

Lutheran World Information

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LWF President Bishop Younan to 2015 Council: we need to taste the hope that strips me of my selfishness.
Photo: LWF/Helen Putzman

Lutherans called to “robust moderation” to counter extremism

LWF President Younan’s address to 2015 Council meeting

GENEVA (LWI) – Proclaim Christian hope that leaves no one behind, the President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan urged Lutheran leaders in his opening address to this year’s LWF Council meeting.

Speaking on 18 June in Geneva, the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) called on the worldwide Lutheran communion to engage in “robust moderation” to counter growing extremism.

The Council, which met 18-22 June, is the LWF’s governing body between assemblies.

In his address focusing on this year’s theme, “Hope Does Not Disappoint,” Younan noted that while Christians are called to nurture and sustain hope, it can be a difficult task amid increasing violence today, perpetrated in the name of religion. Still, he said, hope neither disappoints nor separates Christians from the world.

“It does not disappoint us. It also does not disappoint our neighbor. We do not leave anyone behind. Our global communion’s commitment to holistic mission and prophetic diakonia means

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that we seek the flourishing of all communities,” he emphasized.

The LWF president said the world today is experiencing turmoil, in which different extremist groups inflict, tolerate and justify human suffering to achieve illusionary objectives and totalitarianism. He urged Lutherans to offer a strong defense of religious and political moderation that vigorously challenges such approaches.

Wisdom and clarity of Lutheran doctrine

“It is our responsibility to confront false messages of eschatological hope with the wisdom and clarity of Lutheran doctrine and biblical interpretation. Reformation history gives tools for en-

gaging in this urgent project,” Younan remarked.

Lutherans also need to affirm a community in which neighbors are cared for, food is shared, gifts are honored, homelands are preserved, and all have the right to worship in their own way, the ELCJHL bishop said. “In this vision, we taste the hope that strips me of my selfishness and focus on my interests alone. This hope grounds me in a communion with a vision for the world. It makes me part of a larger whole where I am comfortable with differences and diversities,” he emphasized.

In order to further this vision, the LWF president urged Lutherans to work to understand the causes of extremism.

Belonging to the Lutheran communion makes one both a global citizen and an interdependent Christian,

Younan stressed. “My identity as an Arab Palestinian Lutheran Christian is directly connected with African spirituality, with the Asian appreciation of mystery, with the heritage of European enlightenment, with American inventiveness and ingenuity, all alongside Latin American liberation. Each of these strands have supported and informed me in the Communion to say that a Lutheran today is no more an individual designation.”

The president’s address was discussed in plenary and at Council committees.

There were more than 100 participants in this year’s meeting. They included Council members and advisers representing LWF member churches around the world and other officials, invited ecumenical guests and staff persons.

Stronger engagement makes the Lutheran communion tangible

General Secretary Junge’s report to Council

GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF must continue to grow in its dynamic engagement that has enabled Lutherans to serve millions worldwide and deepen relationships that make the communion tangible, General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge has urged.

Addressing the Council, Junge said there was no reason for the LWF to pause in its growth. “Because we are seeing millions of eyes looking to the LWF as a source of hope and empowerment, there is no reason for us to turn our back on them while becoming occupied with ourselves.”

In his wide-ranging report on LWF’s work over the last one year, the general secretary offered highlights from the different activities that affirmed the communion’s vibrant witness in the world. He said many churches face the challenge of providing theological education for lay people and pastors in changing realities and contexts, thus calling for innovative approaches.

Junge noted that during his extensive travels to visit member churches, he had encountered many individuals, scholarship holders, volunteers and church leaders whose encounters with LWF were life-changing and faith-growing experiences.

“The LWF adds something very fundamental to the way of being a believer, and the way of being the church. The LWF offers a dimension, which churches and people on their own wouldn’t be able to see and grasp,” he emphasized.



Rev. Dr Martin Junge delivers his report to the Council. Photo: LWF/Helen Putsman

Growing mutuality

On LWF's humanitarian aid and long-term development work, Junge said that service to refugees and those in crisis in countries such as South Sudan, Syria and the Central African Republic had touched 2 million lives, an 80 percent increase over two years. Collaboration has increased with long-standing partners, notably the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and there are new agreements with organizations such as the Islamic Relief Worldwide.

During this time of growing service, the Lutheran communion has supported capacity training and development programs for member churches and LWF-supported projects in 54 member churches.

There is vitality in the communion, for which Lutherans must thank God, Junge said. "How else can one explain the growing mutuality between mem-

ber churches, their working together to serve refugees, the displaced and marginalized?" he asked.

The general secretary's report also focused on activities related to the 500th Reformation anniversary and the Twelfth Assembly. He mentioned the ongoing "Women on the Move" initiative celebrating women's contribution to the Reformation; and the Global Young Reformers' Network and its international conference this August.

He thanked LWF's ecumenical partners for the ongoing collaboration in bilateral dialogues and for supporting "LWF's commitment to approach the Reformation anniversary with a sense of 'ecumenical accountability.'"

Challenges and moving forward

Still, there are financial and relationships-based challenges that the LWF

must continue to deal with, Junge said. Referring to the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, he reported a much improved financial situation. He stressed the need to proactively address the financial market volatility that threatens LWF's sustainability.

Junge emphasized the need to continue envisioning vitality in the Lutheran communion, despite challenges along the way. "Because we have journeyed thus far and continue to grow and move dynamically every day, step by step, there is no reason to press the pause button now," he added.

One of the documents that the Council discussed was the "The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion," which the general secretary also mentioned in his report.

Communion amidst diversity

LWF Council agrees process for member church study of self-understanding document

GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF Council received with appreciation a study document on "The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion," and agreed on a process to enable member churches study it in preparation for the 2017 Assembly.

The Council asked the Communion Office (CO) to prepare a process with questions and timelines for further reception of the document in the LWF member churches. The CO will send the document to the churches for further study; and encourage the churches to discuss it during Pre-Assemblies in anticipation of the 2017 Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia.

The LWF governing body also expressed appreciation to the seven-person study group that compiled the document, led by Rev. Dr Minna Hietamäki, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The 18-month

study process included joint reflection and consultation with representatives from the LWF regions.

The 2013 Council meeting requested the LWF General Secretary to establish the study group in order to engage the member churches in discerning how to deal with differences while upholding their commitment to being a communion of churches.

The study document defines communion as a gift and a task that is lived out in both unity and diversity. Explaining further what task entails, it discusses the questions of autonomy and accountability; shared decision making; disagreements in the communion and possible resources that can guide the communion in discerning life together amidst diversity.

Plenary discussions following Hietamäki's presentation focused on the document's relevance to the com-

munion and its churches, and on the process of discussing it further in the respective church contexts.

A good theological framework

Hietamäki responded to a question on the absence of a concrete proposal on how to discuss and appropriate the document in a local context. She noted that the group's mandate did not focus on the process beyond the adoption of the document by Council, but on producing content that would serve as an incentive for discussion. She said she hoped the Council would offer more concrete proposals on how to proceed with the document.

Rev. Dr Robin J. Steinke, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), said she shared the enthusiasm expressed in the report. She said the



Rev. Dr Minna Hietämäki presents the document, *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*.
Photo: LWF/Helen Putsman

document offers perspectives on how the LWF engages in robust relations, and also asks the question what this really means for the member churches.

“It is a good theological framework that guides our theological understanding,” commented Rev. Dr Rafael Malpica-Padilla, from the ELCA. Referring to the emphasis of “word and sacraments” as events in the communion, he said it was important in this respect to “think about the day to day life of member churches.” More attention should be paid to issues raised for further discussion in the document including the subject

of mutual accountability and the role of the CO, he added.

On the reception process, Presiding Bishop Dr Ndanganeni P. Phaswana, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, proposed that seminaries that are training pastors be also introduced to the document, and that ways be found to have workshops in order to popularize the document. “Let’s start introducing it now, and continue sensitizing our communion about it. A journey of one million steps begins with one step forward,” he said.

Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile,

supported the proposal to use the pre-assemblies “to gather the reaction of our churches and bring them to the assembly in 2017.”

Accountability in communion

Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany) expressed his appreciation for the study document, saying he saw it as a reminder about the gift of communion. He said the central questions for the churches should be: “How do you [the churches] want to live out your responsibility in the Lutheran communion; and how should this accountability be reflected in your decisions and communication?”

Ms Colleen E. Cunningham, Moravian Church in South Africa, emphasized her appreciation for the document “with regard to conflict and conflict resolution. Let us take the document in our regional meetings. It will give us time to reflect and look at it from within our own contexts.”

The self-understanding document develops a theologically grounded approach on how to live out the gift of communion. It also affirms shared convictions based on Lutheran confessional writings and Scripture, and highlights issues that require further conversation.

Council appoints directors Mwombeki for Mission and Development and Immonen for World Service

Strengthening holistic mission and humanitarian response

GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF Council appointed Ms Maria Immonen as the new director of the Department for World Service and Rev. Dr Fidon R. Mwombeki as director of the Department for Mission and Development (DMD)

Immonen, who has been interim World Service director since September 2014, becomes the first woman to head the LWF international arm for humanitarian response and develop-

ment. The Council appointed her for an initial five-year term, at its session on 19 June.

LWF World Service has 5,000 staff working with local and international partners to alleviate suffering, combat injustice and poverty, reaching 2 million people in over 30 countries.

Immonen, 46, is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), and has a background in development and human rights.

Prior to her current position as interim director since September 2014, she had served LWF World Service as global program coordinator since April 2014. From 2003 to 2007, she was the program officer for East Africa, and the focal human rights, gender and peace.

She worked at the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) as director for Development Cooperation, 2008-2014, and as development coordinator, 1999-2003.



Members of the 2015 Council approve two key positions in the LWF Communion Office.
Photo: LWF/Helen Putsman

Immonen has served as a member of the LWF Council, the World Service Committee, ELCF Council for International Affairs, and on the governing boards of ACT Alliance and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

She holds a Master degree in English and Development Studies from the University of Helsinki, and a degree in leadership and management from Helsinki Business College.

She replaces Rev. Eberhard Hitzler from Germany, who served as World Service director from 2006 until September 2014.

Tanzanian theologian Mwombeki

DMD's objective of holistic mission includes support to the LWF member churches in proclaiming the gospel, advocating for justice and peace and assisting churches in network and relationship building. The department helps churches in the sharing their resources and skills, provides training and capacity building as well as financial assistance.

Mwombeki, 55, the newly appointed DMD director currently serves as General Secretary of the United

Evangelical Mission: Communion of Churches in Three Continents (UEM) in Wuppertal, Germany. He brings to the LWF expertise from his theological background, broad experience in financial management, and organizational leadership at regional and global levels.

An ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), Mwombeki joined UEM in 2005 as Executive Secretary for Evangelism, and took up the position of general secretary in 2006. Prior to that, he served as General Secretary of the ELCT North-Western Diocese of Bukoba for four years.

He is a member of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), and has previously served on the boards of the Oikocredit Bank, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the Tanzanian coalition on Debt and Development.

He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in biblical studies from Luther Seminary in St Paul, Minnesota, and a master in Business Administration from California Coast University.

Mwombeki will succeed Rev. Dr Carlos G. Bock from Brazil, who served as DMD director from September 2013 until January 2015. Brazilian pastor Rev. Dr Silvio Schneider currently heads DMD as interim director.

Council endorses proposal for a continued sustainable LWF

Important step in addressing long-term challenges

GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF Council endorsed proposals for a process to envision a continued sustainable LWF.

On the last day of its meeting in Geneva, the Council approved the document "Towards a sustainable projection of the LWF and its Communion Office." The governing body asked the General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge to present a follow-up report to the Meeting of Officers in November 2015 and the next Council meeting in June 2016.

The proposed directions focus on how to express a theologically-grounded understanding of LWF's sustainability from the premise of Lutheran vocation and witness in a world that longs for justice, peace and reconciliation. The proposals particularly refer to measures taken by the LWF Communion Office (CO) in 2015 to control the risk resulting from the unexpected and challenging loss of some of the organization's income due to sudden depreciation of the Euro against the Swiss Franc.

The sustainable projection of the LWF and its CO is "our attempt to move from a reactive mode imposed on us by unexpected circumstances, but that will remain beyond 2015, and shift to proactively addressing the challenges the events have brought to surface;" Junge stated in the report's introduction.

National Bishop Susan C. Johnson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, expressed appreciation for the document and opportunity to discuss comprehensively the various

issues involved. “When we look at the whole picture, we can look at what we do well and remain sustainable,” noted the LWF Vice-President for the North American region.

Link to member churches

Rev. Naoki Asano, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, said sustainability of the LWF is also linked to that of its member churches. He said many churches are faced with the issue of an increasingly aging church membership and the challenge of getting the younger generation actively engaged.

Rev. Klaus Rieth, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Germany, said it was important to find ways to share “better among ourselves” the experiences from the different LWF regions. “We have representatives of churches that grow massively, while we in the North are losing our members,” he noted. It is important to learn from each other about spirituality, he stressed.

The different networks among the LWF churches at regional levels can offer some learning about active engagement and visibility, said Hellen Javier Rios Carrillo from the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope. “I feel very much identified with the active youth and women’s networks in my region but the work of the LWF is not very well known.”

Volunteer contribution

The suggestion about volunteer contribution generated varied discussion, with overall appreciation for the various gifts this group brings to churches and the LWF but concern that resources and

coordination are required to ensure effective and meaningful contribution. “We have so many people that carry the LWF in their hearts. This enthusiasm is one of the best treasures that I find,” remarked Ms Magnea Sverrisdottir, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, referring to the possible voluntary contribution of those who have served as Council members.

“I come from a church federation where a lot is being done by volunteers, but we do need structures for this,” said Rev. Dagmar Magold from the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. She noted that there are possibilities of reaching out to younger people and getting them engaged in project-related work of the church.

Transparent process

A sustainable LWF is also linked with the location of the CO. “This is a complicated and delicate question as it depends on a lot of indicators,” noted

Württemberg Bishop Dr Frank O. July. The LWF Vice-President for Central Western Europe emphasized the need to set in place a transparent process of discussing the different possibilities.

General Secretary Junge said, “We have journeyed thus far and continue to grow and move dynamically every day, step by step. We are seeing millions of eyes looking at the LWF as a source of hope and empowerment.”

There were also remarks about the need to be cautious about safeguarding LWF’s theological content, Lutheran identity and ownership by its stakeholders. “Our shared understanding about the stewardship of the communion is critical when we discuss sustainability,” Junge underlined.

In endorsing the principles of the document, the Council authorized the general secretary to establish a follow-up process that will continue to involve the LWF President and Vice-Presidents, as well as the Council at the respective stages.



The LWF Council endorsed a process to envision a continued sustainable LWF.
Photo: LWF/S. Gally

LWF Councillors take strength from “Hope does not disappoint”

Meeting theme holds particular significance

GENEVA (LWI) – In the face of suffering, hope sustains and encourages.

The LWF Council 2015 met from 18 – 22 June in Geneva under the theme

“Hope does not disappoint.” *Lutheran World Information* asked Council mem-

bers from different regions to reflect on the meaning of hope in their contexts.

Hope has brought us closer together

Although the Malaysian High Court rejected an appeal last year by the Roman Catholic Church challenging a government ban on the use of the word “Allah” for anyone but Muslims, Bishop Aaron Yap of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia still feels he has experienced the truth that hope does not disappoint.

Malay-speaking Christians have been using the word in Malay Bible translations since the 16th century. It is the word for “God” in the local language.

“You cannot stop Christians using the word God. Despite the challenges and limitations imposed by the authorities, we believe that God will bring us out of this situation,” Yap said. “The court decision referred only to the use of “Allah” in the Malaysian Catholic weekly, Herald, and our interpretation is that we can still use the term in the Bible.

“Hope has come through the support we received from the LWF and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It showed us that we are not alone and have hope together. There is also hope because the ruling has brought the different Christian denominations in Malaysia much closer together.”

Hope of other opportunities

Rising sea levels means some Pacific Island states face an uncertain future and may even disappear.

In response to LWF President Bishop Younan’s address on June 18, Warime Gutu of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea referred to the fate of Kiribati and Tuvalu, two tiny Pacific nations that will one day succumb to rising sea levels.



Perspectives on “Hope does not disappoint,” from left: Titi Malik (Nigeria), Bishop Aaron Yap (Malaysia) and Magnea Sverrisdottir (Iceland). Photos: LWF/S.Lawrence, S. Gallay

Residents of these island states may have to move from their homes or go abroad. “But where there is life, there is hope, and we still have our culture and identity,” Gutu says.

“We won’t save the land from sinking but can offer hope that is more spiritual. I hope people will have the peace to see the changes and move with the changes.

“But we still have hope in Papua New Guinea even knowing that we are losing land. God gives us hope that there will be other opportunities.”

Hope that one day we will be able to re-build our churches

“Since Boko Haram Islamists began attacking people and churches in northern Nigeria in 2009, Christians have not lost hope and continue to worship and serve God,” LWF Council member Titi Malik of The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria said.

One example is the northeastern town of Mubi, where every single church was destroyed by Boko Haram in October 2014 and people were forced to flee, she said. After the army recaptured Mubi, Christians were able

to return. Now they get up as early as 6.00am and worship God under trees.

“Christianity will never be defeated in Nigeria and one day we will be able to reconstruct our churches.

My hope also comes from the support we have received from our co-partners all over the world. We know that as Christians in Nigeria we are not alone,” she added.

Hope from our congregations and youth work

“My church is still facing financial difficulties as a result of the financial crisis in Iceland in 2007, which led to a cut of more than 25 percent in our income,” says Magnea Sverrisdottir, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland.

“Our hope is that we see a light being brought into our situation through the life of our congregations and youth work,” Sverrisdottir says.

“The work of the church and the preaching of the gospel are still relevant in our country. Our job is to find solutions and to create a space for religion in society. But we cannot do it alone. We need God and prayer.”

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LWF announces decision to not invest in fossil fuels

Speaking up and acting for climate justice as people of faith

GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF announced that it shall be the policy of the LWF to not invest in fossil fuels. This action is taken as part of its long-standing commitment to climate justice.

The LWF Council also called on its member churches “not to invest in fossil fuels and to support energy efficiency and renewable energy companies, and to encourage their institutions and individual members to do likewise.”

“Through this decision, we seek coherence and wish to send a strong

moral signal that the world needs to operate a transformational change towards a low-carbon economy, phasing out fossil fuels and phasing in renewable energies by the middle of this century,” the LWF Council added.

“We are encouraged that the Council has made the decision not to invest in fossil fuels and this puts action behind our commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2050,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said. “It is an important milestone and we trust

as a faith-based community we are making our own contribution within our one human family to address the challenge of climate change affecting our one common household.”

“We acknowledge that some of our member churches, as well as the World Council of Churches, have preceded us in the decision of not investing in fossil fuels companies, and that we are joining a broad global movement which is backed by the UNFCCC,” the LWF Council stated in Geneva. The UNFCCC is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“As a Lutheran Communion, we understand climate change as an issue of justice, peace, care for creation and protection for all peoples everywhere. We raise a special concern for the most vulnerable, in particular the poor, the indigenous people, and the voiceless.”

The LWF Council further emphasized that “we re-commit ourselves and encourage others to commit to a profound change in our lifestyles and in the broader system of production and consumption. We must live as responsible and accountable citizens of this planet.”



*LWF Councillors vote to not invest in fossil fuels.
Photo: LWF/S. Gallay*

Continue ecumenical engagement “in hope” – LWF partners

Christian World Communions and ecumenical partners greet LWF Council

GENEVA (LWI) – Ecumenical partners encouraged the LWF to continue “in hope” processes that deepen mutual dialogue for the sake of justice, peace and reconciliation in the world.

Representatives of Christian World Communions and ecumenical bodies greeting the LWF Council at its recent meeting in Geneva offered reflections

on this year’s theme, “Hope does not disappoint.”

Monsignor Dr Matthias Türk, representing the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said the ecumenical landscape that includes more than 50 years of dialogue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans had altered, creating a foundation for spiritual communion.

“Today we note a fundamental transformation of what used to be rigid frontlines between churches and communities of opposing confessions. Despite continuing differences in various questions of faith, our life as ecumenical partners is characterized by cooperation in all possible ways,” he said.

Türk affirmed cooperation between both partners for a shared commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. “Lutherans and Catholics will for the first time be able to experience a joint ecumenical experience, not in the form of a triumphal celebration, but as a confession of our shared faith in the Triune God,” Turk remarked.

The relationship between Anglicans and Lutherans has grown into a communion of love and trust that includes the giving and receiving of gifts, said Rev. Canon Dr John Gibaut, director for Unity, Faith and Order at the Anglican Communion.

Challenges and opportunities

“Many of the blessings, challenges and opportunities before you as a communion of churches are ours as well. If we truly learn to live into mutual accountability, perhaps we can begin to bear one another’s burdens and so lessen each other’s loads,” Gibaut

said on behalf of the Communion’s Interim Secretary General Rev. Canon Dr Alyson Barnett-Cowan.

Dr Henk Stenvers, Mennonite World Conference Europe Representative, said the process of reconciliation on which the two traditions embarked in 2009 offers hope. “The world in which we live is in turmoil. That is something so many of us experience every day. And when we walk with God, we can only bear witness to the hope that is within us.”

In his greeting, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Secretary Rev. Chris Ferguson said that his presence at the Council meeting illustrated the continuing commitment of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions to grow together in unity and service.

“We find the hour is right with the massive threats to life besetting the *oikoumene*—that we for the sake of God’s creation find new and deeper ways to serve together to do justice following Jesus Christ,” the WCRC leader emphasized.

Upcoming dialogue with Lutherans gives Evangelicals hope of better understanding one another and facing challenges constructively, said Jean Daniel Plüss of the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association.

“We want to address areas of concern and envision ways for common witness, in such a way that both our churches will be enriched,” he said.

Inspiration

Natasha Klukach, program executive for Church and Ecumenical Relations at the World Council of Churches (WCC) noted that the LWF and WCC share in the common vision of creating opportunities to reflect together and collaborate in mission.

“In a world where there are too many places of brokenness and division, together we strive to be witnesses of our common faith, seeking healing and wholeness, justice and peace,” said Klukach, who brought greetings from the WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, and Moderator Dr Agnes Abuom.

LWF’s leadership in diaconal ministry, especially in “working with refugees and migrants, is an inspiration to the ecumenical movement,” she added.

The freedom sparked by the Reformation movement had brought hope to the world, and the times are right again for such inspiration, said Rev. Dr Guy Liagre, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC).

Today’s social imbalances call for hope and ecumenical alliances such as CEC need to offer this kind of aspiration, to bring grace and peace to the world, Liagre concluded.



Dr Henk Stenvers, Mennonite World Conference Europe representative, greets the LWF Council at its June 2015 meeting in Geneva. Photo: LWF/Helen Putzman

LWF Council issues statement on the sin of racism

Statement refers to Charleston shooting

GENEVA (LWI) – At its 2015 meeting, the LWF Council issued a public statement on the “sin of racism”. The statement calls on Lutherans to raise

awareness and advocate against racism in churches and congregations.

In the statement, racism is called “a structural sin”.

“It is tempting to locate evil outside of the beloved community,” the LWF Council statement reads. It calls upon Lutherans to “confess and address our individual actions that perpetuate racism, both things done and left undone, in church, society and relationships.”

The Council addressed the issue of racism informed by the massacre in Charleston, South Carolina, which happened on the day of the Council opening. Nine African Americans were shot in Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the oldest black churches in America during a Bible study session by a young man. According to survivors, he was shouting racist phrases while shooting. The attack is being investigated by police as a hate crime.

The alleged perpetrator who was arrested a day after the attack is a member of a congregation which belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Two of the victims, the Rev. Clementa Pinckney and the Rev. Daniel Simmons of Mother Emanuel African Methodist



Emanuel AME Church, Charleston, South Carolina. Photo: jalexartis CC-NC-SA

Episcopal Church in Charleston graduated from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, one of eight ELCA seminaries.

“All of a sudden and for all of us, this is an intensely personal tragedy,” Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding Bishop of the ELCA and LWF Council member, said in a public statement after the shooting. “One of our own is alleged to have shot and killed two who adopted us as their own.”

“We might say that this was an isolated act by a deeply disturbed man,” Bishop Eaton added. “But we know that is not the whole truth. It is not an isolated event. And even if the shooter was unstable, the framework upon which he built his vision of race is not.”

The statement calls for prayer and forgiveness, and a stronger Christian advocacy against racism in the church environment.

Advocacy and prayers for improved interfaith relations in Nigeria

LWF Council resolution on Nigeria

GENEVA (LWI) – A call on LWF member churches to continue praying for peace and improved interfaith relations in Nigeria contributes to national efforts to build trust in the aftermath of deadly attacks by the Boko Haram militant group, says Council member from Nigeria.

“It is important for Nigeria today because Boko Haram claims to have a religious foundation propelled by Islam,” said Ms Titi Malik from the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), commenting on the June 2015 LWF Council resolution on Nigeria.

In an interview, Malik, a member of the LWF Council’s Committee for

Advocacy and Public Voice, said the Boko Haram attacks mainly targeting churches and Christians in northeastern Nigeria had brought tension in the society. “There is religious discrimination amongst people, fear, mistrust and mutual suspicion,” she said of the violence waged by the group since 2009, reportedly killing nearly 13,000 civilians, most of them in 2014 alone.

Malik noted that harmonious co-existence among the people of different faiths in Nigeria has suffered because of the extremist group. “The Lutheran church is now taking the issue of interfaith relations more seri-

ously in order for peace and harmony to reign in Nigeria,” she emphasized.

The LWF Council also urged the Nigerian government to intensify efforts to bring back female students abducted in April 2014 by Boko Haram from a government secondary school in Chibok, in the northeastern state of Borno. It also commended the current government for relocating its command center for the fight against the militant group to Maiduguri, Borno’s capital. “The Chibok girls are yet to be found and some of them might have been taken away to other locations outside the borders of Nigeria,” Malik said.

Repatriation and reconstruction require concerted effort

While attacks by Boko Haram have reduced since the March 2015 election of Muhammadu Buhari as President, the reconstruction of homes, churches and properties, and proper repatriation of those displaced require concerted effort. “The families that were displaced by the violence get assistance—shelter, food, clothing, toiletries, medication and educational facilities, among others—from individuals, state and federal government, faith-based organizations etc.,” Malik noted.

She is among several LCCN members who have been accommodating scores of displaced relatives and friends. She affirmed the church’s solidarity with its members: “The LCCN continues assisting those displaced by ensuring that they have shelter. The congregations contribute money and food items to help them survive. Vacancies have been opened in LCCN schools and other educational

institutions for the displaced children to either continue with their studies, further their education or start schooling,” she added.

With relative calm returning, additional assistance is expected from the government in rehabilitating houses, farms, businesses and other basic facilities, and in boosting security by

posting more soldiers and vigilante groups to the states devastated by the insurgency. “Many of the families are now going back home, and trying to settle down despite the losses,” Malik added.



The LWF Council expressed appreciation to the General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge for his solidarity visit to northern Nigeria in March this year. The LWF delegation included LCCN’s Ms Titi Malik (seated). Photo: Jfaden Multimedia

Church advocacy still critical in Guyana’s poverty reduction efforts

LWF Council: From “Millennium” to “Social” development goals

GENEVA (LWI) – LWF Council member, Michael Ram, commended the LWF for encouraging greater church engagement in the implementation of the United Nations post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address extreme poverty.

The focus on global poverty reduction was one of the resolutions of the June 2015 LWF Council meeting in Geneva. In an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, Ram, from Guyana, reflected on the relevance of this action for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana and the country as a whole.

“Despite progress made over the past decade, poverty is still one of the major issues in Guyanese society,”

said Ram, who is the newly-appointed chairperson of the LWF Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice, which presented the recommendation for Council decision. The resolution “From MDGs to SDGs: Putting Diaconal Participation into Practice” was based on discussion on the UN Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000 as benchmarks for tackling global poverty. The UN will assess progress on the eight designated targets at its summit this September and set new goals.

The Council called on LWF member churches to “stay informed about the final stages of the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, of which the Social Development Goals

are a significant part.” Churches in their respective contexts were encouraged to advocate for funding and support, and to enhance “story sharing and advocacy” in their diaconal and theological work.

“Poverty in Guyana is mainly human-made due to poor management and distribution of national wealth,” Ram said. With a new government since mid-May, expectations are high that there will be accountable use of revenue from natural resources, especially bauxite, as well as gold and diamonds, he noted.

“However, huge strides have been made in creating job opportunities and attracting investment, as the country



Mr Michael Ram, chairperson of the Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice, presents the committee's report at the June 2015 LWF Council meeting in Geneva.

lacks the capital, material and human resources to develop some of its mining sectors and explore oil. Ongoing advocacy by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana and other churches is therefore necessary to strengthen such focus," said Ram.

He cited government allocation of 10,000 housing lots to low-income citizens in the last few years as a positive indicator. "The extended housing projects

offered affordable home ownership for a cost that is as low as USD 300," he said. Still, there are challenges, "as the last government was accused of corruption and 'filling their pockets' in carrying out these projects," Ram noted.

For the welfare of others

Guyana has made commendable progress on its Millennium Develop-

ment Goal commitments, according to the UN Development Fund, Ram said. The portion of the population living in extreme poverty declined from 18.6 percent in 2006 to around 17 percent in 2010. It is currently estimated at 13 percent among the country's 735,500 people.

There have been notable efforts to reduce hunger and the under-five child mortality rate, to improve access to social services, to both enrol children in primary education and for them to complete primary schooling, and to increase women's empowerment.

Although the Lutheran church does not have a national structure to tackle poverty-related issues, its parishes are encouraged to establish relevant programs. "When we seek to address the needs of others it should not be to our own benefit, but for the welfare of others," Ram concluded.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana has 11,000 members organized in 13 parishes with 45 congregations. It joined the LWF in 1950.

Encouraged by global Lutheran communion support for West Papua

LWF Council Public Statement on Tanah Papua

GENEVA (LWI) – At its 2015 meeting, the LWF Council issued a public statement on the situation in Tanah Papua (Indonesia), voicing deep concern over the "on-going discrimination, rights abuses, and a culture of fear and violence" faced by the indigenous people of West Papua.

The former Dutch colony was unilaterally annexed by Indonesia in 1963 after being placed under the administration of the United Nations.

The conflict in Tanah Papua (West Papua) between the Indonesian authorities and Papuan pro-independence groups has cost the lives of thousands since the late 1960s. The

Indonesian security forces in Papua have been implicated in many human rights abuses over the past decade, including the killing of five unarmed peaceful protesters in the remote town of Enarotali on 8 December 2014, according to a Human Rights Watch report. Large numbers of political prisoners convicted for peaceful expression have yet to be released, the report said.

The LWF statement also noted, "Despite the Indonesian government's emphasis on development for the region, ad hoc programs and solutions have failed to meet the needs of local communities."

Council member Warime Gutti from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG) was one of the initiators of the statement. It called on LWF member churches, and especially those in the region, to "listen to and learn about Tanah Papua, the situation of the indigenous people, their economic and social struggles, the inequities they face and the injustices they experience, and to stand in solidarity with them and raise them up in prayer."

"Our church is very ethnically connected with the people of West Papua," Gutti said in an interview. "We are encouraged and strengthened in knowing



Council member Warime Gutu from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, one of the initiators of the statement. Photo: LWF/Helen Putzman

that the global communion is behind us in supporting our Christian brothers and sisters. It is also important for them to know that they have not been forgotten by the rest of the world.”

The LWF Council commended the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding between the ELCPNG and the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua. “We encourage the spirit of their

agreement to foster greater cooperation in diakonia, relationship-building particularly with youth, and enhancing formal and informal education. We especially note and support the emphasis between the two churches on continuing a relationship of solidarity, and acceptance of diverse cultures, traditions and spiritual gifts,” it said.

It also affirmed the 2012 Statement of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which included an expression of its “deep concern for the deteriorating situation regarding human rights violations in Tanah Papua” and called on the “Indonesian government to initiate necessary steps to enter into dialogue with indigenous Papuan people and to take adequate measures to protect their rights and to provide them with their basic needs.”

LWF Council issues statement on protracted conflicts

Call to protect humanitarian space

GENEVA (LWI)– The LWF Council issued a public statement on protracted conflicts and the over-stretched humanitarian response, drawing attention to the 60 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, and the fact that more than half of them are children. “The world’s humanitarian responders are over-stretched and unable to properly respond to the needs of those affected by these violent conflicts. The scale of suffering and the necessary response is overwhelming the system,” the statement reads.

Currently, the LWF World Service is responding to emergencies and protracted refugee situations in 32 countries. Among them are people fleeing violence in Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Central African Republic, Mali, DR Congo, Burundi, Myanmar, Colombia, and Central America.

Some refugees have had to flee for a second or third time, others have

spent years in a refugee camp. One example is Daniel Deba, a biology professor from the Central African Republic who was threatened and fled to Chad with his family ten years ago.

His children have grown up in Dossaye refugee camp, where the LWF is offering training, food, non-food items, psycho-social and livelihood support. The family does not know when it will



Children from Kordofan in Gendressa refugee camp, South Sudan. The ongoing conflict in the latest UN member state provides an especially difficult working environment. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

be safe to return, or if they will be offered resettlement to another country. "Of course I want to go home," he says, "but that is not possible".

With 15 new conflicts erupting in 2014 alone, the protracted crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) receives less international attention. The number of refugees in countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Jordan, Chad and Uganda increases every year.

At the same time, the working environment for humanitarian staff

becomes more challenging. In 2014, LWF World Service staff experienced security incidents in South Sudan and Myanmar and had to evacuate staff and even suspend activities in these countries. Continued fighting prevents the transport of relief goods to those in need and raises operation costs.

The LWF public statement calls upon the United Nations Security Council to "suspend the veto power by the permanent five members in matters related to preventing or end-

ing genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity". It urges parties to the conflict "facilitate humanitarian access" and to "protect and promote the safety, space and freedom of humanitarian personnel" to work without political pressure.

The statement calls upon LWF member churches to welcome refugees and to support member churches and Christians under persecution.

ELCA Global Mission and EECMY-DASSC sign Memorandum of Understanding

Continued cooperation of ongoing projects in the area of diakonia

GENEVA (LWI) – The Development and Social Services Commission of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY-DASSC) and the Global Mission unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to continue project cooperation of ongoing projects in the field of Diakonia.

In doing so, both the ELCA and the EECMY have made use of an existing provision in the 2013 EECMY General Assembly decision. The highest decision-making body of the EECMY severed partnership ties with the ELCA and Church of Sweden, but indicated the possibility to continue engagement in diaconal projects that were under implementation at the time of its decision.

Commenting on the importance of the signature, the LWF Vice-President for the African region, Presiding Bishop Dr Alex. G. Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania encouraged the churches to not regard the signed document as a result, but as a step towards resumption of the cooperation in ongoing diaconal projects. "Let this not become another signed document without tangible effects, as they are so many in our



Participants of the signing ceremony between EECMY – DASSC and ELCA Global Mission to resume cooperation on ongoing projects in the field of Diakonia. Photo: LWF/S. Gallay

world today, but a document which translates into concrete actions." He attended the signing ceremony in the LWF Communion Office on 19 June.

The LWF Vice-President for North America, National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada also witnessed the signature of the project cooperation MoU. In her remarks, she underlined the role of the LWF communion as a space that is shared by all member churches, and the importance of accompaniment with a view of healing and reconciliation. "I am glad we were able to gather

at the table for a meal. I am delighted we are gathered at a meeting table for this signing. I look forward, with hope, to the day these churches can meet again at the table of the Lord."

EECMY President Rev. Dr Wakseyoum I. Negeri referred to the door that the EECMY had left open for continued support of ongoing development and social services' projects. "I am glad that now an atmosphere of understanding is created that such support continues within the limits of the decisions of the EECMY, where the EECMY DASSC makes careful follow

up on the implementation of these ongoing projects”, he expressed. “We will continue to pray to God to provide us with better future”, he added.

For the ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton the Memorandum of Understanding “defines us as neighbors despite the distance and the contexts that divide us. But we are more than neighbors, more even than brothers and sisters. St. Paul writes, ‘So we, though many, are one body in

Christ, and individually members one of another.’ (Romans 12:5) I pray that this MoU will lead to deeper conversation, reconciliation and restoration of community between our churches”.

LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan said: “I believe this is a day of joy: for the poor who will be served, for the two churches involved and for the entire communion. Without any doubt God’s Spirit has brought this day to come. We trust in God’s ongoing guidance and

inspiration for the journey of healing and restoration that is still ahead.

In his report to the Council, the LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge pledged “the LWF’s efforts to continue accompanying these (two) churches. The moment we as a communion stop feeling the pain of the fracture in relationships (...) we have ceased to be a body and given up on our vocation to live and witness together as churches in communion”.

Renewal of the Lutheran church in Africa must address today’s realities

Nigerian Bishop Filibus stresses need for critical reforms in theological education, leadership, liturgy and worship

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – Ongoing renewal of the church must be a priority task for the African Lutheran church witness in a context where progress and abundance co-exist with struggles for justice, peace, reconciliation and a dignified life.

These were the key messages from speakers at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Africa regional consultation and 60th anniversary celebrations, 20-24 May, in Moshi, Tanzania. Over 200 delegates including heads of churches from the 31 LWF member churches, representatives from

sister churches around the world, and global LWF leaders reflected on the vision of the first gathering of African Lutherans in Marangu, Tanzania, in 1955. They also analyzed critically their contribution to the Lutheran communion, and the future of the African Lutheran church with a view to the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 and beyond.

A presentation by Bishop Dr Musa P. Filibus of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) summarized the most critical issues for the renewal of the African Lutheran church in

today’s context. These include theological education, church sustainability, good governance, ecumenism and interfaith relations.

In his paper “Being a reforming Lutheran church in Africa today,” Filibus emphasized that “renewal of the church is not change for the sake of change or fashioning after popular opinions in an attempt to be relevant to modern styles and developments.” Churches, he said, “need to be relevant for the context in which they witness.”



LCCN Bishop Dr Musa P. Filibus makes his presentation at the May 2015 consultation and 60th anniversary gathering of African Lutheran church leaders in Moshi, Tanzania. Photo: LWF/Tsion Alemayehu

Theological education

The bishop of the LCCN Mayo Belwa Diocese called for a more creative approach to theological education, formation, and pastoral training to ensure adequate response to the needs of the church and its mission work. Citing his own country Nigeria, he expressed deep concern that seminary curricula are loaded with courses designed by their affiliate universities, leaving the church institutions with little time for in-depth work on doctrinal and ministerial courses. “How then do we train pastors to meet up with the yearnings of members and congregations?” he asked.

On the need to reform liturgy and worship, Filibus said many Lutheran Christians argue that the liturgy and ancient hymnals still used by churches are very distant from today's realities. "What is critical in trying to rediscover our worship heritage, however, is keeping in mind that those songs and liturgies were born out of specific realities."

The LCCN bishop also asked the African churches to critically look at why "we are still struggling under the so-called dependency syndrome and lacking the financial independence to develop much-needed human resources and various ministries."

Confronting corruption

He decried the general lack of accountability and transparency, and its negative impact on the life and ministry of the

church. "If we are serious about renewal, we should boldly name and confront corruption and financial scandals in the church. A reforming Lutheran church in Africa cannot turn deaf ears to widespread rumors on the disappearance of church funds sometimes suspected to be diverted into personal projects, corruption in the form of abuse of power and nepotism in the churches."

On leadership renewal, he reminded the church representatives of the Christian calling to servanthood leadership. He said it was "indeed sad" that people fight for leadership positions not as a calling to serve, but to fulfill personal ambitions. "We need to understand that Christian communities today increasingly appreciate leaders who live and lead by example."

Filibus noted that despite democratic changes and economic progress

since the 1960s, there is growing impoverishment of huge sections of Africa's population, high unemployment rates especially among the youth, poor social infrastructure and basic services, and extremist related violence. "We are going through a very sad period, when human life has become so cheap, evident in the senseless killings and destruction of human life across the region. This is a bit of our story within which we reflect on reforming the Lutheran churches in Africa today," he added.

Other topics discussed at the conference included human beings' contribution to inequality and ecological destruction; the church's public responsibility in view of violence against women; and the importance of ecumenical and interfaith encounters in the public space.

Persist in putting faith into action, Kanyoro urges Lutheran churches

Violence against women is alarming, congregations can do more

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – "Are we as churches sometimes unable to speak about violence against women and girls because we experience it and practice it?" This was one of the questions posed by Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, chief executive officer and president of the US-based Global Fund for Women, when she addressed African Lutheran church leaders meeting in Moshi, Tanzania to celebrate 60 years since the first pan-African Lutheran gathering.

Kanyoro, who in the late 80s and 90s coordinated The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Women in Church and Society desk, commended the LWF for its courage in advocating and acting for change in society and in the churches. "Each one of us here will have some experience of a public action, a theological or social issue that you celebrate," she said, and mentioned advocacy and intervention against apartheid, political oppression



Dr Musimbi Kanyoro addresses Lutheran church delegates at the May 2015 African region consultation and 60th anniversary gathering in Moshi, Tanzania. Photo: LWF/Tsion Alemayehu

and repression, displaced people, and HIV and AIDS among others.

"Issues that raise public concern will not go away," Kanyoro said in her presentation on "Justification and public responsibility." She encour-

aged churches in the Lutheran communion to persist in putting their faith into action even when progress is not forthcoming.

Kanyoro affirmed LWF's role in enabling churches to talk together

about an inclusive church for men and women, the clergy and laity.

“We saw consistently how churches learn from each other and also care for their bilateral and multilateral relationships,” she said, referring to the issue of women’s ordination in several LWF churches.

“It took a while for change to happen, but once started our togetherness churches in communion hastened and scaled it rapidly,” she noted, and cited cases of Lutheran women ordinations in the United States, Finland, Namibia and Tanzania, among several other countries.

Violence against women is pervasive

Kanyoro commended the LWF and its churches for significant efforts in engaging with the issue of violence against women both in church and society. However, she argued, much more needs to be done.

“Violence against women and girls in the world today is so pervasive that it is a shame to society, and we in the

church have no excuse for not making it our business,” she emphasized.

Global indicators on the prevalence and impact of such violence show that “the most dangerous place for a woman is in her own home,” at the hands of an intimate male partner, Kanyoro said. She described the facts as “harrowing,” with “more than one in three women globally having been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence.” The personal tragedy, human suffering, enormous social and economic costs of such violence have ripple effects throughout society.

Equally alarming is the number of women who are subjected to human trafficking for forced labor worldwide. Citing statistics from United Nations Women, Kanyoro said women and girls represent 55 per cent of the estimated 20.9 million people trafficked for forced labor worldwide. The same group accounts for 98 percent of the estimated 4.5 million people forced into sexual exploitation. This is in addition to other forms of violence such as the most extreme—femicide—the murder of women and girls simply because they are female.

Kanyoro argued that churches and their congregations “have the expertise to understand the pain in our communities,” and should thus lead in correcting gender inequalities, respecting human rights of all people without exception, preventing conflicts and wars, ending violence, and creating a fair and just world.

Faith without action does not give people hope, Kanyoro said. She encouraged the over 200 church delegates at the conference to continue “to use the pulpit to teach what our communities should look like” and help people to see the image of God in each suffering person.

“My hope is that we will never tire of our responsibility to be present and act in the moment to address the issues of our time. We are justified by faith and called back to our responsibility,” she added.

(Afram Pete, regional coordinator of the the African Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET) contributed to this article.)

LWF welcomes Pope’s encouragement to tackle climate change

General Secretary Junge: Escalating impact on the poor makes advocacy urgent

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’ —On Care for Our Common Home”, as an encouragement for all those struggling for climate justice.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said the encyclical “encourages every person living on this planet to collaborate in urgently protecting our common home. As the LWF, we are encouraged to continue upholding a special commitment to both address and tackle climate change. We look forward to enhanced ecumenical collaboration on this vital issue that concerns us all.”

Published by the Vatican on 18 June, the encyclical by the head of the global Roman Catholic Church calls for an ethical, spiritual and economic revolution to prevent catastrophic climate change and halt the growing inequality in the world.

“We welcome Pope Francis’ emphasis on the intimate togetherness of caring for the planet and caring for the poor and future generations,” Junge said. “We have to read the encyclical attentively in order to identify the common ground in view of our current engagement on issues of climate change,” he added.

The LWF has committed to focus on reducing the impact of climate change as a matter of social, economic and eco-justice responsibility. Many of the LWF member churches have experienced the consequences of increasing and frequent climate change that disproportionately hit vulnerable communities. The LWF also emphasizes care for creation as a matter of intergenerational justice.

LWF youth delegates lead the organization’s advocacy on this issue under the global “Fast for the Climate” campaign, and represent the LWF in the United Nations (UN) climate change conferences. Climate justice is a focus



Members of the LWF Global Young Reformers' Network in Africa, plant a tree during a May 2015 visit to Majengo Lutheran Parish in Moshi, Tanzania. Photo: LWF/Allison Westerhoff

of the Lutheran communion's commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, illustrated by one of the event's sub-themes "Creation – not for sale."

As part of its commitment to the stewardship of creation, the LWF is working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2050. It engages its respective departments in initiatives that contribute to the reductions of carbon emissions. Many of the member churches have made similar efforts.

The LWF will participate in the 30 November – 11 December Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris.

New LWF publication: "Religious Plurality and the Public Space"

Christian and Muslims scholars reflect on the role faith in the public sphere

GENEVA (LWI) – *Religious Plurality and the Public Space* is the title of a new publication jointly produced by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Center for Islamic Theology (ZIT).

The compilation of theological reflections from Christian and Muslim scholars examines the role of faith in the public sphere. Theologians and social scientists discuss distinctions and relations between religious communities and the state, and analyze anthropological and theological perceptions that influence the understanding of public space.

"In plural societies, the notion of public space is key when negotiating questions pertaining to justice and peace," LWF's Rev. Dr Simone Sinn and ZIT theologians Dr Dina El Omari and Prof. Mouhanad Khorchide note in the book's introduction. They observe that the vision of good life, dignity and society's well-being is both influenced by diverse social, cultural and life experience contexts and shaped by the different religious and non-religious value commitments.

However, the plurality of religious commitment and constructive engagement today is threatened by perspectives and religious interpretations that are fundamentalist, as well as politics that embody nationalistic and ethnic identity. In the publication, Christian and Muslim scholars from 12 different countries across the globe examine how religious communities understand and interpret plurality and how they

relate with other communities and stakeholders in the public space.

Most of the essays were first presented at a January 2014 international consultation organized jointly by the LWF and the Münster (Germany)-based ZIT on the topic "Creating Public Space: The Role of Faith in the Public Sphere."

The authors provide in-depth rationales for why and how Islam and



Christian and Muslim participants of the 2014 consultation in Germany, visiting the Hall of Peace in Münster, which commemorates the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. Photo: Marion von Hagen

Christianity can contribute to building a shared public space. They discuss how the interpretation of the Bible and Qur'an strongly influence the way in which communities engage in public space and how they deal with politics and power.

Reflections on contemporary realities in Brazil, Nigeria and Palestine address issues of domination and the complex relationship between religion and politics, and highlight the crucial role played by minority groups in plural societies.

Copies of *Religious Plurality and the Public Space: Joint Christian-Muslim Theological Reflections*, in the *LWF Studies* series can be ordered directly from the publisher or DTPWPublications@lutheranworld.org

Faith-based organizations issue statement at Human Rights Council

“Common vision to protect dignity of girls and women”

GENEVA (LWI) – Faith-based organizations issued a joint statement for advancing women's rights and denouncing gender-based violence at the 29th session of the UN Human Rights Council. In a joint side event on 16 June, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) hosted a panel to discuss how faith communities can advocate for women and girls.

“Although we come from different religious traditions, we share a common vision to protect the dignity and rights of women and girls,” the statement reads. It was signed by the LWF, IRW, World Council of Churches (WCC), and the World YWCA.

“We recognize that religious beliefs can become obstacles, but also resources for addressing gender-based violence,” the statement further says, addressing the issue of “deliberate distortions” and “misinterpretation of religious texts and traditions.” The statement urges the Human Rights Council to consider faith-based organizations as partners in addressing gender-based violence and advocating for women's rights, and to create space for interfaith cooperation in the promotion of human rights.

During the side event representatives of different organizations discussed the reality of women's rights and violence against women and girls, as experienced in their daily work.

“The church blessed their union without reservation,” Olga Tshiwewe from the Democratic Republic of Congo and



Olga Tshiwewe (WCC), Iman Sandra Pertek (IRW) and Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt (LWF, from left) discuss during the side event on violence against women at the Human Rights Council. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

representative of the WCC, recounted the story of a teenage girl forced to quit school and marry a man twice her age. “When her husband started abusing her, she had nowhere to go. Would she turn to that same church for help, which previously had blessed the marriage?”

“Young women in this region have the same dreams: education, good health and human rights.” Hendrica Okondo, Global program Manager for HIV AIDS with World YWCA, said. “But the culture defines gender norms.”

Malayah Harper, Chief of UN AIDS Gender Equality and Diversity, emphasized the need to work with and through faith communities, and for faith communities to speak up against gender-based violence. “In traditional societies, women are very unlikely to go to formal courts, but they will go to traditional leaders,” she said.

“We need to differentiate culture and religion,” Iman Sandra Pertek, IRW Senior Policy Advisor on Gender, said. “Human rights need to be seen as fundamental rights given by God. Scripture gives us fundamental ground to challenge forced marriage and gender-based violence, and to advocate for the rights of the child.”

Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, LWF Program Secretary for Women in Church and Society, demanded to also recognize human rights violations in theological language. “As we learnt in the process of discussing the LWF action plan ‘Churches say no to violence against women’ we need to call this violence by its name,” she said. “It is something against God's will, so theologically speaking it's a sin.”

LWF to gather proof of human rights status in Mozambique

“A responsibility to ensure the evidence we collect is robust”

MAPUTO, Mozambique/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation is part of an NGO coalition that is gathering evidence of human rights concerns for a United Nations review of rights in Mozambique.

The review, known as the Universal Periodic Review, is a mechanism run by the UN Human Rights Council in which states review each other’s efforts to improve human rights every four years.

At a recent meeting of NGOs in Maputo, the LWF was one of five organizations nominated to form a steering committee that will lead 20 organizations investigating human rights in the sectors of education, gender, land rights, public and political participation, and freedom of expression.

As well as holding community consultations, LWF staff in both Geneva and Mozambique will work with Mozambican authorities and key local organizations, such as the Human Rights League of Mozambique, a major civil society organization in the country.

The review will make public the steering committee findings, as long

as the findings are formatted correctly and based on primary evidence. Once made public, states can include the data in their national reports.

LWF Mozambique country representative Katja José said it was an honor to support the people of Mozambique in their struggle to have their rights recognized.

“We now have a responsibility to ensure the evidence we collect is robust and truly reflects the human rights situation in the country.” The greatest challenges in this process will be to gather inclusive information reflecting the greatest concerns of the poorest and marginalized, in a setting where civil society is fragmented. There are unmet needs in almost every sector.”

Crops ruined by big business

Rights of rural people to safeguard their crops from large-scale commercial farmers is a key concern that the LWF wants to bring to the attention of the UN council.

In recent years, Mozambique has been the scene of increased land conflict as national and international companies benefit from deals that block the ability of local communities to farm.

In 2005, a livestock company settled 10km from a village in the Sofala province of Mozambique. However, village residents were denied the chance to negotiate conditions that would have protected their livelihoods. Every year since, cattle have been left to graze the community farm land, destroying crops in the process.

“Before this company arrived, life was good here,” says Paulo, head of the committee that encourages development in the village.

Residents used to benefit from two harvests but for the last decade, cattle have been systematically destroying the second. In 2013, the community tried to complain to the company but never received a response. They are seeking compensation for lost income.

Victoria speaks for the women of the village. “We used to cultivate beans, sweet potatoes, onions and tomatoes. We would sell them and use the money to bring the corn to the grinding mill.”

Paying the mill to do the job would free time for other activities. Now they can no longer afford to go to the mill and have to grind the corn themselves. “The whole process is broken. The women of the village are suffering.”

Examples and testimonies from the local population show that community consultations required by law are not taking place; land deals often take place in the capital and the people who end up worst affected by these deals are not informed until it is too late.

As in almost all rural areas in Mozambique, community land is not



LWF staff collect information about human rights concerns at a village in Mozambique.
Photo: S. Oftadeh

registered because Mozambican law recognizes customary ownership. However, in the face of more and more large-scale investments in land and natural resources, land registration has become critical. Without paperwork, the land is easily given away by national authorities.

In Sofala province, the LWF has been supporting residents for years. LWF staff give advice about land legislation and the registration process, and help communities register their land in order to better defend themselves against large-scale commercial farmers.

This support is now crucial to avoid the situation worsening and arriving at a point where “development has taken a step back,” as Paulo says of his village.

A first graduation ceremony at Augusta Victoria Hospital

Eleven students receive diploma in Medical Oncology Nursing

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – The first class of oncology nurses graduated from the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem on 16 June. Eleven post-graduate students received a diploma in Medical Oncology Nursing, as a result of the agreement between the hospital run by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Betanien University in Norway.

“I can make a difference now in the lives of cancer patients and their families not only because I know the treatments,” Mr. Wassim Rawashdeh, a graduate from the West Bank town of Hebron, said. “I can make a difference because I learned how to listen, how to educate and how to support those patients and their families in their difficult journeys.”

Cooperation with Norway

The graduates were part of a program that ran from January 2013 until June 2015 and was supported by the Norwegian Government and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). The Representative of Norway to the Palestinian Authority, Ambassador Hans Jacob Frydenlund, attended the ceremony and expressed his support for the graduates and the importance of the AVH oncology services..

“The graduates here today are a special group - the cream of the crop!” Rev. Mark Brown, LWF Regional Representative in Jerusalem, said in his



*An AVH graduate shares his excitement at a reception after the ceremony.
Photo: LWF Jerusalem/T. Montgomery*

address to the graduates. “You have already been successful nurses. You know how demanding the profession is, and the self-sacrifice that comes with it.”

“As nurses, you are often expected to care more about your patients than for yourselves. As nurses, you are called upon to go above and beyond the call of duty for your patients, putting aside your own needs. As oncology nurses, you have made an even deeper commitment to making a difference in someone’s life every day that you go to work,” Brown added.

Tribute to the late Dr Tawfiq Nasser

The cohort was named after the AVH Chief Executive Officer Dr. Tawfiq

Nasser, who died from cancer in May 2015. Dr Nasser shaped the hospital into the leading center for nephrology and oncology in the Palestinian territories. During the celebration, the Palestinian Oncology Society presented a plaque to Tawfiq’s family in recognition of his service.

Amin Nasser, father of the deceased director of the hospital, was among those handing out diplomas to the graduates. He did so together with Dr. Walid Nammour, who since Tawfiq Nasser’s death has been Acting CEO of the hospital.

“Sometimes we feel the tears in our eyes, but we prevent them from coming out... This is life represented in moments of sorrow and others of joy,” Nammour said.

The graduates will continue working in the hospital's oncology department. "Augusta Victoria Hospital and the Lutheran World Federation pledge to support you in your professional roles and to empower you with systems, structures and processes that will

support you in your work and enable you to be full partners in healthcare," the LWF Regional Representative said in his address to the graduates. "May God give you strength and help you to find great joy in your special calling as oncology nurses."

Located on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, Augusta Victoria Hospital serves thousands of Palestinian patients annually. It provides specialized medical services in the areas of oncology and nephrology that are unavailable in the West Bank and Gaza.

General Secretary Junge earns Honorary Doctorate for service to LWF communion

Build bridges between communities, Junge urges Canadian graduates

WATERLOO, Canada/GENEVA (LWI) – Young university graduates should build bridges for the sake of peace, justice and life in today's world, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said in accepting an honorary doctorate in Waterloo, Canada.

Speaking on 12 June at the Wilfrid Laurier University, which conferred on him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree, Junge invited young graduates "to always attempt to continue learning in the arts of bridge building."

He urged them to use their professional skills to "strive to make the connections between your own vocation and your field of expertise, and this most needed ministry of today: the building of bridges. The world

needs people like you ... to make a difference for the common good." He emphasized the futility of putting up protection walls between different communities. "They won't deliver on their intended purpose. They will eventually fall."

Junge's convocation address highlighted the LWF's commitment to put faith into action through care and advocacy for over 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons, with support from partners such as Canadian Lutheran World Relief. He attributed the highest ever recorded number of displaced people since World War II—over 50 million today—to the many protracted conflicts across the world. "Our human rights will depend on the respect for the rights of all people,

particularly for those in the most vulnerable situation. There isn't an 'us and them' on this issue, but just an 'us,'" he added.

The Laurier University recognized Junge for his outstanding contribution to LWF's work. "I receive this degree as an encouragement to continue upholding the principles, values and commitments which I have attempted to express," Junge said.

Committed service to the LWF

Congratulating the general secretary, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, noted Junge's doctorate had been earned through years of service in the Lutheran communion.

The first Latin American general secretary of the LWF, Junge assumed LWF's chief executive position in 2010 after a decade as area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean.

"Under your leadership, the LWF has deepened and expanded its commitment to neighbors throughout the world. Your commitment to holistic mission, including prophetic diakonia, has been reflected throughout the communion," Younan said.

On 11 June, Junge delivered a public lecture on "Global citizenship: the role of faith communities in the public space," at the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, an affiliate college of Laurier. The ceremony was attended by hundreds of guests including students, faculty



LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge smiles during the afternoon convocation ceremony at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, during which he received an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Photo: Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

members and other officials, among them, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada National Bishop Susan C. Johnson, who is LWF Vice-President for the North American region.

Faith should not be a stumbling block

Junge urged faith communities to persist in claiming their role as “a source of healing” when religion is being manipulated and hijacked to support violence.

“Faith is not meant to be a stumbling block among people and communities

seeking to live in dignity, justice and peace, but a building block, a resource enabling people and communities to reach that goal,” he emphasized.

The former president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile asked, “If God showed compassion to humanity through the life of Jesus Christ, how can churches stay out of the public space?”

He argued that Luther’s message around justification by faith alone, when associated with loving care for those suffering spiritually and materially, helped make his message more relevant.

Junge commended Canadian society for promoting multiculturalism. “I recognize a feature here that I have seen replicated in many churches and faith communities around the world: their ability to position themselves in the public space goes hand in hand with their loving engagement with the world and the people,” he noted.

“Faith communities are called today into the public space as bridge builders, as both local and global actors, and as strong advocates for peace and justice,” Junge concluded.

Junge’s recognition brings “joy and pride” to Chilean Lutheran church

Bishop Bruch affirms advocacy for human rights and justice

SANTIAGO, Chile/GENEVA (LWI) – The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) has welcomed with “joy and pride” the Honorary Doctor of Divinity conferred on LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

“It is a deserved award that recognizes your valuable work of sowing seeds of justice, peace and affirmation of life. From Chile, the IELCH accompanies you spiritually and wishes you blessings for your life and work as LWF general secretary,” IELCH Bishop Izani Bruch and President Karl Böhmer, said in a congratulatory letter to Junge.

On 12 June, the Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada, conferred on Junge a divinity doctorate for his outstanding contribution to LWF’s work.

In his convocation address, the LWF general secretary paid tribute to the IELCH, which he served as Pastor-President from 1996 to 2000, for its advocacy for people suffering injustices during Chile’s dictatorship. “I was blessed enough to have grown up in a church that took the suffering and pain in my country as an occasion for renewed scrutiny of God’s call to the church in its own context.”



IELCH Bishop Izani Bruch (left) sharing Holy Communion with Peruvian pastor Rev. Ofelia Dávila during the 2015 Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Conference in La Paz, Bolivia. Photo: Eugenio Albrecht

Bruch in her congratulations emphasized that the role of faith communities in the church “is to be a voice that announces the gospel of love and mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, fighting for justice and the rights of all, especially the most vulnerable in our society.”

She thanked Junge for his contribution to the local and global church, including ecumenical and interreligious work. “You have helped to raise the church’s prophetic voice of advo-

cating for human rights and justice and being a sign of hope in society,” she added.

Junge was ordained as IELCH pastor in 1989. Prior to becoming head of the church, he served in two city congregations with extremely different social and cultural backgrounds. He first joined the LWF in 2000 as area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, and has been general secretary since 2010.

LWF and Islamic Relief partner in Nepal earthquake response

Christian and Muslim humanitarian organizations provide relief for marginalized groups

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA/BIRMINGHAM (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) have joined forces to provide shelter for 12,000 of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in the 14 worst-affected areas following the earthquakes in Nepal in April.

This joint relief project will ensure that 12,000 people in five remote villages in Rasuwa district, north-east of Kathmandu will receive temporary homes before the onset of the monsoon and the following cold winter seasons.

Following a joint assessment, the project will target those most in need, including people with disabilities, the elderly, women, children, nursing mothers, and people from marginalized communities such as Dalits, religious minorities and indigenous nationalities.

Religion an “added value in emergency aid”

“In Nepal, it is absolutely vital that we target aid towards those who need it most,” said Dr Mohamed Ashmaway, CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide. “Is-

lamic Relief has vast experience in humanitarian work and has responded to disasters in the Philippines, Pakistan, and Indonesia, amongst other locations. We look forward to working with LWF, sharing expertise and serving communities in Nepal.”

The LWF has been working with marginalized communities and on disaster response in Nepal for 30 years and IRW wishes to collaborate with the LWF, accessing the LWF’s existing experience on the ground and sharing the diversity of our experience in responding to disasters across the world.

The LWF and IRW have separately provided assistance to more than 110,000 Nepalese people, and hope to reach even more by combining resources.

“This is a time when we as faith-based organizations have to say very clearly that religion is not a stumbling block, but an added value in emergency aid,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge. “In Nepal, we have a coexistence of many different beliefs. When disaster strikes, communities have to pull together to help the most vulnerable,” Junge added.

In August 2014, IRW and the LWF signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on humanitarian work, marking the first official cooperation between a global Christian communion and a worldwide Islamic non-governmental organization.

The joint Nepal earthquake emergency response will be the third cooperative project for IRW and the LWF. The two organizations have been working together with Syrian refugees and host communities in Al Mafrqa in Jordan, and plan a project in the Kenyan refugee camp Dadaab.

Help to marginalized people

IRW and the LWF said they were confident that with this new initiative, additional numbers of marginalized people affected by the quake would get relief and early-recovery support in an economic, efficient, transparent and accountable manner.

Dr Prabin Manandhar of LWF Nepal noted: “With this agreement between IRW and the LWF, we shall be in a better position to reach out to the people affected by the April 25 earthquake. The partnership will enable us to widen and deepen our relief and early-recovery programs in the affected districts and foster interfaith harmony simultaneously.”

Umair Hasan, head of mission in Nepal for IRW, said: “An estimated 8 million people have been affected by the disaster in Nepal, and IRW and LWF are keen to reach some of those people in the remotest and marginalized areas of Rasuwa District, offering support to communities who have lost family members, homes and livelihoods. By combining our expertise, we will be able to provide much needed assistance in these ‘hard to reach areas’.”



Relief efforts in Nepal. Photo: LWF/DWS Nepal

LWF Nepal staff put personal troubles aside to help earthquake victims

“This is the time when we can contribute”

KATHMANDU, Nepal/ GENEVA (LWI)—When an earthquake the magnitude of 7.9 struck Nepal on Saturday 25 May 2015, shelves at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) country office in Kathmandu tumbled over, leaving a trail of broken glass and files in disarray. The homes of four staff were completely destroyed while the houses of others were damaged. Some staff members lost contact with their loved ones and spend agonizing hours waiting for news. Yet they returned to the office to help others. Within hours of the earthquake, an emergency team was put together and made operational.

Amrit Sunwar, one of LWF Nepal's eldest staff, was at a church service when the building started moving. “I remembered the lessons from an earthquake training and told the people to stay calm and leave the building only after the quake was over,” says Sunwar. The service continued outside, on an open field. What the finance assistant did not know then was that his home in Ramechhap district, in eastern Nepal, had collapsed. Luckily his 80-year old parents were out working in the fields and escaped unscathed.

“Terrifying experience”

Kitchen helper Bishnu Maya Maharjan was busy washing clothes at her brother's house when the earthquake struck. “It was a terrifying experience. I saw how my sister-in-law fell down holding my sixteen-month-old baby but I could not get to them. Only when the shaking stopped could I get to them. They were both ok. After that all I could do was cry.”

Maharjan had a narrow escape. Her own house, a traditional Newar home in the heart of Patan, Kathmandu district, collapsed. “Because we lack water in the old house I do the laundry at my brothers' place on Saturdays. That saved us.”



Driver Anita Rana Magar faced angry crowds and landslides during a relief mission. Photo: LWF/L. de Vries

Human resource officer Nisha Kharel was visiting her home district Chitwan on that fateful day. The quake had little impact there. Because she could not get hold of her family in Kathmandu she decided to drive back the next day. “When I entered Kathmandu Valley I started to cry. So much destruction. It slowly dawned on me that this was a big disaster.” Luckily her 70-year old mother survived the quake without a scratch. However, the apartment Kharel had just bought in a high rise building was heavily damaged.

“Providing relief is one of our main jobs”

The day after the earthquake, Sunwar paid a quick visit to his parents to help them build a temporary shelter. He then organized a tent for his wife and son in Kathmandu, as none of them felt safe to sleep in the rented room on the fourth floor. The next day he was back at work. “Providing relief is one of LWF's main jobs. This is the time when we can truly contribute to the needy,” he argues.

Maharjan and her family now live in a tent along the Patan Ring Road. They have brought out the gas stove and utensils and cook out in the open. Although her brother's house only sustained a few cracks none of the relatives dare to return to the place. Despite these difficult circumstances, Bishnu Maya was at the office again few days after the earthquake, cooking midday meals for up to 100 people. Her workload has doubled with the influx of hundreds of volunteers, new staff and visitors. But she does not mind. “Being here with my friends helps me to relax,” she says.

Kharel and her mother moved in with distant relatives and slept on the floor with 40 to 50 other people for a week. She was too scared to enter her apartment to retrieve her clothes. Yet, she sprang into action and helped LWF Nepal hire 18 new staff and recruit hundreds of volunteers. “For the first time in my life I felt I knew what it means to be a refugee,” she says.

Dangerous relief work

Although they are happy to be helping others, the staff are unable to forget their

worries completely. Sunwar is concerned about his elderly parents. “Every morning I ask myself: How did they spend the night? What do they eat today?” he says. Kitchen helper Bishnu Maya calls her husband three times a day to check on the baby.

Kharel, a single parent, nowadays stays with her sister and has collected some essentials from her apartment. “Half of the time I still can’t believe what has happened. My mother bought this expensive flat for me, which now is basically uninhabitable. A huge investment has gone. However, I learn from the Bible that there are new beginnings. We hope against hope.”

The relief work is not without danger. Anita Rana Magar, a driver with LWF Nepal, experienced this first hand during a recent trip to Sindhupalchowk district, one of the most affected districts east of Kathmandu. The convoy with relief goods was stopped by an angry mob who wanted to loot the material. “They threatened to overthrow the car and attack us,” recounts Magar. She quickly removed her

LWF jacket and retorted: “These goods are for our friends in the next village. You cannot confiscate private goods.” The villagers retreated and the team stayed the night at a secure army camp.

The next day Magar faced an even greater challenge. During a strong aftershock rocks started tumbling down from the hills above the camp. “I was very scared. ‘We are going to die’ I shouted. The army captain comforted me and said, ‘You will not die today.’” The landslides caved in on the army camp on both sides. There was no other choice but to leave the car behind and walk back to safety. During the long trek Magar injured her foot. She cried when the team reached the road head, where another LWF car was waiting for them.

“Every other job is easy”

Magar’s husband works abroad in Malaysia, which is why the young driver has to manage things on her own. But by now she has regained her confidence. “After

what happened to me in Sindhupalchowk I feel every other job is easy. Nothing really compares to that dreadful experience.”

The disaster has created a strong bond among the LWF Nepal team. “We are more than family now,” says one of the team members.

Thanks to the dedication of the LWF Nepal team, more than 3,000 families were provided with life-saving relief in the week after the earthquake. To date, the LWF has distributed relief goods to 13,718 households in 27 towns and villages. LWF is assisting in six districts, namely Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Sindhupalchowk, Rasuwa and Dolakha.

ACT Alliance agencies – of which the LWF is a member – that work together as the ACT Nepal forum have provided emergency shelter kits, hygiene items, psychosocial counseling, food and non-food items to 50,468 households in nine districts in the Kathmandu valley and north-eastern Nepal.

(Contribution by Lucia de Vries, LWF Nepal)

Dutch minister Ploumen visits LWF Nepal’s relief work

“Deeply impressed with resilience of Nepalese people”

KATHMANU, Nepal/ GENEVA (LWI) – There was an awkward moment when Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Lillianne Ploumen visited the relief work of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal in Indrayani village. The village in Lalitpur district was badly hit during the April 25 earthquake and lies mostly in rubble. LWF Nepal staff wondered whether the Minister would dare to cross the dusty mounds of broken bricks. She did, and during her one hour visit talked to many community members.

Minister Ploumen said she was impressed with the organized way in which the relief took place, and the attitude of the Nepalese people. “I leave the country with mixed feelings,” she

said. “On the one hand I feel sad about the destruction I saw. On the other

hand I am deeply impressed with the resilience of the Nepalese people, the



Dutch foreign trade and development cooperation minister Lillianne Ploumen visits the relief work of the Lutheran World Federation Nepal in Indrayani village. Credit: LWF Nepal

way communities have come together to deal with the disaster.”

Dalit and Newar communities

On behalf of ACT Alliance members, LWF Nepal within a week after the quake provided basic food items and emergency shelter to the families of In-drayani. During the follow up visit with the minister, inhabitants were given hygiene kits, utensils and latrines. Women and children receive psycho-social counseling.

“The community in the village consists mostly of two groups: Newars and Dalits, or artisans,” LWF Nepal’s country representative Dr Prabin Manandhar explained in his briefing to the minister. Relief is being offered to both communities, and the team has committed to also providing livelihood support.

The Dutch minister sat down with students in their class room while they received psycho-social counselling, using games and drawings. She also talked to different female community members, and said she was most touched by a displaced mother telling her she and

her family had no place to go back to. “Having lost everything and not knowing where to return to, that must be terrible,” the Minister recounted.

The Dutch government has provided 10 million euros to Nepal for immediate relief after the earthquake. A joint fundraiser through Giro 555 raised another 20 million, which will be channeled through Dutch NGOs working in Nepal, including Act Alliance partner ICCO. LWF Nepal and ICCO will work jointly on relief and rehabilitation programs in one of the worst affected districts.

Repeat journey for Burundian refugee who fled militia

Family sheltering in LWF-supported camp in Tanzania

BUJUMBURA, Burundi/Geneva (LWI) – Ngendakumana Désiré is 26 years old and for the second time in his life, is a Burundian refugee in Tanzania.

The first time, he explains, was immediately after President Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated in 1993. Désiré was very young then but his family deemed it better to seek refuge in neighboring Tanzania than attempt to live out the atrocities that would follow. They were right. They remained refugees in Tanzania for 12 years, as a long war continued to decimate thousands of their countrymen.

Finally, when the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement was signed in 2000, Désiré and his family believed they were safe and returned home a few years later.

By then a young man, Désiré was as shocked as his parents to find their plot of land in Kabunga, in the southern-most province of Burundi, had been occupied. Despite their attempts to regain their land through the authorities, they failed and were left homeless in their own country. The family was then housed by friends in a compound for the years that followed. Désiré started a business as a market trader and started a family in 2013.



Today, Désiré, his wife Geneviève and their nine-month-old daughter, Félicité, share a tent with another family in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania, just south of the border with Burundi and inland from Lake Tanganyika. It is here that the Lutheran World Federation provides refugee families with household goods, clothes, mosquito nets and basic water, sanitation and hygiene amenities.

Désiré explains that in the wake of the election period this February, the

governing party’s youth militia, Imbonerakure, told him to enlist with them or risk the consequences of not doing so. The Imbonerakure had been known to carry out atrocities to intimidate youth into joining them.

Désiré thought that remaining neutral would be best for him and his young family but was proven wrong when one night in April, he was taken and forced to join the group or be killed on the spot. Désiré had no choice but to feign acceptance and request permission to

say goodbye to his family as his wife did not know where he was. He seized that chance to flee with his wife and daughter, and never looked back.

On 4 May, Désiré and his family boarded a ferry for Tanzania to again become refugees. They arrived at port of Kagunga three hours later where they found thousands of other people who,

just like them, had decided to flee the looming threat of the Imbonerakure.

Two days later, they were taken to the Tanzania port town, Kigoma, identified, registered and immediately taken to Nyarugusu, where they were placed in a temporary reception center, the local primary school. On May 26, they were finally taken to their shared

tent in Zone 8 where they have been living since.

Désiré says that if given the chance, he would like to either farm the land or get the means to start a business and provide for his family. He reports that unfortunately he feels more certain about a future in Tanzania than his hostile, native Burundi.

Chad: Agricultural support for sustainability

Animals, plows and vaccination campaigns

DOSSEYE, Chad /GENEVA (LWI) – “It was about time the rain came,” Genio Maidoum says. Together with three younger brothers, the 16-year-old plows the family fields in Dosseye camp, Southern Chad. They have one acre, the harvest is to complement the distributed food ration for a family of nine.

Genio is a refugee from the Central African Republic (CAR) in Dosseye camp, Chad. His family is one of nearly 7,000 who have received two oxen, a yoke and a plow from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to help them farm the land which they have been allocated temporarily. As the rainy season has started in Chad, refugees in Dosseye camp have started planting.

“It will take two days to plow all our land,” Genio says. He is pushing the green plow into the soil, while two of

his younger brothers lead the oxen. A third trails behind with a bowl full of beans. Every two steps he stretches out his arm and lets one of them fall into the freshly turned soil. “The cows are afraid of big people,” Genio says.

Harvest doubled

It is the second planting season they have mastered with a plow and animals, and Genio is full of praise. “Before, we just threw the seeds on top. Now we embed them into the soil, and our harvest has nearly doubled,” he says. “Last year, we harvested almost 18 bags full of grain, normally we would have less than ten bags.”

Since the rain started a few days ago, plowing and planting can be seen everywhere in Southern Chad. For

most of the farmer’s it’s the second year they are working with what in technical terms is called an “Animal traction unit” – two cattle, yoke and plow to till the soil. “It’s not just about the harvest, it’s about the labour,” Adina Rudovil (28) says.

“Before, it would take me weeks to break the ground. I just had my hands and a hoe, every evening I would come home utterly exhausted. Now – this is fun. Two days and the work is done.” He is accompanied by two children who are leading the cows. “They are the neighbor’s kids,” he says. “Whenever the children see someone working with the plow, they want to come and play with the cows.”

A few kilometers from where he works the land, cattle are led into a large corral. Together with the planting season, the LWF has started the first vaccination campaign of the year. Veterinarians and assistants in white lab coats with the LWF logo fill syringes and apply the shots to the animals which have been secured in a narrow cage.

Protect the children

“We vaccinate cattle, goats, dogs and poultry,” says Jaques Allatchi Saralam, LWF assistant for livestock projects. Up to four campaigns, depending on the animal, are carried out each year. While dogs receive four shots against rabies, LWF inoculates cattle two times a year against the most common



CAR refugees plow their field with the animals and plow provided by LWF in Southern Chad.
Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

pests. “It used to cost a lot of money and we had to walk a long distance,” Alasra Jean Oscar says. Since the LWF started their campaigns, it’s a short way for the CAR refugee to vaccinate the chicken, goats and cattle he has accumulated since he arrived in 2008.

It’s a necessary precaution, not only to build additional food sources and sustainability for the refugees. There are about 1,000 dogs in Gore. Refugees keep the animals for hunting and to protect their livestock. “People get bitten, even the masters, and

sometimes also the children,” Alice Titina says. She still needs the dogs to protect her goats from thieves. “But now, even if they bite, people won’t get sick. It’s a relief.”

Psychosocial support in Chad for people with mental problems

“I feel more respected now”

GORE, Chad/GENEVA (LWI) – The log is still lying in the yard of her home in Maro village, Chad. It’s a big white chunk of wood, heavy to lift and polished from a person touching it and sitting on it all day. The log was used to chain Améline (not her real name) for almost two years. The 35-year-old woman has severe mental health problems due to a brain infection after she contracted meningitis two years ago. Only when a case worker of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) found her, did things take a turn for the better.

“There are nine cases in this village alone,” Françoise Milamem, LWF case worker, says. She found Améline and four other people with severe mental problems, all of them living under terrible inhuman conditions. They have epilepsy, psychoses, some multiple personality disorder or other health problems. Often, their condition is worsened by non-acceptance in their communities and the lack of mental health specialists.

Exhausted relatives, neglected patients

People in the traditional community of Maro in Southern Chad host more than 50,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR). There are only a few resources to deal with mental and psychological problems. LWF case worker Milamem has documented the conditions in which she found mentally ill people: Naked, neglected, tied up and in bad health conditions.



*Treatment and care enabled Améline to move freely and take care of her children again.
Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner*

“I had a prescription for the hospital, but she refused to go,” Améline’s husband Adumi says. “So I went to a traditional doctor.” The tribal method of healing was above all costly: Adumi sold land and a cow to pay for his wife’s treatment. “We had to pay for a goat and traditionally sacrifice it, but it did not help,” he says. On top of everything else, the family has a big debt.

For the mentally ill and their relatives, the LWF first aid psycho-social support usually comes at a time when people are desperate. Sometimes the sick have already been abandoned by their families and spouses.

“She would become aggressive to me, beat her children, and destroy things,” Françoise recalls Améline’s initial state. “In other moments, she was mentally absent, in her own world.”

As Améline’s parents refused to take responsibility, her husband Adumi was soon left alone in dealing with their six little children and an illness which he did not understand. When Améline set the house on fire, and destroyed all the family’s belongings including birth certificates and other papers, he decided to chain her to the log. “I thank God that LWF came in to help us,” he says.

Help beyond the medical treatment

LWF does not provide medical services, but its support is essential in identifying cases and convincing those affected to seek professional help. Usually, people are found through community house visits. Once a

week, LWF also provides counseling at a listening center in Maro. “We have about four cases each time,” LWF staff Milamem says. The stories differ between cases of mental illness, but also domestic violence, abuse and female genital mutilation.

After she had convinced Améline to see a doctor and take the prescribed drugs, Milamem continued to monitor the family’s situation through regular visits and face to face sessions at the listening center. Often, the medical

treatment is just part of a long process of improving the domestic situation.

For Améline’s family, the priority is now to pay their debts. The family has been registered for LWF livelihood support. Adumi will receive a small cash grant to open a business. “Améline can make little cakes and I will smoke fish, which we will take to the market to sell,” he says. He also cleared a field behind the house and plans to plant peanuts.

Still, Améline often has an absent look on her face. “I feel a little better,”

she says quietly. Medication makes her tired, but she prepares food and takes care of the little children. “I will not abandon her, she is the mother of my children,” Adumi says. He still does not feel comfortable leaving her alone, but as Améline is receiving treatment, neighbors come in to help.

“I feel more respected now,” Adumi says. “People greet us when they see Améline in the village. I am really happy for all that support.”

Chad: Spice of life in the refugee camp

LWF supports refugees with small loans to generate income

GORE, Chad/GENEVA (LWI) – Her assortment includes salt, onions, Maggi flavour cubes, little yellow peppers and cooking oil. Pointy plastic bags with the yellow liquid are shining in the afternoon sun. Once in a while, a customer comes to buy one of the little spice bags at Cecile Endamag’s market stand in Gondje refugee settlement, Chad. “People here miss the spices,” she says. “We receive cereals and basic food but nothing to make it taste good. Spices sell the best.”

Endamag is a refugee from the Central African Republic (CAR), whose border is only 60km from the settlement. Back home, she had a small

food shop and her own warehouse with a good stock of supplies. “When the war started, we went to hide in the bush,” she recalls. “After a while, that became too dangerous and exhausting, so we fled.”

Making life a little better

Endamag lost her husband in the war. She arrived in Chad in 2008. A year ago, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) helped her open the business with a cash grant. “I do not earn much but the small money already makes life here a bit better,” she says. “I now have the means to buy school supplies

and clothes for my children, and some additional food.”

Like her, 600 CAR refugees and vulnerable people living in the host community have received cash grants to open a business. “We encourage them to form groups,” says Marie-Grace Longaye, LWF supervisor for income-generating activities in Gore. “This way, refugees form communities organize themselves and ideally also hold each other responsible for paying back the loan.”

The situation of Endamag’s family is what humanitarian agencies call a protracted refugee situation. Because of recurring conflict in their home country, people are forced to live abroad for years, sometimes decades. They build semi-permanent houses of clay with thatched roofs, farm a little piece of land allocated to them by the host country, and wait for peace and stability in their place of origin.

Some of the CAR refugees arrived way back in 2003—their children know only the refugee settlement. The latest group arrived in 2014, when Anti-Balaka militia staged a coup against the Muslim president of CAR and started a war against the Muslim population. Many of them are Chad migrant workers in CAR. Although considered “returnees”, they have lost their homes and come to a country foreign to them.



Cecile Endamag (far right) with her nephew and neighbor at the market stand.
Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

A home away from home

Helping people create a business, therefore, is much more than a means to supply them with additional money. “It gives them purpose again,” Longaye says. “They have seen terrible things and lost family members. Many women lost their husbands. Helping them to take life into their own hands again is also a way to help them heal.”

Small loan groups are meant to provide occupation, stability and a new community. This is most visible in the “Groupement Garage”. As the name suggests, the group used their loan to open a business in car repairs, painting, welding and carrying out general metal work. “We were the first to repair

a car in the region,” says Amidou, the group’s president. “We now receive requests from people in nearby host communities who wish to join us.”

The group is integrating young and old, making use of a wide variety of talents. The youngest apprentice in training is Abulai Amadou, a 15-year-old boy with a hearing disability. “His mother brought him,” president Amidou explains. “Because of his hearing problem, he cannot go to school, so she asked us to train him.” The oldest group member is Mamadou Abu, 53, the treasurer and unofficial teacher of the group. “We wanted someone old and wise to handle the money. We also come to him for advice and to train the

young ones,” Amidou says. “He used to train apprentices in CAR.”

“This group gave me the opportunity to learn something,” Amadou Soufa, 22, says. When he arrived, he was still a teenager, with no hope of further education. Group members trained him in various aspects of car repair and metal work. Now he plans to one day open his own business.

“It is important to train the young people,” Amidou says. “The situation is psychologically difficult. We have been here since February. After all we have seen, there is no hope of going back anytime soon. We did not just want to sit around and do nothing.”

Liturgy for LWF Sunday 2015

The LWF has published an order of worship which is available for use during the 2015 Reformation Sunday period. The LWF Sunday liturgy makes reference to the topic, “Human beings – not for sale,” one of the sub-themes chosen by the LWF for the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017.

The LWF invites churches and congregations to make use of the liturgy for LWF Sunday services held on or around Reformation Day—31 October, either as a whole or by using its individual elements.

A printable version of the full liturgy can be downloaded at www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-sunday-2015-liturgy. It will also appear in the online edition of *LWI* No. 07/2015, to be published in early August.

The overarching theme “Liberated by God’s Grace,” will guide LWF’s focus on both the Reformation anniversary and the Twelve Assembly in 2017. Booklets on the theme and its three sub-themes Salvation, Creation—and Human beings—not for sale are now available (in English) on the LWF website.

LWF Colombia held up as example of high quality aid

The work of the Lutheran World Federation in Colombia has been held up as a model of how a new humanitarian standard should be applied.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability is a series of nine commitments created by a consortium of aid organizations to improve the quality of the assistance that aid agencies provide. The standard can also be used to ensure humanitarian organizations are accountable to people recovering from crisis. The LWF’s Department for World Service has adopted the standard.

By knowing what activities humanitarian organisations will carry out, people affected by disaster can hold those organizations to account and know that resources are being used as expected.

This short documentary features the work of LWF staff from in the department of Arauca, Colombia. By ensuring accountability, communities with which the LWF work no longer rely on humanitarian assistance. The film was shown at the launch of the standard in Bogota last month.

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