

Lutheran World Information

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Syrian refugees living in the host community of Al Mafraq, ten kilometres from Zaatari camp, Jordan. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

LWF Leaders Urge Member Churches to Advocate for Syrian Refugees

Younan and Junge Underline “Desperate Situation”

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President and General Secretary have jointly urged LWF member churches to actively advocate for additional support to sustain Syrian refugees who currently face “the risk of hunger and starvation”.

“Without additional support, the food delivery programs can only be sustained until the end of January 2015,” LWF President Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge stated in a joint letter to LWF member churches today.

“It is with dismay that we have been following news about social debate and

policy developments in several countries, which instead of keeping a focus on how to protect refugees and to welcome the stranger, seem to be more concerned about protecting borders,” Younan and Junge wrote to the LWF member churches.

“We write this letter to you in order to ask you to intercede for Syrian refugees by advocating with your respective governments for greater solidarity so that the international community meets its obligation to protect refugees.”

The LWF leaders asked the churches to intercede for the refugees by advocat-



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

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2014 LWF Christmas Card and President's Greetings

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2014 Christmas card depicts an angel bringing glad tidings to a bustling world in which the church is a prominent structure.

Citing the angel's message in Luke 2:10-11, the LWF offers prayers that “the light of the Gospel will shine in the darkest corners of our world and within our hearts and minds” and that “in our witness, [we] become the bearers of the hope and joy that arises from God's promises.”



Art: Birthe Einer-Jensen

Naivistic artist Birthe Einer-Jensen, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark designed the card.

In addition, the 2014 Christmas greeting from LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan is available at www.lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-president-bishop-dr-younan-message-christmas-2014

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ing with their respective governments to scale up financial support and to increase the number of people to be accepted for resettlement, asylum and family reunion beyond countries neighboring Syria.

Younan and Junge noted the “astonishing generosity to protect refugees” by countries that neighbor Syria, including Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which all together host over 2.6 million Syrians. The LWF Department for World Service is active in both Jordan’s Za’atri camp and host communities as well as in Iraq.

The LWF leaders also asked churches through their specialized ministries

to protect and support refugees living in their respective countries, and to continue their assistance towards LWF’s work among Syrian refugees.

They reiterated churches’ role in promoting the document “Welcoming the Stranger,” which was jointly developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and faith-based organizations including the LWF to underline the role of faith communities in welcoming displaced persons. The document which the LWF Council adopted in June 2013 and which was subsequently sent to the member churches for study, affirms the “duty to act with love toward those in need, regardless of their religion, gender or nationality.”

In this Advent season, the LWF president and general secretary note that while Lutherans around the world prepare to celebrate Christmas, food aid to Syrian refugees had to be cut due to lack of funding.

They invite the churches to consider the Advent and Christmas seasons as an opportunity “to speak relevantly to situations of forced migration and exclusion of refugees around the world today.”

More information about support towards LWF’s emergency response for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Iraq is available at www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-northern-iraq-crisis and www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-syrian-refugees-jordan

UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE (COP 20)

Lima, Peru, 1-12 December 2014

Increased LWF Advocacy Needed after Unambitious ‘Lima Call for Climate Action’

LWF COP 20 Delegate Kopp Says Mobilizing Churches Is Key to Pushing for Commitments

LIMA, Peru/GENEVA (LWI) – The failure by governments at the Peru climate conference to deliver a concrete and clear roadmap to reduce global warming places an urgent responsibility on people of faith to increase their advocacy for decisive political commitment ahead of the 2015 United Nations (UN) summit in Paris, says Mr Martin Kopp, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) advocacy officer for climate change.

“While the text of the ‘Lima Call for Climate Action’ might come as a blow to the advocacy efforts of the civil society, the [mobilization] over the past few months demonstrate that a true social movement on climate change is being born and that believers can be a strong and committed part of it,” Kopp said of the 1-12 December climate change negotiations in the Peruvian capital.

Reflecting on the outcome of the 20th session of the Conference to the

Parties (COP 20) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kopp emphasized LWF’s role in continuing to “mobilize our member churches to advocate, especially in countries key to

the negotiations and raise awareness at church leadership and membership levels.”

He sees the 2015 UN climate summit and COP 21 negotiations in



ACT Alliance climate campaigners staged a protest “Don’t Gamble with our Future” as the UN climate talks drew to a close. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

Paris as “wonderful opportunities for the LWF to deepen its commitment for climate justice by being both the voice of the voiceless and the hands working for low-carbon development and climate resilience.”

At the COP 20 talks in Lima, Kopp and other members of the LWF delegation to the UN climate change conferences joined in discussions and led advocacy actions. This included a Vigil for the Climate to mark the end of one year of the monthly Fast for the Climate campaign by the LWF and other religious and environmental groups around the world.

Lack of Political Will

“The negotiations in Lima had revealed no sense of urgency, portrayed a lack of trust between the rich and poor countries, and the text adopted by the

195 parties to the UNFCCC presented a mere call, “if not a simple suggestion,” Kopp concluded. Instead of providing concrete proposals towards a universal agreement to be signed in Paris in December 2015, the ‘Lima Call for Action’ was a weak text with no binding compulsory timeframes or common technical frameworks, he said.

At its June 2014 Council meeting, the LWF called on world political leaders to make firm commitments for deeper cuts in carbon pollution.

Kopp argued that Lima had once again shown the lack of political will across the world to provide financing and support technology to help reduce carbon emissions. This, he added, “comes at the expense of the poor and vulnerable people and future generations,” who continue to be the most adversely affected by climate change.

Hope

Still, there is hope in the sustained advocacy by the LWF and other faith communities and civil society, and governments must be pushed to stand up to their responsibility in the coming year, Kopp said. “The Fast for the Climate Campaign, the New York [September 2014] Climate People’s March and several other initiatives have shown that the people are already at work and constitute the seeds of our common future,” he added.

Launched by the LWF together with other global organizations at the November 2013 COP 19 conference in Poland, the Fast for the Climate campaign takes place on the first day of each month until December 2015. It has grown into a global movement with the participation of youth, environmental and faith groups, urging governments’ decisive action on climate change.

365 Days of Fasting Launched At COP20

LWF delegation calling for lasting response to climate change

LIMA, Peru/GENEVA (LWI) – A Lutheran World Federation delegation was present in Lima, Peru as government representatives from across the globe met at the United National Climate Change Conference (COP20) from 1–12 December.

The LWF delegation to COP20 was comprised of seven young people from Canada, India, France, Norway, Swe-

den, the USA and Papua New Guinea. Delegates participated together with NGOs and faith-based organizations in a number of events to call for immediate action to counter climate change.

On 1 December, the delegation participated in a large “Fast-for-the-Climate” event as they sat with empty plates in front of the conference can-

teen. LWF Youth Secretary Caroline Richter stated that “We are fasting here to be a voice for the voiceless those who are already suffering from the impacts of climate change.”

The Fast for the Climate campaign was launched by the LWF together with many other global organizations on January 1, following an initiative of the LWF youth delegation to COP 19 in Warsaw, Poland, in November 2013. It has grown into a global movement with the participation of youth, environmental and faith groups, who all want urgent action on climate change by governments this year.

On the eve of the first day of COP20, a Vigil for the Climate was held to mark the end of the one year Fast for the Climate campaign near the Pentagonito where the UN talks are to be held. Christiana Figueres, the head of the UNFCCC and Manuel Pulgar-Vidal the Peruvian Minister for the Environment and President of the UN meeting, spoke to the crowd and



Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

a symbolic lighting of candles began the celebration that marks the end of one year of monthly fasting.

1 December also saw the launch of a 365 day fasting campaign leading to COP21 in Paris in 2015. “We announced today how we will fast for the climate until Paris, COP 21,” said Caroline Richter.

“We are launching a row of 365 fasters. One person will fast for a day for the whole day. It is going to be a

journey from Latin America here in Peru to North America, to Asia, Africa and finally to Paris, where it will reach COP 21.”

The LWF has continuously called for policy makers to agree on measures that will have a lasting impact on climate change.

At the 2014 Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the LWF issued a statement urging “heads of state and key decision makers to make it a

personal priority to address the human contribution to climate change, and make firm commitments for deeper cuts in carbon pollution.”

The LWF statement also asks political leaders to “ensure that the response includes provisions to assist the most vulnerable communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change already being experienced, and to account for the loss and damage being caused.

LWF Youth Delegation Form Human Chain in Solidarity against Climate Change

Typhoon in the Philippines Prompts the Call for “Solidarity not just Sympathy”

LIMA, Peru/GENEVA (LWI) – In solidarity with the people of the Philippines impacted by typhoon Haijut (AKA “Ruby”), scores of advocates including the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Youth delegation, local activists and other environmentally-focused NGOs formed a “human chain” inside the COP20 pavilion in Lima, Peru.

Arms linked together for one minute in silent protest, the group hoped to shine a bright light on the devastating effects of climate change and the vulnerable people most affected by inaction.

“Haijut” marks the third typhoon to hit the Philippines in three years and ironically, these disasters always seem to occur during COP events,” stated LWF Youth Secretary, Caroline Richter. “We stand in solidarity especially with the people of the Philippines’ environmental activists who are here with us in Lima and whose communities have been directly impacted by these natural disasters the most.”

In a letter addressed to Rev. Antonio Reyes, president the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the general secretary of the LWF, Rev. Martin Junge, offered prayers on behalf of the entire Lutheran communion for the people of the Philippines.



Standing together for one minute in silent protest, LWF Youth delegates unite with local activists to emphasize the devastating effects of climate change. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

Since 2013 when typhoon Haiyan also hit the Eastern Samar Province of the Philippines, killing over 7,000 people, the LWF has assisted member churches in the Philippines helping local communities become better equipped to handle such natural disasters. In October this year, the LWF Department for Mission and Development ran a disaster preparedness workshop.

Pastor of the Lutheran church in Tacloban city said on 7 December that many have already volunteered to vacate their houses included church members. The local government has

put in place an evacuation plan which people have obediently followed.

“This is another trial of our faith yet we continue to trust our God for He is the true Refuge and Sure Defense in times of trouble,” said Rev. Dr. Ranara.

“Please know that the LWF communion stands with you during these hours of fear and concern,” stated Rev. Junge in his letter. “Please let your people know that our bonds of communion and solidarity in Christ are strong and vital reason for which our prayers and focus belongs all to you in these days!”

Faith in the Good

International Conference Discusses Faith-Based Approaches in Development Cooperation

BERLIN, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – An international conference held, 15-18 December in Berlin, Germany, explored the interface between “Religion and Development Cooperation.” Hosted by Bread for the World and jointly organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and ACT Alliance, it brought together 55 participants from over 25 countries.

Under the thematic focus, the conference looked at questions such as: How can development work use the respective networks and influence of religion? Discussions included possible ways of cooperating with ministries, governments and political organizations; about new actors in theory and practice; and about the role of the church in issues on conflict and peace building. Around 90 people came specially to listen to the panel discussions.

Although the speakers presented different perspectives on the first afternoon, they agreed on one thing: religion is everywhere, is an important building block in most societies worldwide and has great influence on real life.

“Religions form global networks that can often reach even the most remote areas, particularly in regions where government organizations are weak,” underlined Rev. Dr Bernhard Felmberg from the German Ministry for Development Cooperation (BMZ). For that reason, BMZ has formed a task force on values, religion and development.

“A few years ago we thought that politics had nothing to do with development. That is quite wrong as we know now,” admitted Jean-Louis Ville from the European Commission’s Directorate General for Development



Bishop Dr Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala. Photo: Anja Martin

and Cooperation (DEVCO). “Now it is about religion and the question is how we integrate it. It is part of the society in which we live.”

Ville gave an example of how seriously religion is now taken in Brussels. The legal framework for financial support for projects had been changed to take account of religious freedom. For a year now there have been new guidelines to govern the handling of religious values in project activity.

The role of religion in development assistance became clear, above all, through the participants from the Global South. “Buddhism says that hunger is the worst disease,” stated Indian theologian Rev. Dr Chandran Paul Martin. “In Asia the power of religion is immense. And it controls the way in which the world reacts to it in its own context,” he added.

Martin presented the provocative theory that it is often religions that recall humanitarian tasks. Precisely because situations such as poverty are often accepted as God-given, en-

lightenment must be brought by the religious communities. “Development must not be at the expense of fundamental human rights,” he asserted.

In Namibia the church is an important actor in social and political development, said Lutheran Bishop Dr Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala. “One cannot do anything without coming into contact with the Christian community.” Unlike in Western countries, in his context it is necessary to remind the State of its responsibilities.

“You can see from the participants that this discussion on religion and development assistance is relevant and for many organizations very present,” said Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, LWF study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice.

Dr Dietrich Werner from Bread for the World said he was glad that the conference was taking place at the right time. This time it was restricted to Christian churches but he can imagine opening it up to all world religions in one of the next rounds.

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Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland Holds Conference on LWF Gender Justice Policy

Focuses on Polish Context, Churches say NO to Violence Against Women

WARSAW, Poland/GENEVA (LWI)— The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland held a conference in Warsaw on 19 November aimed at showcasing the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Gender Justice Policy. The meeting also explored equality and gender balance in the local church and Polish society in the run-up to the Reformation Anniversary in 2017.

"We cannot eliminate injustice in the world but we are able to have such an impact on our environment that injustice and inequality can be limited," said Jerzy Samiec, Presiding Bishop of the host church.

Some 70 people, including Lutheran leaders, ecumenical guests and teachers and students from the Warsaw-based Christian Academy of Theology, attended the conference at the Lutheran Center. Three LWF publications, *Churches say NO to Violence Against Women*, *A Faith Reflection on Gender and Power* and *LWF's Gender Justice Policy*, formed the basis of discussions on gender equality in the LWF and church structures.

The translation and publication of the three LWF documents is significant in the Polish context. At the last Synod session in October, Bishop Samiec said he would submit a proposal at the autumn session of the Synod in 2015 to amend internal church law to allow the ordination of women in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. Voting will take place in spring 2016.

During the discussion process, Bishop Samiec also plans to collect information on the ordination of women based on the experiences of other LWF member churches and conduct a survey of parishioners.

LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Director for the Department of Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka underlined the role the church can play in advocating for gender justice in society and expressed her satisfaction that gender issues are an important concern for Polish Lutherans.

"Today the LWF talks not only about gender equality but gender justice. Speaking of justice is not only thinking about women but also about men," she said, adding that the LWF documents can be used as a guide and a source of information for achieving greater gender justice in Poland.

Dr Joanna Koleff-Pracka of the Christian Academy of Theology said the LWF documents provide a way "to protect and support the dignity of women and men, created in God's image and co-responsible stewards of creation."

For Deacon Halina Radacz, the "Churches say NO to Violence Against Women" is important in the context of the debate in Poland relating to a "Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence." The view of Lutheran churches on the issue of violence was recognized and positively received by Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara, the Secretary of State and Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, she said.

The LWF Gender Justice Policy, which was approved by the Council in 2013, is in a process of being contextualized, and studied in churches and regional platforms. Translations into the four LWF official languages plus efforts by Women in Church and Society's (WICAS) regional networks to also make the document available in Polish, Portuguese and Kiswahili, underline the policy's importance as a response to local gender justice challenges.



Gender Justice Implementation Workshop, Warsaw Poland. Photo: Michał Karski

“The Bible Shook up a Dictatorship”

LWF interview with Rev. Harald Bretschneider on the Peaceful Revolution of 1989

DRESDEN, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – The Peaceful Revolution that 25 years ago caused the fall of the wall dividing Germany to a great extent started in the churches. Former Rev. (retired) Harald Bretschneider was the youth pastor in Leipzig at the time. He founded several peace groups within the church, acted as a contact for oppositional groups in Saxony in autumn 1989, and took care of those imprisoned, especially during the Monday demonstrations.

In an interview with the *Lutheran World Information* (LWI), Rev. Bretschneider explains how the church was able to help bring down the regime.

Why did you start advocating for peace?

On 13. February 1945, my mother dragged me out of our house which had been completely destroyed during the Dresden bombing. I always wondered why I was saved that night while so many others perished. When I was 16, I refused to enlist with the army, and was not allowed to study architecture as a consequence.

I became a youth pastor in 1979 – the very year that the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet Union’s nuclear missiles, which were not far from us in Kamenz, were placed on mobile vehicles. An incredible militarization of everyday life began in the GDR, the army was present from the cradle to the grave. The schools introduced Military Education as a mandatory subjects, manufacturers produced toy soldiers – everything of course with the stated ideal of striving for peace. The young people asked me what they should do. I knew then that I had survived to advocate for peace, and I joined with others to organize the first Decade for Peace in 1980. This was dead serious. Taken to its logical conclusion, the situation could have meant the end for all of us – *tabula rasa* in Germany.



With a symbolic “border of light”, people of Berlin commemorated the fall of the Berlin wall 25 years ago. Photo: Michael via Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA (<https://flic.kr/p/pGctiv>)

Working for peace and militarization

The patches worn during the Decade for Peace would later become a symbol of the opposition. How did that happen?

The motto of the Decade for Peace was “Swords to plowshares” (Micah 4:3). There is a statue dedicated to this quote by the Russian sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich in Moscow. Nikita Khrushchev presented a copy of it to the United Nations, it can now be seen in front of the U.N. Headquarters in New York. I wanted to use a picture of the sculpture, and since I knew that I would not get permission to print leaflets with that, I had it printed onto fleece. This was officially called the “finishing of textile surfaces” and did not require printing permission. Young people would then use the fleece as a bookmark in their school books which in turn caused discussions in school. Their atheist teachers even looked it up in their grandmothers’ Bibles to see if it really was a biblical quote! Some of the young people also sewed it as a patch onto their clothes. A year later, we manufactured 100,000 bookmarks and 100,000 patches.

Why was this activity against a state that itself had always propagated peace and international friendship?

They said that this “unnuanced pacifism” was “detrimental to peace”, showed a “negative attitude toward our socialist defense”, unsettled future officers, and undermined military morale. It was practically absurd that while we were even allowed to watch peace demonstrations on West German television, we were not allowed to demonstrate for peace ourselves. Still it is curious how events unfolded. We just had a Bible quote and a Russian monument. If the Stasi (secret police) had just accepted that, nobody would have paid attention. But by banning it, they enabled a Bible quote to shake up the GDR dictatorship.

Why were these issues of social importance discussed in the church?

The church was the only social entity that was legitimized by the system but not integrated into it. They kept the question of God alive but also took a position on matters affecting people’s lives. There are democratic structures in the church it provides space to practice free discussions. These were important

areas in preparing for the construction of a democratic society. We provided safe places for people to discuss matters involving environmental protection and human rights, when they had the feeling that the government was not telling them the truth. With a position which did not fall into categories of resistance or accommodation, confrontation or collaboration, the church earned the trust of the people.

“The leaven of the Gospel”

What role did young people play at the time?

Young people are like seismographs. They very accurately indicate threats to church and society. Our interactions and discussions with them were quite fruitful. I am still moved by how courageous and mature these young people were in taking the message of peace to the people – while bearing many disadvantages and hardships for that. It was breathtaking. They caused a Bible quote to be discussed on the streets of Saxony. This moved and pleased the church leadership, who took a clear position in support of the young people. The youth were the leaven of the Gospel, and lent the Gospel their hands and feet.

You were the contact person for the Monday demonstrations in autumn 1989. What are your strongest memories of this period?

There are a few events that I will never forget. The most important was

the Monday demonstration in Leipzig on October 9. I knew of course that Leipzig’s hospitals were prepared for large numbers of gunshot injuries. After the prayer we silently walked the ring road around the city center, and when we came to the corner where the Stasi headquarters was located, it dawned on us that there would actually be no reaction. The officer in charge was apparently surprised by the number of demonstrators and realized that his forces would not suffice. Right after the demonstration, I drove to Dresden – of course not without accompaniment. Prayers for peace were still underway at the *Kreuzkirche* (Church of the Holy Cross) when I announced that no shots had been fired in Leipzig. First there was silence, collective exhaling, and then incredible cheering and applause. I still can’t find the words to describe it.

“Not without accompaniment” refers to the Stasi agents who were watching you the whole time. Were you afraid?

I was afraid many times. In 1982 I said goodbye to my wife before attending the Peace Forum for the Youth. We planned to publicly commemorate the Dresden bombing, and I was sure that they would arrest me for that. In 1984, I spoke out at the LWF Assembly in Budapest. After that, they didn’t want to let me back into the GDR. But in 1989 something inside me had changed. There was a new feeling of not being intimidated by authority. People were no longer so easily unsettled by the police.

Remaining attentive and watchful

Did you expect the wall to come down?

Yes, I took the biblical number 40 seriously and always saw German reunification as a goal. And yet, it was a gift and not an accomplishment. I am very grateful for the support of my family and the church at the time. The LWF also accompanied us with attention and compassion. It was only due to the decision to hold the LWF Assembly in Budapest in 1984, and to introduce a youth assembly, that we were able to take part with 50 young people. I will never forget that.

Today you give witness to young people. What is it that you would like to tell them?

I’d like to make young people understand the strength of repentance and atonement as a basic attitude of faith, and to never forget God’s goodness in connection with historical events. He opens up possibilities in our human impossibilities. Also, it is necessary to remain watchful. God’s word helps us to live critically in the present. We are liberated from idolizing the temptations of the market economy. Faith helps us find the meaning and orientation needed to uphold values, which in turn is the only thing that can maintain peace in the world. I talk about history to motivate for the present – against weapon trade, greed, and social marginalization.

Diaconal and theological work belong together

Speaking in Württemberg, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation recalls the founding of the LWF

STUTT GART (Germany)/GENEVA (LWI) – The significance of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has always been characterized by the way in which its church-related and diaconal aspects have worked together. This founding principle of the LWF was emphasized by the LWF General Secretary, Mar-

tin Junge, on 27 November 2014 in Stuttgart. In his formal greeting to the Regional Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg he recalled the founding of the LWF almost 70 years ago.

One of the motivations behind it had been the deep need of the churches for

world-wide unity. The consequences of the Second World War had led to the realization that “a church on its own is a church at risk”, in the words of Rev. Junge in Stuttgart. “Our cultural and ideological boundaries are too narrow to encompass completely the width and depth of the Gospel”.

A further central motive for the founding of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947 had been the “unspeakable hardships after the Second World War, ... including in particular the many people who were refugees, suffering hunger and desperate to find a place to stay and a means of survival”, said Junge. Assistance for reconstruction work was organized at that time through the LWF. In this way an early foundation stone was laid for the diaconal profile of the LWF, which today is clearly demonstrated in the development work and emergency response offered by the LWF in over thirty countries worldwide. Rev. Junge explained that he himself came from a family that had been repeatedly forced to flee, partly for economic and partly for religious reasons.

The close association of church-related and diaconal activity was a

specific feature of the LWF. The two areas of work could not be separated from one another. He challenged the Synod not to lose sight of the needs of refugees both in Europe and worldwide. “These are people who, according to our faith, are made in the image of God, and in whom, according to the words of Jesus, we encounter Christ himself”, he said.

In his speech he also acknowledged the “energetic support” of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg for the humanitarian work of the LWF, which amongst other things offered support and supplies to refugees in the Central African war zones, as well as in Syria and Iraq. Junge challenged the 150 delegates at the Synod to maintain their commitment. “Advocate for the refugees, so that more may be done.

Europe must do more. Germany must do more. And you can do more” he said.

Rev. Junge also made a presentation to the Synod about the LWF planning for the reformation commemoration in 2017. The LWF wanted to concentrate its activities on the next three years and in particular to emphasize the international aspects of its content: “Reformation today is a world citizen. It has gone out and established itself in foreign places”.

In addition the Reformation commemoration must be dealt with in the context of “ecumenical responsibility”. The results of dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church must not be forgotten, for example the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. “We specifically want to include these ecumenical achievements, in order to avoid coming either to inappropriate triumphalism or to backward-looking antagonism”, said Junge.

Furthermore, the Reformation was not over and done with, but the churches were involved in ongoing reformation. This would have to be borne in mind also in 2017. In this context, the General Secretary drew particular attention to the work of the Global Network of Young Reformers. Over a thousand young people from the members churches of the LWF have committed themselves to come together in a network linking their projects and to send a strong message to the next LWF Assembly in Namibia in 2017.



General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge at the LWF Council Meeting in Indonesia, June 2014. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

African Lutheran Theologians’ Network Focuses on Churches as Peacemakers

The Bible and peace building

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa/GENEVA (LWI)

– A central theme of the African Lutheran Theologians’ Network meeting in Johannesburg from 8-15 November 2014 was the practical role churches should play as peacemakers in conflict situations in their countries and within the church.

“The Bible verse about turning the other cheek prompted a long discussion on how to relate this text to conflict in churches,” said Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Public Witness.

“Many participants gave examples from their own contexts. This is very interesting because in churches conflict often arises due to the failure to uphold the laws which govern that church.”

The network brings together theologians from across Africa to discuss interpretations of the Bible from a Lutheran

perspective and address contextual questions. The meeting focused on gender justice and human development, with a special emphasis on mentoring young theologians. It used the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5, which calls on Christians to be peacemakers, as its main text.

“In our current situation in Cameroon, we want to preserve peace between Christians and Muslims. This peace may be weakened by attacks by Boko Haram Islamists from Nigeria against churches, which can create mistrust between religious communities,” said Rev. Dr Samuel Dawai, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon and director of the Institute of Theology in Kaele, Cameroon.

“For example, in a confirmation class, I will say that Christians should behave in a way that avoids provocation, mistrust and confusion between Christians and Muslims. Inside the church to resolve conflicts, we teach a behavior that promotes justice and peace to



Participants of the African Theologian's Network meeting in Johannesburg. Photo: LWF

avoid frustrating situations that cause divisions within African churches.”

Dawai emphasized that “peacemakers enjoy a wonderful promise of being called the sons and daughters of God and will enter with Jesus as brothers and sisters into the family of God.”

“Churches in Africa have a responsibility to their countries and continent to help solve social, economic and political problems,” he added. “The most urgent issues that African theologians have to address are poverty, peace, the coexistence of religions and good governance.”

Cash-flow Crisis of Augusta Victoria Hospital Averted Payment by Palestinian Authority

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF-run Augusta Victoria Hospital has collected a substantial amount of receivables from the Palestinian Authority (PA) averting the recent cash-flow crisis. The payment went through in November as a consequence of ongoing advocacy efforts and

goes towards covering outstanding fees for patients referred to the specialized East Jerusalem hospital by the PA.

“With the support of USAID and the European Union on 17 November 2014 the PA was able to pay outstanding patient bills with the Augusta Vic-

toria Hospital,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said, adding that “while this payment covers a substantial amount of the due patient fees, all receivables are not fully paid”.

“With this payment, the AVH is able to continue delivering its relevant specialized health services” Junge said.

From 30 November – 1 December, the Augusta Victoria Hospital Board convened on the Mount of Olives, under the chairmanship of Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. The General Secretary expressed gratitude to the board members for their support in prayer and advocacy which helped bring about this payment.

The Augusta Victoria Hospital offers specialized care for cancer and dialysis patients. It is the first and only hospital in the Palestinian territories to provide radiation therapy for Palestinian cancer patients and is the



Augusta-Victoria Hospital. Photo: LWF/M. Brown

only medical facility in the West Bank offering pediatric kidney dialysis.

In August, Augusta Victoria Hospital responded to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by sending two medical teams along with essential medical supplies. Augusta Victoria Hospital also opened a department with 16 beds for casualties in order to receive

critically wounded people from Gaza while the hospital maintained its ongoing treatment of cancer patients.

Reflecting on the challenges of the past months, the General Secretary underlined the need to receive ongoing regular payments for patient fees in the future for which ongoing advocacy efforts are needed. "This will even be

of more importance in view of plans to begin bone marrow transplantation services", Junge said.

The LWF continues to be committed to the future of AVH and the patients it serves. The hospital is a cornerstone of the health care system of the Palestinian Authority and an important institution in its overall infrastructure.

São Leopoldo Students Send Video, Letters to children in Dadaab Refugee Camp

Extending a Tree of Friendship from Brazil to Kenya

SÃO LEOPOLDO, Brazil/GENEVA (LWI) – "Hello, friends! How are you? Today we are showing our school routine! We hope you enjoy it," says Arthur Blasi de Souza speaking into the camera, accompanied by the waves of his classmates in the background.

Arthur is talking to Somalian children, who live in Dadaab, the largest refugee camp in the world. Located on the border of Kenya and Somalia, the camp was established in 1991 to receive refugees from the civil war in Somalia, but it is now home to around 500,000 people of all ages.

Since 2010, students at Colégio Sinodal, a school in São Leopoldo, Brazil, have been exchanging correspondence with Somali children at a school in Dadaab. When they were still

in the last year of pre-school, "Africa" was simply a topic to study because of the World Cup in South Africa. But the pupils soon decided that they wanted to find out more about the continent.

"When they were in first grade, came up with the idea of showing them the reality of the Somali children who travel for days to reach the camp in Dadaab. We talked to the teachers and decided to create a tapestry called "the friendship tree," says Arthur's mother, Marcia Blasi.

"Each child drew one of their hands on pieces of fabric. After the pieces were sewn together by a group of mothers, the children wrote messages and drew pictures."

Blasi, an adviser to the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Council, was

one of the people responsible for contacting the camp in North Eastern Kenya. In partnership with UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, the LWF provides education, community services and sustainable livelihood support to people living in the Dadaab camp.

"With the help of many people at the LWF, we sent the tapestry to Kenya. The answer came the following year. The students there sent photos of the tapestry on the wall of their classroom, along with letters," she says.

Now in the fourth grade and on their way to the fifth, Arthur and his fellow pupils wanted to thank the children from the camp for the latest correspondence received from Kenya in December 2014. As a result, they are preparing to send their letters, drawings, photographs and a video about their day-to-day activities at their Brazilian school.

To teacher Andressa Neis, it will be New Year's gift called "friendship."

"We want to send them a moment of affection wrapped in the material we are organizing. It is an unassuming gesture, but it is loaded with good wishes for those who need it," she explains.

Blasi agrees. "The children in Dadaab are joyful – they play, run, go to school and want to be happy. They don't need much, but they do need love and friendship."

(By Vanessa Botega, journalist)



Students in a Dadaab schoolroom. Photo: LWF/DWS Kenya-Djibouti

Guaranteeing Human Rights in Conflict

Focus on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Iraq

DOHUK, Iraq/GENEVA (LWI) – The right to freely and openly practice religion without fear of persecution is as fundamental as those rights guaranteeing a person's physical needs.

Yet, many Christians, Yazidis and Sunni Muslims in regions held by Islamic State spent world Human Rights Day on 10 December in fear of their lives.

Father Emmanuel Youkhana, director of the Lutheran World Federation's partner in Northern Iraq, CAPNI, has witnessed years of persecution against his Assyrian people, who are Christian. Many of them want to migrate.

"Throughout history, non-Muslims have suffered in this region and still don't feel confident they are considered partners," he says.

History of Persecution

It is not the first time Christians have fled Mosul, Father Emmanuel says. "But this time they were betrayed by their neighbours. Co-existence has broken down." He explains that Assyrians while helpless are not hopeless. "But hope needs to be empowered. Emotions are not enough."

Father Emmanuel still holds on to hope for a land in which freedom of religion and belief is the norm.

"I dream that the long-term future of the Ninevah Plain will be a model of peaceful co-existence. But as long as people feel they do not enjoy the same rights as any citizen in the country, it will not happen." Only patience and the guarantee of protection to all will instil the confidence needed to bring about a future that protects citizens, regardless of their religious belief, he says.

Being "people of the book", a reference to non-Muslim adherents to faiths which have a revealed scripture, the Christian Yazidis would normally



Dr Mortatha Khodr Hmood and his neighbour. Both men have taken shelter with their families in Kurdistan where a LWF partner operates a mobile health clinic. Photo: LWF/S. Cox

enjoy a special protection in Islam. Yet misinformation about their beliefs left them subject to a particularly harsh treatment at the hands of Islamic State. They have suffered summary execution, kidnapping and rape.

Yet, Sunni Muslims are viewed with fear and suspicion in some quarters, too.

Dr Mortatha Khodr Hmood was the last to leave his post at Tikrit Hospital as Islamic State terrorised the city and clashed with the Iraqi army. He had long ago gone beyond his mandate. A specialist in internal medicine, he struggled to cope with the deluge of seriously injured patients by carrying out surgical procedures while airstrikes and vehicle explosions wracked his city. When his emergency unit was bombed and the hospital ran out of medicine, he listened to the pleas of his neighbour, a former senior military, to protect his family and leave.

Targeted for Being a Sunni Muslim

"I was targeted by the Iraqi army for being Sunni. They regarded us as Islamic State opponents. It wasn't until

my neighbour called and said that I must get out that we left. But it was hard because I still wanted to help the people" he says.

On his way out of the city, he was questioned at three Islamic State checkpoints about his motive for leaving. "They asked me, 'Why do you want to leave the hospital?'"

Fortunately neither his name nor his vehicle registration appeared on the database used by Islamic State insurgents manning checkpoints. Ironically, being a Muslim he was almost denied entry at the checkpoints bordering the Kurdistan region. The same faith which had caused his persecution to begin with almost denied him safety. It was only because he could phone a friend to vouch for him that he was not turned back.

He now lives in a modest house with his wife and two young children in the small Christian village of Aradin, which is home to the oldest surviving church not destroyed by the Saddam Hussein regime. Both Dr Hmood and his neighbour have some peace in this place.

"This is not our life but what can we do? At least here, there is no division.

My neighbours are a Christian family from Mosul. We live very harmoniously. Relations between us are really good. We treat all people as we would like to be treated” the doctor says.

Ask anyone who has fled the terror of Islamic State a simple question: what would you most like? They will answer: the right to remain in my country of religious heritage, to live in peace, to worship where and as one wishes with their fellow people of faith – hence: our human rights”

LWF Council Statements

At their 2014 meeting, the LWF Council adopted a public statement on “Welcoming the Stranger”, calling for compassion and understanding to refugees and migrants. “It is part of our duty to act with love toward those in need, regardless of their religion, gender or nationality”, the statement says.

The LWF Department for World Service is assisting the people displaced by IS terror in Dohuk and the Nineveh plain. LWF is providing

shelter, water and sanitation as well as non-food items such as blankets, mattresses and cooking equipment. LWF is also actively rehabilitating schools where refugees had been sheltered during the summer.

In cooperation with the Kirkuk center for torture victims Jiyan, LWF gives psychosocial support. A special focus currently lies on preparing the people for winter and distributing winter clothing and heaters.

Ethiopia: Focus on Hygiene in Flooded Camps

“Emergency Within an Emergency”

GAMBELLA, Ethiopia/ GENEVA (LWI) – The aerial view of Leitchuor refugee camp in Ethiopia’s Gambella region is devastating. It resembles a big lake, dotted with little islands of white tents peeking out of the water. Standing on muddy earth, the camp looks even worse. There is hardly a dry spot in the place which is home to almost 50,000 people, many of them refugees of the recent conflict in South Sudan. More than 200,000 have fled to the region since the conflict started one year ago.

On 17. November 2014 UNHCR and the Ethiopian government started relocating refugees from the flood-prone Gambella region to a new site named Pugnido. It is planned to also relocate 70 percent of the Leitchuor population to this site.

Extreme flooding has tested the refugee camps of Leitchuor and NipNip in Ethiopia for months. In August, heavy rains caused havoc by flooding Gambella, inundating Leitchuor camp and destroying the infrastructure. Further destruction followed a month later when the Baro river burst its banks. With roads engulfed by water, the essential delivery of life saving services has been severely affected. Since the camp became cut off from the rest of the region, the area has been accessible only by UN-run helicopter and cargo boats sailing—and occasionally sinking—on the Baro river.



A young boy collects buckets for washing and water transport at the LWF distribution point in Leitchuor camp. Photo: LWF Ethiopia/ Heidi Lehto

Focus on Water and Hygiene Promotion

“Refugees have started salvaging materials from the collapsed tukuls, while they take shelter on the elevated roads and among host communities in nearby villages and churches” Sophia Gebreyes, LWF Country Representative for Ethiopia, says.

“Their resilience in the midst of flooding is being tested in terms of constant displacement, insecurities, deplorable living conditions and diseases. Due to recent incidents claiming several lives, the refugee mothers live in constant fear that their children will drown in the flood puddles.”

Despite the numerous obstacles that have hampered the refugee operations in Leitchuor, LWF staff remains committed to improving the living conditions of the refugees with lifesaving activities such as sanitation and hygiene promotion, waste management and distribution of WASH items.

“Hygiene and sanitation promotion is a crucial part of LWF’s current activities, designed to combat the recent outbreak of hepatitis E and the increasing number of malaria cases, which are the main cause of morbidity”, Country representative Gebreyes says. Malaria prevention and control

activities, including environmental management and community awareness raising, are mobilized through the Community Outreach Agents (COA).

LWF has been distributing non-food items, in total 10,000 pieces of soap, 8,000 jerry cans, 1,300 wash basins and 7,900 buckets. These items were given especially to elderly and unaccompanied or separated children, to ease their burden of eater transport and storage. LWF also handed out 65,000 sachets of water purification chemicals, received from UNHCR. Local staff provided information on water handling and purification so the material would be used properly. While the end of the rainy season may relieve the flooding in the Gam-

bella camps, it might also lead to an increase in new arrivals as fighting reignites across the border. “The warring parties in South Sudan’s civil war have used this time to organize their troops again and we fear that they are preparing for major offensives as the heavy downpours ease”, Ms Gebreyes says.

South Sudan continues to face a humanitarian crisis of major proportions. The total number of refugees who have entered Ethiopia since the outbreak of the conflict in mid-December 2013 is now over 193,649 individuals. With the number continuing to increase daily, the arrivals in the Gambella Regional State cite fighting and food insecurity as the main reasons for their flight. Although the

number of daily arrivals have dropped since the rainy season commenced, dramatic increase is anticipated as the passage ways to Ethiopia become yet again accessible. With the renewed fighting in South Sudan resulting in further displacement, atrocity crimes and famine, more people will be forced to seek asylum in western Ethiopia.

The anticipated influx will further stretch the capacity of all agencies striving to provide basic services in this ‘emergency within an emergency’. The new arrivals and those stranded in the flooded Leitchuor are facing an uncertain future, adding to the distress of the war.

LWF to Take Over Camp Management of Mbera, Mauritania

“Sign of Continued Confidence and Appreciation”

NOUAKCHOTT, Mauritania/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) country program in Mauritania will be responsible for camp management of the Mbera refugee camp in 2015. “This is a sign of continued confidence and appreciation by the UN-system for the work LWF has done in Mbera so far”, LWF Program Officer for Mauritania, Anne Caroline Tveoy, says.

The camp, which is located a two-day drive from the capital Nouakchott and 60 kilometers from the border to Mali, hosts more than 50,000 refugees who fled the violent conflict there in 2011.

LWF Mauritania has been assisting with camp management since the camp was originally set up by the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “In addition to camp management, our UNHCR-funded portfolio includes responsibility for logistics and medical evacuations of the camp’s inhabitants” LWF Country representative Kasongo Mutshaila says.

Re-organizing the Refugee Database

Camp management includes the coordination of humanitarian activities, internal organization of the refugees, cultural life in the camp and complaint mechanisms. One of the tasks in the coming years will be to continue assessing the needs and future perspec-

tives the refugees, which may include plans for repatriation to Mali.

Mbera camp has made headlines in the past for its high number of locals who registered as refugees. According to a joint assessment mission conducted by UNHCR and the World Food Program in 2013, one fifth of the inhabitants in Mbera were actu-



Mauritanians receiving the notification of their changed status at Mbera refugee camp.
Photo: LWF Mauritania

ally local Mauritians. Mbera camp is located in empty desert land where the temperatures during summer go up to 50 degree Celsius. Food and water are scarce in the entire region.

“Do bear in mind that during the period of the assessment, Mauritania was affected by the Sahel drought. This means that the impoverished inhabitants in the local community surrounding the camp were also in need. Therefore, some of them registered also as Malian refugees” Country Representative Mutshaila explains. The scheme became visible when the Mauritanian government started biometric registration and found some of the supposed refugees in the country’s national database.

After consultation with UNHCR, the Mauritanian government decided

to rectify the initial mistake by “deactivating” those who are not refugees. 6,000 Mauritians have already been removed from the refugee database, while another 14,000 are scheduled to follow next year. The process of de-activation is done to ensure that international donations reach the people they are intended for.

Supporting Host Communities, Maintaining Peaceful Co-Habitation

Still, LWF recognizes that the situation in the host communities is difficult, with inhabitants that are almost as vulnerable as the Malian refugees. As a twist of irony, many of these inhabitants did originally come from Mali themselves as refugees, but have

since settled and integrated in the local Mauritanian community. “This is a very sensitive case” Mr. Mutshaila says, “and in an area not far from where the Malian chapter of Al-Quaeda has tried hard to recruit young boys and men to join their forces, it is important that we seek to maintain peace and stability between the camp population and the vulnerable host community”.

Instead of receiving food aid targeted at refugees, Mauritanian host communities will benefit from special programs: “The plan is to initiate programs and projects to support host communities so we can sustain peaceful co-habitation between the refugees and host communities”, Mr. Mutshaila says.

LWF and ELCA Thank Uruguay for Opening its Doors to Guantanamo Detainees

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have expressed their gratitude to the Uruguayan government for accepting six detainees held for 12 years at Guantanamo Bay as refugees.

“On top of the teaching of our faith to welcome the stranger, the protection of refugees is also an international obligation for states under international law,” said LWF Advocacy Officer Ojot Ojulu. “In this regard, Uruguay’s decision to receive the Guantanamo Bay detainees should be applauded.”

The six men—four Syrians, a Palestinian and a Tunisian—were detained as suspected militants with links to al-Qaeda in 2002 but were never charged. The U.S. has struggled to find countries willing to take the detainees after they were cleared for release in 2009. Uruguayan President Jose Mujica offered to take the men as a humanitarian gesture and said they would be welcomed in the South American country, which has a tiny Muslim population.

“In taking seriously the moral imperative to welcome the stranger—something that the United States has been unwilling to do with Guantanamo detainees who pose no threat to

national security nor to the communities to which they would be resettled—the Uruguayan government has displayed leadership and is a positive example to the U.S. and the rest of the international community,” said Stacy Martin, Director for Policy and Advocacy at the ELCA.

“Uruguay’s actions are to be commended. Lutherans, whose collective commitment to welcoming the stranger is evident in both our teaching and practice, are especially grateful to the Uruguayan government for opening its doors to these individuals.”

At the 2014 Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the LWF issued a statement underlining its commitment to Welcoming the Stranger, an initiative endorsed by many faith-based and secular organizations.

“We see today that Welcoming the Stranger is necessary as ever before in our world. It is part of our duty to act with love toward those in need, regardless of their religion, gender or nationality,” the statement said. “We note that there are an increasing number of refugees in the world. Whether migrants, refugees, or those marginalized, all need our solidarity and support.”

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