH. In an interview with Lutheran World Information (LWI) she speaks of treasures and challenges, of the importance of religious education in Chile and how the congregations react to a woman in a cassock.

Where do you find the richness of the church in Chile?

The greatest treasure possessed by the two Lutheran churches in the Chilean religious landscape is Lutheran theology, which emphasizes freedom of conscience and independent debate about the biblical testimony to the faith.



The Lutheran Church in Chile has ordained its first woman pastor. Photo: ILCH

If the churches make this theology their focal point, then they offer a genuine alternative to the increasing strength of the Roman Catholic Church and the growing Independent and Pentecostal Churches. The Lutheran Churches are a place where ethically difficult issues can be discussed, where information from other areas of scientific knowledge can be brought into the conversation in order to develop one's own opinions, where different attitudes are tolerated and where people can even express their doubts about faith.

In conversations with members I have been struck by the fact that quite a few of them have found their way to the Lutheran churches because they have experienced the other churches as being very exclusive in respect of moral issues. In my view, the Lutheran Churches should build on their strengths in encouraging dialogue, plurality and the formation of critical opinions, but at the same time not to be forgetful of the spiritual framework and our hope in God's rule.

A further source of richness is the variety of backgrounds and characteristics of the individual ministers. In this way the members of the local congregations can experience different forms of piety and interpretations of the Bible.

Working for integration in the congregation

Where do you see particular challenges in working in a local church?

It is getting harder for the ILCH to find people who will get involved and take an active role. Contact to the church often remains very loose and is predominantly only for special liturgical occasions or through religious education in the German school. Earlier on the sense of belonging was much more intensive, since belonging to the Lutheran Church was a way of strengthening one's German identity.

But in the meantime, a German or Lutheran identity has come to play a much smaller role. More and more Christians are coming into the congregations of the ILCH who are not of German origin. It is therefore important to develop congregational life in the ILCH in such a way that Christians from different generations and backgrounds feel is relevant to them. Congregations must work towards integration between the various interest groups.

I also see an exciting challenge in engaging in discussion about our Lutheran identity, for Lutheran theology offers ways of thinking, concepts and styles of piety which offer an alternative to people who are conscious of a religious need, but who for all kinds

of reasons have distanced themselves from the church. Above all, the Lutheran Churches could become a spiritual home, particularly for people who would like to engage on an intellectual level with religious questions and issues affecting their lives.

You are the first female ordained minister in the ILCH. What does that mean for you?

As a woman, exercising a vocation that in Chile is still strongly associated with men causes astonishment and joy, but sometimes people are also irritated, skeptical or hostile. I have learnt to be relaxed about being in receipt of this skepticism. I believe that my very presence is already making a big difference. People can see that it is possible and indeed normal for a woman to take on the duties of a minister, and will thereby become accustomed to it.

Empowering women

What is the particular challenge in this situation?

For me this has first of all meant needing to understand that for many people a woman minister is not a normal thing. I had to learn not to shut myself off, or to become demotivated if people treated me with skepticism or rejection. I have even managed to develop an understanding of this. However, I have always kept in mind that the ordination of women is normal in other countries and that I also have women colleagues in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH), as well as in some other Protestant Churches in Chile.

For me it is very important that I make a particular effort with those people with whom I am working, and that I carry out all my tasks with commitment and joy. Through my work, and the experiences that people have of me, I can help towards the acceptance of women ministers as spiritual directors and theologians.

Will there soon be more ordained women in your church?

I don't know of any woman who is studying theology just now and who will come into the ILCH. But I do know young women who are very interested in theology and are actively involved in the local churches. They would love to study theology in the future. I think that a great deal of encouragement will need to be offered here. The fact that a woman has come along and has been ordained and accepted as a minister is certainly a great contribution towards encouraging more young women to be interested in this calling. They can see that this possibility is now open to them as well.

In which local congregation will you now be working?

I will continue to work in Santiago, where I have also completed my vicariate. I will have a half-time post there, as I am undertaking studies in education at the same time. My main focus will be working with

young people and young adults in the congregation. In addition I will also be visiting homes for old people. I will also be supervising German volunteers involved in various projects of the Lutheran churches.

Accompanying people on the journey of faith

Why is it important to you to be able also to engage in religious education in Chile?

It is through religious education that children and young people can be motivated to join in confirmation classes and to develop a sense of belonging to the Lutheran congregation. The other side of the coin is that, as a teacher of religion, ministers remain in contact with the children and young people and are able to have a stronger relationship with them in the general pastoral work. In addition, the Lutheran local churches in Chile are really small, and so the ministers can

help their congregations financially by taking on this ancillary work. And last but not least, I will learn a great deal through my educational training that will help with my work in the congregation.

What are you looking forward to most?

There are lots of things: studying the Bible together with young people and young adults, or the privilege of having an insight into the way of life of other people. I am looking forward to seeing how people commit themselves to getting involved in a project and how they get to grips with initiatives in the local church and community and I look forward to being able to support that. I am looking forward to establishing new contacts. I am particularly looking forward to collaborating on the next Youth Retreat and seeing it through, because I will learn so much about human nature, creativity and spontaneity. I look forward to being able to accompany people on their journey of faith.

God's Transformative Action in Theological Education

Churches witnessing their faith in society

MEXICO CITY, Mexico/Geneva (LWI) – Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) churches in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region, meeting in Mexico City, agreed to strengthen their efforts in educating leaders for mission and advocating for vulnerable and marginalized people in their societies.

Sixty-one LAC leaders attended the event, from 7-11 April, which explored the notion of "God's Transformative Action in Areas of Theological Formation," and focused on practical theology, hermeneutics from a gender perspective, and the role of theology in the ecumenical and inter-religious world.

"We call the LWF member churches in our region to engage and facilitate

that more women find access to graduate studies and teaching positions in the centers of theological formation. We celebrate that the Young Lutheran Network in Latin America and the Caribbean has assumed the challenge of strengthening youth work in the Lutheran churches in the region and globally," the member churches stated in a message from the conference.

"We recognize the effort of churches that have opened doors to work in the HIV ministry; however, we are concerned with the silence before the increase in diagnoses among young and young adult populations," they noted.

The church leaders highlighted their commitment "to study and put in practice the LWF Gender Justice Policy

as a transversal theme in all activities and actions of our churches."

They also acknowledged progress made in promoting cooperation among member churches through the Sustainability of the Churches and Advocacy on Illegitimate Debt and Ecological Justice programs.

"As a Lutheran communion we approach the 500 centenary of the Lutheran Reformation in the year 2017, and more than a celebration, we want to commemorate it in the understanding that we are freed in Christ and by God's grace to work together for a peaceful, just, and reconciled world," the LAC leaders stated in their message.

"We are thankful for the reconciliation, reunification and reconstitution

work that our sister churches; (the) Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church, Evangelic Lutheran Church in Venezuela, Lutheran Church in Chile, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile are carrying out, and we invite you to ask the blessing of our God on them.”

The annual leadership conference was organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) LAC desk in collaboration with the Mexican Lutheran Church.

“There is a lot of commitment in the LAC member churches. The leadership platform is supporting the different networks where people engage regionally, agree on actions, and develop them locally. Encouragement among participants to live their Lutheran faith in their societies implies a journey that engages in serving the neighbour through dia-



Rev. Gloria Rojas, Rev. Patricia Cuyatti and Bishop Eduardo Martínez. Photo: Adriana Castañeda

conal work, practicing inclusion, and humbly supporting, counselling, and walking the journey accompanied as

sister churches,” said Rev. Patricia Cuyatti, DMD area secretary for LAC after the conference.

Ebola in West Africa

Public Awareness Training and Protective Equipment for Health Workers to Contain Spread

MONROVIA, Liberia/GENEVA (LWI) – The current outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa has killed more than 140 people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations health agency said at least 230 suspected or confirmed cases of Ebola have been recorded in Guinea and Liberia.

Ebola, for which there is no cure or vaccine, is one of the most deadly viruses, killing up to 90 percent of those infected. It causes bleeding and organ failure and spreads through direct contact with infected people. 136 deaths in Guinea and 11 in Liberia have been linked to the disease, which began months ago in the forested villages of southeastern Guinea. The West Africa outbreak is highly unusual as the virus is typically found only in central or eastern Africa.

“As the incubation period for Ebola can be up to three weeks, it is likely that the Guinean authorities will report new cases in the coming weeks and

additional suspected cases may also be identified in neighboring countries,” the WHO said on Tuesday.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member Church in Liberia, together with its partners in the ACT Alliance, are appealing for funds to promote public awareness and provide supportive care for those infected with the virus and isolating them to curtail its spread. Hospital workers urgently need more personal protective equipment such as jackets, gloves and respirators.

“The (Lutheran) Curran and Phebe Hospitals in Bong and Lofa Counties have set up separate units for would-be patients of the virus, but they also need some basic things to equip such units including beds, detergents, bed pans, soaps and bedding,” said Naomi Ford-Wilson, General Secretary of the Lutheran Church in Liberia. “We also need money to print out jingles/fliers for distribution in target communities.”

The Lutheran Church in Liberia may use staff in Guinea currently

implementing an HIV/ AIDs project in the country to access the local population. It also plans to provide Ebola awareness training in neighboring Sierra Leone if the disease spreads.

Last year, the LWF’s Department for Mission and Development (DMD) organized a “Disaster Preparedness and Response Workshop” in Monrovia, Liberia, aimed at equipping member churches to better respond to emergency situations in their local communities, mobilize resources and implement disaster risk reduction measures.

“The workshop helped the Lutheran Church in Liberia in identifying ways in which emergencies arise and are quickly responded to. The knowledge helped us with support from the rest of the Liberia ACT Forum members to intervene in the current outbreak,” said Ford-Wilson.

Myanmar: LWF Resumes Implementation of Programs

Back to School for Students and Teachers in Rakhine State

SITTWE, Myanmar/GENEVA, 16 May 2014 (LWI) – U Kyaw Soe Aung sits with his legs crossed on a wooden floor of a Child Friendly Space in the camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) of Set Yone Su. His 10-year old son, Mg Aung Than, attends a school nearby – happy to be back after the school had closed for more than a month due to an evacuation of staff.

The Lutheran World Federation has resumed implementation of its programs in Rakhine state, Myanmar and is now fully operational again. LWF was forced to temporarily suspend activities and evacuate their staff when Violence against international organizations broke out in Sittwe town on 26-27 March 2014. Mobs attacked the premises of 14 organizations, including the LWF's, destroying office equipment, furniture and documents.

Relocation of Staff

All staff, including those forced to evacuate, is now back on duty. For security reasons, the governmental Emergency Coordinating Committee (ECC) now has directed all international NGOs to relocate to the southern zone of Sittwe town. This action is viewed as segregation that will render difficult communication and longer-term community building.

The LWF has moved its office to the Southern zone of Sittwe town and all staff is now living in nearby communities. In spite of the unrest, LWF has begun camp coordination and management programs for three additional camps now assisting over 30,000 IDPs.

Additional to camp coordination and community-based psychosocial support, LWF manages assistance in Education in Emergencies. The Myan-

mar program is operating 11 temporary learning spaces (TLS) for children aged 6-10, planning an additional ten and preparing to open ten non-formal education centers for older students.

Investing in The Future

To U Kyaw Soe Aung is devoting all his power to make sure his children can continue the education. "I used to work as a teacher to the children of my village. I taught all the subjects in private schools and also at my home." he recalls.

After the clashes between Buddhist and Muslim communities escalated in 2012, U Kyaw Soe Aung's village was burned and he became a refugee in his own country. Now the majority of villagers live in the IDP camp. Here, U Kyaw Soe Aung made his children's education a top priority. "Education is everything" he says. "I couldn't afford educating my oldest son thus now he is unemployed. So, I decided to make my youngest children educated no matter what happened."

LWF Myanmar has facilitated Education in Emergency (EIE) in Sittwe

since late 2013 funded by the ACT Appeal. To implement educational activities, LWF Sittwe coordinated with UNICEF, Save the Children and the Department of Education, who are the only agencies for education involved in IDP camps.

Making a Difference in Children's Lives

With the aid of Department of Education of the Rakhine State, LWF will also conclude teachers training in May. "I want to make life of children beautiful, that's why I became a teacher," says Ma Swe Swe Naing, 20, gazing over the dusty yard of a temporary school in the camp where her students are playing around the makeshift bamboo building.

Ma Swe Swe Naing is one of the volunteers recently trained by LWF Myanmar. Her job is to ensure the children of the Oh Taw Gyi camp can read, write, count and pay respect to each other. "If a person is educated he or she can consider the difference between the good and the immoral." she says.



Children wearing the traditional Burmese skin conditioner thanaka in a Temporary Learning Space in Ohn Taw Gyi South camp, Rakhine State. Photo: LWF Myanmar

Apart from teaching, Ma Swe Swe Naing thinks that school is also about fun and joy. “One of my favorite personal school memories is when I went to see a football match of my village

team. The next day I had a mathematics exam, but I decided to watch the match and our team won. It was such a happy day, though I barely passed the exam,” the teacher reminisces

smiling. Ma Swe Swe Naing wants to make sure that the children in the IDP camp, despite the unrest in their country, will also have joyful memories from their school years.

LWF Joins Call to End Violence against Civilians in South Sudan

A Callous Disregard for Civilian Life

JUBA, South Sudan/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has joined 50 non-governmental organizations in expressing concern over the recent escalation of violence in South Sudan, which has resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.

“We strongly condemn all attacks that have taken place during this conflict,” the NGOs said in a 26 April statement from Juba, South Sudan, which was signed by the LWF.

“Civilians have been targeted on the basis of their ethnicity, others indiscriminately killed, and many subjected to unspeakable grave human rights abuses including rape,” added the statement, which urged a cessation of violence and increased humanitarian assistance.

The NGOs say the basic needs of civilians caught up in the conflict are “growing by the hour” and that

the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) bases must be reinforced so that civilians are protected.

LWF Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights Ralston Deffenbaugh noted that the people of South Sudan suffered 50 years of civil war during which millions were killed or displaced. The hope brought by the 2005 peace accord and the 2011 transition to independence has been brutally dashed, Deffenbaugh said.

“The leaders of the armed factions in South Sudan should put down their weapons immediately, resolve their differences peacefully, and treat their fellow citizens, their fellow human beings, with dignity and respect,” Deffenbaugh said and called for those around the world who have influence on the armed factions to urge them to cease the violence immediately.

There has been widespread violence against civilians since December 2013 and the NGOs say that attacks on the UN peacekeeping base at Bor on 17 April and at Bentiu 15-18 April indicate a “serious deepening of the conflict and callous disregard for civilian life and international humanitarian law.”

An estimated one million people have been forced from their homes and 90,000 people are being sheltered by UNMISS bases around the country.

The LWF continues to support the internally displaced persons in South Sudan and South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. An estimated 3.2 million people are at risk of extreme food insecurity due to the conflict and NGOs working in South Sudan estimate that the number will rise.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, is visiting South Sudan 28-29 April to discuss the worsening crisis. She will meet with government and opposition officials following last week’s discussions on South Sudan in the UN Security Council.

Read the statement: https://www.dropbox.com/s/2d8gpgl3elx5x5y/NGOConcern_Statement26042014.pdf

Learn more about the LWF response to the South Sudan crisis: <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-south-sudan-conflict>



Children look for valuable items in the ashes of what was once the central market in Bor. Photo: Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance

Calling the International Community to Action in South Sudan

NGOs Propose Seven Steps to Address Crisis, Churches Call to Prayer

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), together with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is calling on the international community to urgently increase efforts to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan.

An appeal signed by 60 humanitarian NGOs including the LWF calls on United Nations (UN) member states at the Humanitarian Pledging Conference for South Sudan on 20 May 2014 in Oslo, Norway, to “urgently focus on clear and immediate actions to provide assistance to the people of South Sudan.”

According to UN reports, the conflict, which started five months ago, has displaced 1.3 million people. More than 4 million people, including 2.5 million children, are extremely vulnerable to food insecurity. A recent UN report speaks of an alarming increase in atrocities in various sites.

On 20 May, the international community will convene in Norway with the purpose of addressing the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan.

Prior to the convention, the LWF and 59 other organizations from the South Sudan NGO forum are proposing “Seven Steps to Assisting the People of South Sudan,” especially stressing the necessity to widen humanitarian space and to protect the people of South Sudan.

“Aid workers have been killed, and thousands of national staff are unable to work in many areas due to fear of being targeted,” the appeal states. “This is significantly undermining the humanitarian response.”

Seven Steps

The statement calls for:

- 1) Timely funding of the humanitarian response to save lives



*LWF staff provides a displaced woman in Bor with a water, sanitation and health kit.
Photo: LWF/South Sudan*

- 2) Protection of and respect for humanitarian staff to allow delivery of assistance
- 3) Support of the humanitarian needs of the people
- 4) A viable, inclusive and transparent mediation and political process, not just financial assistance
- 5) Measures to be taken to immediately protect the people of South Sudan
- 6) International and domestic measures to curb sales, transit and flow of arms to South Sudan
- 7) Making accountability for the violence a component in any political settlement and peace effort

Ceasefire

On Friday, 9 May, a ceasefire agreement was signed between South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar in the Ethiopian capital

Addis Ababa. The agreement stipulated a cessation of hostilities within 24 hours and humanitarian access to the thousands afflicted by the conflict.

“We must use this chance to push for access to help the many people who have had to flee during this conflict, people who are in desperate need of immediate food and protection,” said Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF's Department for World Services.

“I hope and pray that the ceasefire will hold so that people can return to their homes and start re-building their lives.”

The LWF has been working in South Sudan for over three decades in the areas of sustainable development and education. Since the crisis broke out in December, the LWF has been engaged in the humanitarian response, distributing basic items for people who have fled and lost all in the wake of the outbreak of hostilities.

A Call to Prayer

In “A Message of Solidarity with the Church in South Sudan” issued on 9

May, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), both LWF member churches, joined their Anglican and Episcopal sister churches in urging members of their respective denominations to pray for peace and for the people of South Sudan and Sudan.

“Our partners in South Sudan have suffered massive casualties.

Their people have been murdered, raped, tortured, and burned out of their homes. Churches and entire villages have been destroyed. In spite of extensive displacement, Anglicans/Episcopalians and Lutherans continue to be active in relief and peace-making efforts through our partners in the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan, and the Lutheran World Federation,” said the message, signed by

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson.

“We urge you to join in prayer for the people of South Sudan and Sudan, for a lasting and meaningful peace, and for immediate aid and response to the needs of the myriad of displaced persons,” said the message.

LWF Pleads for Cessation of Hostilities and Humanitarian Access to Civilians in South Sudan

High Risk of Conflict Destabilizing Entire Region

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is highly concerned about the growing vulnerability of civilians and reduced humanitarian access to internally displaced people inside South Sudan. The recent targeted killings in the Unity State capital of Bentiu and deadly attack at the United Nations base in Bor, Jonglei State, only add to the growing insecurity since conflict erupted in the country in mid-December.

The LWF calls on the international community to hold the conflicting parties to the immediate cessation of hostilities agreed in January and to act expediently to enhance the presence of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). “We see a high risk of the conflict intensifying and destabilizing the entire region with a humanitarian crisis of unmanageable proportions,” says Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS).

“That both sides in the conflict still believe in a military logic that has recently left thousands dead and caused unimaginable destruction can only dampen the signs of hope that this young nation had begun to experience,” Hitzler adds.

The LWF remains committed to working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ACT Alliance members and other partners to assist



LWF distribution of non-food items to IDPs in Twic East county, Jonglei State, South Sudan on 30 March. Photo: LWF South Sudan/J. Aleer

internally displaced South Sudanese and those seeking refuge in neighboring Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

In mid-December last year, the LWF was compelled to scale down its intervention inside South Sudan, stop development work and evacuate some of its staff due to growing insecurity, the DWS director notes. At present, all staff is back and focusing work on relief assistance to internally displaced persons in remote areas.

Hitzler stresses the responsibility of the local authorities to collaborate with the global community in ensuring the protection of all civilians and safe humanitarian access.

In South Sudan, the LWF has worked for years with rural communities in Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile states to build sustainable livelihoods, promote peace, human rights and reconciliation, and strengthen capacity to respond to disasters.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that there are more than 927,000 displaced persons in the country, with the highest increase in Upper Nile State by mid-April. In addition, there are 289,000 South Sudanese refugees in the region.

LWF Ethiopia Says Refugee Camp Capacity Is “Severely Overstretched”

Insufficient Funding Compounds Situation for over 90,000 South Sudanese

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – Thirteen-year-old Panum arrived in Ethiopia’s western region of Gambella accompanied by her elder sister Nyamoun. “Our father got killed in the war and our mother is in Juba. We have had no communication with her for the last several weeks, and she does not know that we are here in safety. We really don’t know when we will see her again or how to get in touch with her,” the younger sibling adds.

In another section of Lietchor refugee camp in Gambella, Marie a lactating mother with four other children says she was in her eighth month of pregnancy when they fled home. Her husband and their eldest son decided to stay behind. “Food is sparse and not enough for all of us. It is difficult to get by but we are glad to be alive,” she adds.

In Lietchor camp, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) continues to provide essential services including water, sanitation and health (WASH), but the growing influx of refugees and slow financial support for the South Sudan crisis poses significant challenges. “With up to 1,000 new arrivals

per day, the relocation [to different settlements] and camp absorption capacities are severely overstretched,” says Sophie Gebreyes, representative of the LWF Department for World Service program in Ethiopia.

By 15 April the number of South Sudanese fleeing to Ethiopia had surpassed 95,000, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The majority (over 90 percent) are women and children.

Most of the South Sudanese enter Ethiopia through Matar, Pagak and Akobo after walking for weeks and swimming across the river that separates both countries. “They arrive in increasingly poor conditions as they fled the violence for extended periods, surviving on grass, wild fruits and leaves along the way,” says Gebreyes.

High Rate of Child Malnutrition

Reiterating an April appeal by the LWF and other ACT Alliance members in Ethiopia, Gebreyes says that more funding is required to provide

life-saving assistance. “The alarmingly high rate of malnutrition among the children waiting to be relocated to [other] camps is a sign of rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation within and beyond the borders of South Sudan,” she adds.

A sharp increase in displacement is anticipated because of looming famine in South Sudan. In Lietchor camp, where the LWF is the lead organization in WASH, the population has exceeded its capacity of 20,000, with over 38,000 refugees registered there by mid-April.

The LWF has completed the drilling of two boreholes for emergency water supply. Pit latrines are being constructed, and a mass sanitation campaign has been launched in response to growing concerns over disease outbreaks caused by open defecation and accelerated by the rainy season.

Uncertainty about Return

Many of the refugees do not know when they can return home. Duang Mar, 39, who arrived in Ethiopia with some of his family members says he would “not rush to decide” when he can go back, as there are no guarantees that hostilities have ceased. Before fighting broke out last December, he was working as an administrative officer in Malakal district.

Since violence erupted in South Sudan, more than 1 million people have been displaced, including nearly 300,000 who have fled to neighboring countries. A USD 3.5 million ACT Appeal for Ethiopia launched in February has received about 10 percent of the anticipated funding. In March UNHCR launched an interagency appeal for USD 370 million on behalf of 24 agencies including the LWF, which is also



A South Sudanese girl at the Lietchor refugee camp in Gambella, western Ethiopia. Photo: Christof Krackhardt/Brot für die Welt

assisting South Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda.

“Unless sufficient funding is available, the life and health of refugees will

be severely compromised,” Gebreyes adds.

LWF Joins Organizations Urging Humanitarian Access in Central African Republic

Armed Actors in Conflict Hinder Aid Delivery to Displaced Civilians

BANGUI, Central African Republic/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is among 26 international non-governmental organizations in the Central African Republic (CAR) that are calling on all armed actors in the country’s conflict to respect humanitarian access to all communities in need.

In a joint statement released on 19 May the organizations condemned recent attacks against aid workers, saying that the increasing violence, threats and killings only “jeopardize assistance and risk reducing access to vulnerable populations depending on NGOs for their basic needs.”

The political impasse in CAR since December 2012 and subsequent conflict between armed militia groups has resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths during attacks on urban and rural communities. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses have been looted, destroyed or burned down, sparking massive population displacements.

With support from partners in the ACT Alliance network, the LWF emergency program in CAR and the member church Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, have been providing food and non-food items (NFIs) to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ouham Péné and Nana Mambéré regions in the northwest, and in the capital Bangui. Reconstruction of shelters and restoration of water sources in several villages, which had been delayed because of insecurity, has now started.



Rebecca Abbo returned to her damaged and empty house in Yongoro village, western CAR, in early May. With LWF’s support, she can now access clean water. Photo: LWF/P. Mumia

LWF assistance in CAR’s northwestern axis targets populations that repeatedly flee to the forests because of recurring attacks, and cautiously return home to assess their safety and assistance from the outside. Working with community outreach officers, LWF uses local centers such as schools and churches to distribute much-needed water, sanitation and hygiene kits, and farming tools as the IDPs have lost nearly everything.

LWF’s earlier intervention in the northeast was suspended in December 2013 due to the deteriorating security and safety.

Reiterating the recent joint statement by the international NGOs, the LWF CAR team leader Ms Serena Badenhorst underlined the difficulty in accessing vulnerable populations, but stressed the urgency to meet the enormous needs.

“More resources and support are needed to support civilians caught in the crisis,” Badenhorst emphasized. “But there is an urgency to meet these needs today, not only to save thousands of lives now, but to also save and improve hundreds of thousands of lives in the coming decades. The longer today’s needs are left unmet, the longer CAR will struggle to recover from this crisis and the longer Central Africans will struggle with chronic poverty,” she added.

Over 2.5 million people in CAR—more than 50 percent of the population—require urgent assistance. There are an estimated 560,000 IDPs throughout the country and another 350,000 are refugees in neighboring countries.

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LWF Reaches Out to Displaced Populations in Central African Republic

Insecurity Hampers Timely Response to Enormous Needs

BOUAR, Central African Republic/GENEVA (LWI) – In the small village of Gbetene, along the western axis of Bohong-Bouar in Central African Republic (CAR), Yvonne Ndongoe, says she cannot recall the number of times her family had to flee to the forest to escape attacks by militant groups in the sectarian fighting that has gripped the country since March 2013.

“After four months of difficulties living in the bush, we decided to come back, although we knew we had already lost everything,” the mother of seven explains, pointing to her partially thatched house. Across the fence, her neighbor David Danwen, who also returned home recently, points to his empty house, as he places more thatch on the roof which he has been rebuilding. The rainy season has started and his family needs protection, he adds.

In the populous Bohong village with over 19,700 residents, many are coming to terms with the extensive destruction during attacks by armed groups associated with the Seleka rebels in August 2013 and the retaliations by the anti-Balaka vigilantes in Ouham

Pendé prefecture. Armand Yabinti, recently hired as a community outreach officer for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) emergency program in CAR surveys the ruins around him, as he silently walks to what remains of his house—no corrugated iron sheets or roofing structure, no room partitions, nor wooden frames for doors or windows—only piles of shattered bricks on the floor. He points to several other buildings in similar or worse conditions, including a small mosque at the corner.

Like Yabinti, almost everyone in Bohong, some 70 kilometers from the regional capital of Bouar, has been directly affected by the sectarian violence. In the August attacks, over 1,740 homes and other buildings were completely destroyed, five people were killed and hundreds were injured, chief Félix Wosso says. Many who fled to the bush or moved in with relatives or friends are cautiously coming back as the rainy season begins, but there is growing fear that armed groups could strike again.

Despite the installation of an interim government in January 2014, the third in a series of political changes

and the presence of international peace keeping forces in the country, the cycle of violence and insecurity continue in northern CAR and the western axis. The districts of Bouar and Baboua in Nana Mambéré prefecture where the LWF is providing emergency intervention have been marked by armed attacks and kidnapping, which significantly impede humanitarian access to internally displaced populations. Looting has left families with no possessions and those returning to their destroyed homes sleep on bare ground without mats or blankets.

Hygiene Kits and Jerry Cans

Since March 2014, the LWF emergency program has been distributing non-food items (NFIs) to vulnerable populations in Bohong and several other villages. Prioritizing women-headed households and people with disabilities, over 3,000 households, have received hygiene kits including soaps, buckets and jerry cans for water, cups, tooth paste and brushes, sanitary packs and underwear for women.

As most of the people were displaced during the critical months of planting and weeding, the LWF has distributed farming tools to 725 families to help them rehabilitate their crop land. The intervention also includes restoration of existing water sources as many of the village boreholes and pumps have been abandoned or destroyed. Shelter reconstruction targets over 4,500 houses in the Bouar-Bohong axis.

Through a cash distribution program that sources basic items from selected local traders, around 1,200 vulnerable households will each receive vouchers equivalent to USD 80 to meet basic needs and improve livelihoods.



Armand Yabinti, community outreach officer for the LWF emergency program in CAR, outside the ruins of his house in Bohong village, Ouham Pendé prefecture. Photo: LWF/P. Mumia

In Bouar, the LWF emergency program collaborates with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Central African Republic (EEL-RCA), and will support the church's health centers in the distribution of mosquito nets to protect vulnerable populations from malaria infections.

Major Gaps in Meeting Enormous Needs

"But there are still huge gaps in a context where most of the population is distressed by fear and the violence experienced from the conflict," says Serena Badenhorst, team leader of the LWF emergency program in CAR.

She underlines psycho-social support as crucial for individuals, communities and church alongside the emergency intervention and livelihoods support. "Rebuilding livelihoods goes hand in hand with good mental and physical health," she adds.

While humanitarian intervention is urgent, the growing insecurity significantly limits access to affected population, Badenhorst notes. "It is difficult for people outside to imagine



A young man draws water from a recently restored pump in Yongoro village, western CAR. In Ouham Pendé, LWF is rehabilitating water sources that will serve more than 37,000 people in several villages. Photo: LWF/P. Mumia

the logistical and security challenges involved. It takes more time and costs so much more to reach people who are in dire need. While we are trying our best, more resources and support are needed to support civilians caught in the CAR crisis," she adds.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) puts the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside CAR at over 567,630. Around 142,600 of

the IDPs are located in 42 sites in the capital Bangui and in host communities including the St Timothy Lutheran parish, which is currently home to around 190 IDPs, a majority of whom are children below 14 years.

Since December 2013, some 360,000 people have fled CAR and are now refugees in neighboring Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo.

LWF Pays Scheduled Accompaniment Visit to EECMY

On 26 April 2014, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, accompanied by Bishop Dr Musa P. Filibus, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, met with the Executive Council of the Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia.

The visit with the EECMY is the second in a series of three following a decision by the LWF Council in June 2013. The Council asked the LWF Communion Office to offer an accompaniment process to the three LWF member churches that are affected by a rupture of relations over the issues of family, marriage and sexuality.

"We know this from daily life: in the context of disagreement among family members the role and attitude of the larger family acquires critical importance," said Rev. Junge. "Our visit of accompaniment to the EECMY is an expression of the vitality of communion relationships in the LWF. They are by nature attentive and responsive, as well as supportive and transformative."

In February, the LWF visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. An accompaniment visit has also been scheduled with the Church of Sweden in the course of the coming month. The LWF Communion Office will offer an account of the accompaniment process to the LWF Council in June this year.

Published and distributed by:
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