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Resolution - The Middle East

The Council of the Lutheran World Federation, meeting in Geneva in June 2015, has turned its attention again to the grave situation in the Middle East. The Council is deeply concerned about the escalation of violence in the region, the vulnerability of religious and other minorities, and the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The current scale of violence and forced displacement in the region is unprecedented: nearly 12 million in Syria (half the population; 4 million are refugees, nearly 8 million internally displaced) and nearly 3 million in Iraq. Other countries in the region, such as Libya and Yemen, have descended into violence. The region needs justice not more arms.

Neighboring countries have been extraordinarily generous. Today, nearly 1.2 million people have been received as refugees by Lebanon, so that one out of every four people in Lebanon is now a refugee. Jordan has received more than 600,000 refugees, so that now one out of every ten persons there is a refugee. Turkey is hosting 1.7 million Syrian refugees. These host countries cannot keep up this level of welcome indefinitely.

Religion has been used to legitimize much of the region's violence. Religious groups have been targeted. In this context, efforts to promote religiously-identified political moderation are struggling against the growth of extremism.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still unresolved, 67 years since the founding of the State of Israel and 48 years since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In the latest Gaza war last year, more than 2,000 people were killed, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian civilians; 490 of these civilians were children. The latest round of peace talks was allowed to collapse. Illegal Israeli settlements continue to be built in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Israeli prime minister has disavowed commitment to a two-state solution. Violence from both sides continues to be perpetrated against civilians.

Drawing on previous statements and commitments made, in particular the need to continue to engage in interfaith dialogue, the LWF Council calls for:

- Urgent international efforts to resolve the region's conflicts through negotiation rather than further violence.
- The LWF member churches to advocate with their governments to ensure constructive engagement and to address the causes of human suffering rather than addressing their effects only.
- Respect for human dignity, equal citizenship, and freedom of religion for all people.
- Generous assistance for refugees, including safe and legal channels to flee. All commitments made to United Nations response efforts should be immediately met. Refugees should be received along the lines of the "Welcoming the Stranger" commitments promoted by UNHCR and affirmed by the LWF. All who have been obliged to leave their homes should be helped to return as soon as possible, in safety and dignity.
- Continued support for a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, along the 1967 borders, as the best way to ensure the security and well-being of both states. This call includes: a) a demand for the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories; b) a clear focus on the status of Jerusalem in all proposals to resolve the conflict, with special attention to the religious significance of the city; c) encouragement for member churches to confront religious movements, governments and corporations in their own contexts that directly and indirectly perpetuate the conflict; and d) support for Palestinian efforts to resolve disputes through peaceful means, including the use of United Nations bodies and other international institutions.
- All member churches to accompany strongly the efforts of our member church in the region, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, as it promotes regional ecumenical and interreligious engagement and local ministries of education, health, and prophetic diakonia.

The LWF Council acknowledges with deep gratitude the support for LWF ministries in the region, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital, the Vocational Training Centers, and the humanitarian emergency programs, as well as the support for the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.