

# Lutheran World Information

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LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge tells participants at the Global Perspectives on the Reformation conference: uphold the importance of freedom as a key insight of Lutheran Reformation. Photo: LWF/I. Benesch

## A theology that addresses exclusion amidst merciless competition

### LWF General Secretary keynote presentation on global perspectives on the Reformation

**WINDHOEK, Namibia/GENEVA (LWI)** –The global nature of Lutheran Reformation calls for theological articulation that helps churches to challenge contemporary issues in a world that is increasingly marked by merciless competition, struggles for survival and exclusion. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge made this appeal to theologians from around the world meeting in the Namibian capital.

A world that never hears of grace must of necessity be graceless and will only seek salvation in merciless competition, he said. “Very few can survive such merciless competition,” he stated in his opening keynote presentation at

the 28 October-1 November global LWF gathering. It focused on how theological insights relate to politics and economics as churches prepare to mark 500 years of the Reformation in 2017.

Junge recalled that Martin Luther’s theological insight of justification by faith alone had been developed through rigorous theological research. Once his insight connected with a pastoral and diaconal concern for people it became projected into the public space. “Luther saw people, some of them terribly poor and marginalized, offering their little coins for a bit of peace in their hearts –



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at least for the life after life, given that their current life was just a torment and a nightmare with no end in sight.”

The general secretary challenged the conference participants to uphold the importance of freedom as a key insight of Lutheran Reformation. “Churches in the Reformation tradition are churches of grace *and* freedom, both at the same time! Anyone in this tradition who talks of justification by God’s faith alone will constantly and in the same breath want to talk of freedom,” he noted.

He underlined that freedom in the theological tradition of Lutheran Reformation is never autistic or autonomous, but accountable and responsible. “Freedom, as given by God, finds its full expression in entering into – and protecting – relationships.” According to Luther’s understanding, freedom will find its boundaries in the neighbor, particularly where the neighbor suffers.

Referring to the unprecedented challenge of climate change, he stressed that the current ecological devastation is an expression of a wrong understanding of freedom. “This makes our current generation think” that it got the freedom to use the resources of future generations, or of some countries and societies to use up the resources which belong to all.

“What Lutheran theology in the 16<sup>th</sup> century could not yet see, but needs to be articulated more fully today in the spirit of an ongoing Reformation, is the insight that human freedom, as given by God, will direct its relational commitment not only to the suffering neighbor but also to God’s groaning creation,” Junge added.

### Faith that liberates

The conference began with an opening worship at which Namibian Bishop emeritus Dr Zephania Kameeta preached. In his sermon, the retired bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in the Republic of Namibia, who is also the Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, emphasized that faith that does not make things new and liberate other people is not faith. He said the diaconal calling of the church and mutual encouragement in the journey of faith must be an integral part of commemorating the Lutheran Reformation.

The conference continued to look at dimensions of the law and the gospel, human dignity, gender justice and theological education among others, under the theme “Global Perspectives on the Reformation – Interactions between Theology, Politics and Economics.”

The opening on 28 October was held at the Paulinum United Lutheran Theological Seminary which is run by the three Lutheran churches in Namibia. The churches will jointly host the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF in 2017 and the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation celebration.

## Social transformation through concrete and contextual theology

### Message from LWF conference in Windhoek

**NAMIBIA, Windhoek/GENEVA (LWI)** – Theology that seeks to contribute to social transformation must relate to the contexts in which it is applied, offer critical and creative approaches and address concrete issues.

Theologians from Lutheran and other Christian traditions identified the four features—contextual, creative, critical and concrete—as crucial approaches as The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) prepares to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

In a Reformation Day message on 31 October, the 70 scholars urged the LWF to build up the capacity of its member churches to bring politics, economics and theology together to transform society according to God’s vision of abundant life for all.

Their message stated, “Sensitivity to context reveals the need for critical reflection on one’s own universalizing assumptions and on the context. Critical reflection discloses that some dynamic power and privilege need to be overthrown, which invites creativity which in turn generates concrete actions.”

The contextual element of theology involves different ways of hearing God’s word, relating to God’s presence and reflecting on and addressing the world’s diverse needs. It includes various ways of engaging with other faiths, the theologians added.

The scholars emphasized that the critical aspect of theology involves questioning certainties, challenging centers of power that shut down public space or exclude people. Critical

theology acknowledges its own limits, biases and self-interests, they said.

Creative theology is marked by the courage to think anew, offering enhanced understanding of God’s will, nurturing dynamic liturgical and biblical resources. It offers practical solutions and alternatives to bring theology, politics and economics together to transform society.

Participants agreed that for theology to be concrete, it must speak and act against economic, gender and climate injustice; reform structures, policies and practices that support injustice; and equip pastors and laity to engage in the political and economic realms.

“Transformative theology requires and enables looking with new eyes,





Participants at LWF's conference, "Global Perspectives on the Reformation" in Windhoek, Namibia.  
Photo: LWF/I. Benesch

ing relationships with the communion enable us to see reality through others' eyes," they said.

"We are therefore profoundly grateful for the differences among us," concluded the theologians representing churches and theological institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin America. "This is precisely how a communion works and what communion is," they added.

The conference's message and contributions from some other authors are available at [www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/message\\_from\\_the\\_conference\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/message_from_the_conference_final_0.pdf)

truth-telling about the realities that we face. Seeing with new eyes is made possible by the communion and the differences within it; deep and trust-

## Joint ecumenical witness towards inclusion and inter-dependence

### Junge's perspective on "From Conflict to Communion" in Scherer Lecture at Chicago

**CHICAGO, USA/GENEVA (LWI)** – As Lutherans and Roman Catholics jointly tell the Reformation story, they offer a powerful witness to a fragmented world, said Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Speaking at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, in the United States, Junge said reflecting together on the history of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation of the Church in the publication *From Conflict to Communion* is helping transform Lutheran-Catholic relationships towards joint witness in the world.

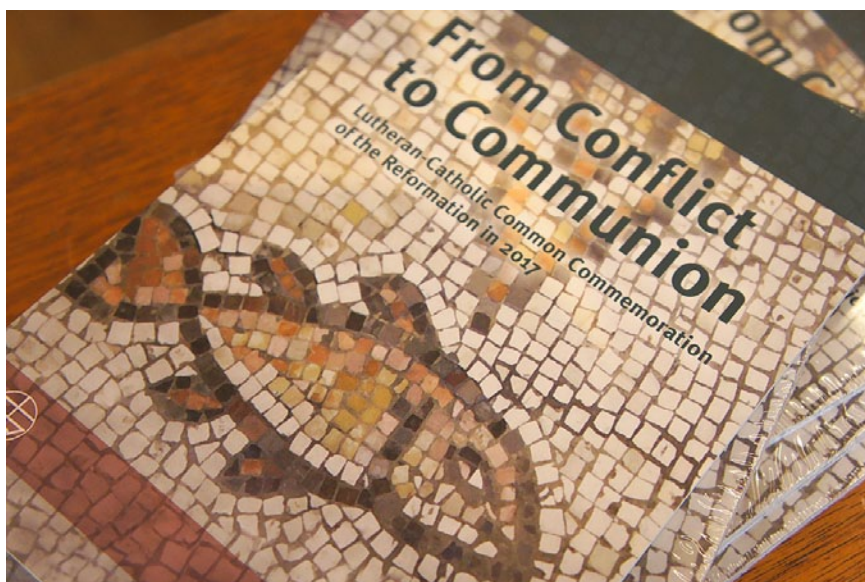
Published in 2013 by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, the publication is the first attempt by Lutherans and Catholics to describe jointly the history of the Reformation, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which will be marked in 2017.

While globalization appears to be driving people and communities apart, people around the world have a deep longing for a common humanity

marked by inclusion and inter-dependence, he said.

"Is it too presumptuous to think that the strong message of *From Conflict to Communion* might speak to the longing of these people?" Junge asked during his 2015 Scherer Lecture at the seminary on 13 October.

"Is it overly optimistic to think that the commitment of Catholics and Lutherans intentionally to leave conflict behind in order to continue journeying into deeper relations of communion might offer powerful vision, hope and encouragement to people otherwise witnessing breakdowns and violence?"



In his address, “From Conflict to Communion – a Prophetic Witness in a Fragmented World,” Junge emphasized that the 2017 anniversary commemoration will not be a triumphalistic celebration. “An anniversary commemoration without a deep lamentation over ruptures in the body of Christ, in communities and families, and without the confession of a blind alignment to political interests, would be a historic mistake,” he added.

Explaining the process by which Lutherans and Roman Catholics will receive the publication, Junge noted that the LWF and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian

Unity will hold a joint ecumenical event on 31 October 2016 in Lund, Sweden, where the LWF was founded.

A common prayer is envisaged, which will incorporate the gifts of the Reformation and lamentation over the ruptures. The two bodies will “commit to the common witness to a wounded and fragmented world.” The general secretary said he hopes Lutheran congregations will use this resource with their Catholic neighbors.

He said it is important to recognize the expectation of many baptized Catholics and Lutherans; “those faithfully attending worship, serving the poor and speaking out for justice,” that the unity of

the church can ultimately be expressed in the sharing of Holy Communion.

“Our message of turning the page and moving from conflict to opening the chapter of deeper communion, everything that we offer as joint witness in our broken world, will inevitably have to be found there where it is expressed in the deepest and most intimate ways: at the table of the Lord,” he added.

He described the common responsibility of making the report accessible and relevant as “the daring, prophetic step of letting conflict go, so that our hands, minds and hearts are empty enough to receive communion as God’s gift.”

## Lutherans and Catholics share concern for nurturing families

### South African Bishop Phaswana brings LWF greetings to Vatican Synod of Bishops

**VATICAN/GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) says the joy of 50 years of joint Catholic-Lutheran dialogue and witness should make the two Christian traditions sensitive to how their theological discussions address the needs of families.

Speaking at the 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church in Rome, Bishop (Emeritus) Dr Ndanganeni Petrus Phaswana of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa said churches should support families in their daily challenges.

Phaswana represented the LWF, invited by the Vatican to its synod, as a fraternal delegate. The 4-25 October gathering discussed “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World.”

Bringing LWF greetings to the synod, he spoke about “ecumenical families where members of the same family are not able to break the bread and share the wine, and hence be nurtured in shared communion in Christ.” Being in relationship and communion is the deepest meaning of family, thus the need for church support, he added.



*Delivering LWF greetings to the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, South African Bishop emeritus Dr Ndanganeni Petrus Phaswana reminded churches of their calling to nurture communities where family relationships can be healed and strengthened. File Photo: LWF/Helen Putsman*

“Both Catholics and Lutherans pray that families can live out their faith in communion with each other and with their neighbors, to witness together and to nurture their witness and togetherness through a shared spiritual life,” Phaswana said.

While Lutherans and Catholics mark 50 years of dialogue in 2017 with the shared conviction that there is more that

unites than divides them, Phaswana said he hoped this intention can become a real sign of hope for families yearning to experience and witness communion in today’s fragmented world.

Churches are called to overcome divisions and grow into communities where relationships can be healed and strengthened, added the South African bishop, who is a member of the LWF Council.



Phaswana said the fruits of decades of dialogue, found in the publication *From Conflict to Communion*,

which jointly tells the story of the Ref-ormation, shows the traditions “have moved from a situation of conflict to

an ever-growing commitment to communion.”

## UN praise for faith-based humanitarian response

### Faith organizations at forefront of emergency operations

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Faith-based organizations show “remarkable signs of leadership” in refugee relief efforts worldwide, a senior official of the United Nations refugee agency has said.

Speaking at a side event to the 66<sup>th</sup> session of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee meeting, the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Türk, not only applauded the work of faith-based organizations in light of record refugee numbers in the world today but called for greater cooperation between them.

He highlighted *Welcoming the Stranger*, a document produced by faith organizations, including The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), affirming faith leaders’ commitment to refugees and stateless people.

Türk said he personally gave out copies of the document to UNHCR staff when he travelled, in a bid to encourage them to work closely with faith organizations.

The push for closer working relations between faith-based organizations stemmed from a 2012 High Commissioner’s dialogue. “When it comes to faith and what it means in humanitarian settings, we had a watershed moment in 2012, which focused on the interlinkages between faith and community work and protection,” Türk said.

“If there was one dialogue that generated most follow-up it was this one. What we thought would not have been possible has become mainstream.”

Faith-based organizations are often at the forefront of efforts to protect refugees and first in the line of aid delivery. In the Central African Republic and in Myanmar, it was clear the role of faith leaders showed an alternative to the divisive elements, Türk said.



IRW CEO Dr Mohamed Ashmawey Mohamed (second from left) shakes hands with Nan Buzard, ICVA Executive Director as the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk, left, and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge look on during the October 8 side event at the UN. Türk praised the humanitarian work of faith-based organizations and urged more cooperation. Photo: LWF/S.Cox

### LWF and IRW – common vocation to serve refugees

The LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide work together on hygiene and peace-building projects in Jordan and earthquake relief in Nepal. The directors of both agencies were panelists at the side event, “People of faith for people in need.”

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge said that as well as *Welcoming the Stranger*, a memorandum of understanding between the LWF and IRW was the second powerful outcome of the 2012 dialogue. It cemented their relationship. “This was an intentional engagement in view of our common vocation to serve refugees and internally displaced people.”

In Jordan, both organizations made a point of being seen as working closely and talking about peace building.

“Faith is all about pulling together instead of being derailed by extraneous pressure. We want to counter that message and say it is possible to work

together and there is an alternative,” Junge added.

Faith-based organizations have a key role to create space in the hearts, minds and souls of people so that their respective societies create space to protect refugees. He reminded nations that beyond the moral duty to protect was also a legal obligation. States have signed the Refugee Convention 1951 which sets out the duty to protect.

Islamic Relief Worldwide CEO Dr Mohamed Ashmawey said that unfortunately, abuse of faith occurred and had done so throughout history. “We don’t hire angels, we hire human beings. Some people use faith the wrong way. Faith should be uniting us, not dividing us. If we can do something about it, with the help and blessing of the UN, we can really do something to save this world for our children.”

Nan Buzard, Executive Director of the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), highlighted the power

of faith organizations in refugee crises. This year's Sergio Vieira de Mello prize for humanitarian action went to a group of faith leaders in the Central African Republic for their work to create dialogue and protect communities. She also cited

the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, in which faith leaders taught skeptical communities that the disease was real, urging people to take precautions against it.

Türk said the panel was proof of what co-operation could bring. "When

the debate around asylum gets too much, this is a time for response, in particular from faith leaders and organizations who have an outreach that is very different from the one we [UNHCR] have."

## Malaysian Lutherans make single largest donation to overseas aid work

### Church offers USD 17,000 to Nepal earthquake survivors

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Lutherans in Malaysia have opened their hearts to the people of Nepal with a significant cash donation for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) relief work.

The church gave just over USD 17,000 to help re-build Nepal, hit by a 7.8 earthquake on 25 April. It is the single largest amount the Malaysian church has donated to overseas disaster relief work.

In October, Bishop Aaron Chuan Ching Yap of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia wrote to pastors and congregations and used social media to dedicate a Sunday for special offering towards the appeal.

For believers, everyone is a brother and sister in Christ, he wrote. "We will try to support in whatever small way we can. Relief work is a common witness that benefits believers and non-believers, regardless of faith or skin color."

Malaysians have a particular concern for the people of Nepal. The church has ministry and work among the many Nepali migrant workers in the country. "God has brought this mission work right in front of our door step," Yap said.

The church has previously supported disaster relief work through the Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church, as well as emergency response in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan two years ago, as well as in Myanmar and Sumatra (Indonesia).

Besides proclaiming the gospel, the church pursues local mission in Malaysia among indigenous Malay (*orang asli*), as well as migrant workers from China, Myanmar and Nepal. It carries out work and ministry in orphanages, rest homes for the elderly, mobile health clinics and pre-schools.

### Global solidarity from Lutheran churches

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge described the donation as significant. "It conveys once more that our being together as a communion of churches blurs the lines and borders between those having and not having."

He said "This donation is an expression of this mutuality which we see ahead of us. We rejoice every time it becomes a reality among us."

The LWF sees more enthusiasm and interest by churches globally to join its diaconal—or service—efforts. Assistance is no longer restricted to churches from the global North. Churches from developing countries increasingly support relief work of fellow churches or the LWF in the global South.

The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil offered a Sunday collection for the LWF-run Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem; African churches pulled together to support sister churches affected by the Ebola outbreak in West Africa; and the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa supported the LWF program to alleviate drought in Namibia.

The identity of the LWF as a global communion of churches is manifested through its call to serve the suffering neighbour. "Our togetherness is not an end in itself. Our togetherness is for the sake of the world," Junge said.

Junge said he was pleased the LWF offered a channel for the church in Malaysia to express its diaconal concern for the people of Nepal. He



After the earthquake in Nepal, local villager searches for cooking utensils in the debris. Photo: LWF/C.Kaestner

was grateful for the generosity and was encouraged that the vision of being a communion of churches that lives and works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world has found another “beautiful expression.”

Prayers from churches were still needed, he said, remembering both the people in Nepal and those working among them. He encourages churches to keep supporting each other financially.

The local LWF team was one of the first to respond to the earthquake. The LWF program in Nepal is appealing for just over USD 6 million for emergency and permanent shelter materials, water and sanitation facilities, psycho-social support, food and other relief goods.

This diaconal expression—the Christian perspective of social work and disaster response—is one of many expressions of solidarity in Asia during

crises. During the Tsunami in Japan in 2011, many churches in the region contributed, with the largest donation of USD 30,000 coming from Lutheran Church in Singapore. Several other churches gave between USD 10,000 and USD 15,000. Following typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November 2014, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church gave USD 30,000.

## LWF joins faith communities’ call for ambitious Paris outcome

### Climate change is a threat to life

**BONN, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)** – As negotiators gathered in Bonn to work on a draft text for the December 2015 United Nations climate conference in Paris, a coalition of more than 150 global faith and spiritual leaders urged political leaders to commit towards “a fair, ambitious and binding global deal” that safeguards the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations.

The faith leaders from 50 countries presented a “Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders” on 20 October to Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. “For the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations” the COP21 climate conference offers a critical opportunity to reach “a global and comprehensive agreement on climate justice and climate protec-

tion” supported by all world nations, they said.

Coordinated by ACT Alliance, CIDSE, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Religions for Peace, and the World Council of Churches, the common statement was handed over to Figueres by Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, Director of Bread for the World, Germany, and Karin Kortmann, Vice-President of the Central Committee of German Catholics. Other faith representatives at the event included Martin Kopp, LWF advocacy officer for climate justice.

“We urge governments to commit to building climate resilience, phasing out fossil energies and reaching zero emissions by midcentury. We call for a robust mechanism to review and ratchet up ambitions, transparency and accountability rules applicable to

all, and the provision of finance and support to poor and vulnerable countries,” Füllkrug-Weitzel said.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge and several Lutheran church leaders are among the faith leaders who have signed the statement, together with representatives of other church organizations as well as leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh communities.

The statement builds up on growing advocacy by faith groups over the past 12 months, such as the Pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the declaration of the New York Interfaith Summit, the Lambeth Declaration, and the Islamic declaration on climate change.

“We join our voice to the voices of other faith communities and organizations to jointly demand decisive steps to address climate change,” Junge added.

On 16 October, the general secretary wrote to the LWF member churches urging them to increase their advocacy on climate justice with their governments in the buildup to the Paris summit, as “climate change is a matter of urgency and a matter of justice.” He reminded them that the LWF has for many years highlighted that climate change is a critical intergenerational issue, and warned that ecological degradation particularly hits the poorest communities.



Joint faith and spiritual leaders present statement to Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Photo: Sean Hawkey



“Led by LWF youth, the LWF has been actively engaging in action and advocacy to address the life-threat-

ening challenge of climate change. Because the LWF wants to be part of the solution, in June this year, it took

the decision to not invest in fossil fuels,” Junge added.

## Human rights support to change people’s lives

### Delegation from Myanmar presents UPR parallel report

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Safeguarding the human rights of disadvantaged groups in Myanmar and Nepal is a primary concern of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The LWF has submitted reports on the human rights situation in both Nepal and Myanmar to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the Universal Periodical Review (UPR) of those two countries.

The UPR reviews the human rights situation on the ground of each member states every four-and-a-half years. Non-governmental organizations are invited to submit firsthand reports, so-called parallel reports.

The reports are based on consultations LWF staff carried out with civilians and civil society organizations with which they work in those countries.

The reports contribute to the UPR, a unique HRC mechanism aimed at improving the human rights situation of each of the 193 UN member states.

In early October, the LWF delegation from Myanmar presented their findings to representatives of some governments in Europe and other Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva. *Lutheran World Information* spoke with delegate San Thein Maung about the UPR process.

#### ***Lutheran World Information: What are the three main human rights issues in your country?***

Our main human rights issues are firstly the right to land. Around 70 percent of the population in Myanmar live in rural areas. Most are farmers and rely on access and use of their land. But most lack official or legal registration of their land.

The reasons for this are mostly traditional customary laws and practices, whereby land is inherited, exchanged



*A woman walks down a street in Myanmar, where women are particularly disadvantaged. The LWF has presented recommendations to the UN human rights process which will scrutinise human rights in Myanmar.*

or sold informally. This practice makes them vulnerable to land grabbing. The situation is especially difficult for them in the current context where the country is opening up to foreign investment: large companies come to exploit the land and natural resources of the country, and the government sells the land of small-scale farmers. Also, the military has been occupying a lot of land for military bases and other purposes, instead of allocating the land to local communities.

A second concern is the rights of women, who have no equal access to land, property, education, employment or decision-making positions in the government. Only 4.4 percent of the members of parliament in Myanmar are female.

The country lacks legal instruments and awareness of government authorities, administration and police, as well as local communities on domestic and gender-based violence. Recent legislation poses grave concerns for civil society organizations, including the new bills called “Race and Religion Bills,” which would enable the government to control inter-

faith marriages. Buddhist women who wish to marry a man of a different faith face particularly severe problems, as do women who convert to another religion.

Our report also addresses the right to nationality. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund UNICEF, 30 percent of under five-years do not have a birth certificate. Large portions of the Myanmar population, especially from the so-called ethnic minorities do not have legal documents that prove their citizenship and nationality. Without an official identity, they are prevented from accessing fundamental rights, such as the right to vote, right to higher education, right to property.

#### ***What are your hopes for the upcoming elections, in terms of human rights?***

Our hope is that the elections will be conducted in a fair and just manner, and that everybody over 18 will be able to vote, no matter their gender, ethnicity, religion or geographical location. We also hope that all parties will accept the results of the elections, and that transition of power

could be conducted in a peaceful manner, respecting the wish of the people of Myanmar. We believe that to achieve this, the international community should actively monitor elections. Whoever wins the election and comes to power should then guarantee fulfilment of equal rights for all the people of Myanmar.

**What is your schedule in Geneva?**

The purpose of our visit is to present the key findings and recommendations on human rights issues in Myanmar to representatives of foreign missions in Geneva. We will advocate to foreign governments and the international community to encourage the Myanmar Government to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the people of Myanmar, so they can live in better conditions.

**What do you hope to achieve from this visit?**

We hope that members of the UN Human Rights Council and governments will give concrete recommendations to the Myanmar government and support to change in the lives of people in Myanmar based on the results of the UPR.

## Refugee crisis: governments must work more closely

### High-level church leaders' international meeting in Munich

**MUNICH, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)** – How can and should churches position themselves in the refugee crisis in Europe?

That was the issue for 35 bishops and church leaders from 20 countries at a consultation in Munich, Germany, representing Protestant and Orthodox churches from Europe, the Middle East and Africa, as well as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

Besides discussing ways of demonstrating greater unity amongst themselves, the leaders called for closer cooperation between governments and urged refugees to be received with dignity.

Swedish Archbishop Antje Jackelén said Europe was currently on a “humanitarian honeymoon.” She underlined the great challenge for Europeans was accepting that there would be changes as the crisis lasted longer, and the fear that refugees were sometimes rejected.

Churches have a special role to play in drawing attention to the fact that refugees are human beings with human needs and not objects to be ‘distributed’ from country to country, she said.

Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and chairperson of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, recalled that Jesus, too, came to the world as a stranger.

He underlined the fact that the responsibility of churches must be expressed in tangible assistance and solidarity with refugees, as well as in advocacy and dialogue with the



Church of Sweden Archbishop Antje Jackelén, WCC's Marianne Ejderstein (moderator) and General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit; EKD Council Chairperson Heinrich Bedford-Strohm; and Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe Photo: LWF/Juliane Ziegler

respective governments. “If we tackle it properly, then the assistance will be sustainable,” Bedford-Strohm said.

The church leaders called for greater cooperation with Islamic leaders, particularly since the refugees coming to Europe are largely Muslims. Jackelén likewise stressed the importance of dialogue with the Muslim communities, adding that undue media focus on extremist Islamism was creating a one-sided view of Islam.

World Council of Churches General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit appealed to global political leaders to finally get down to finding a resolution to the Syrian conflict. This “disaster” had to be stopped, he said.

Metropolitan Gabriel of Nea Ionia and Philadelphia from Greece said his

church was trying to assist, despite the strained economic situation. For example, the church was endeavoring to give a decent reception to the many refugees arriving in Lesbos.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) assistant general secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, Ralston Deffenbaugh said, “We churches must be bearers of hope – not only for the refugees but also for the volunteers and host communities.”

Just as important as practical support for refugees is personal contact and extending the hand of friendship towards refugees. It was equally important that there should be no reduction of assistance in the refugees' countries of origin and in neighboring countries.

One example of this was Jordan, he noted, where the LWF supports Syrians living in refugee camps and in host communities.

Deffenbaugh emphasized LWF's cooperation with Islamic Relief Worldwide. "Religion is so often seen as a source of conflict. But people of faith also work

together and, in so doing, they can send a message of peace," he added.

*(From LWI correspondent Juliane Ziegler)*

## Europe's Lutheran leaders call for dignified refugee policy

**"Fences and walls are no way to shape a good life together for people"**

**BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Vice-Presidents in Europe have jointly called for agreement on a dignified refugee policy in the region.

"We expect all European states to receive refugees and find ways of meeting this common challenge," Presiding Bishops Helga Haugland Byfuglien (Nordic region) and Dr Frank Otfried July (Central Western Europe), and Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny (Central Eastern Europe) said in Budapest, following a solidarity visit with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH).

In a joint statement in Budapest following the 2-3 October visit to Bishop Fabiny, the three Lutheran leaders called the refugee question "a great challenge confronting us at the present time and probably for years to come."

LWF's European region has 40 member churches bringing together nearly 40 million Lutherans. Haugland Byfuglien is the Presiding Bishop of

Church of Norway; July is Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg Germany; and Fabiny is Bishop of the ELCH Northern Diocese.

The vice-presidents noted that the "many different experiences with open borders in the whole of Europe call us today, 25 years after the end of the division of Germany and Europe, to take responsibility for dealing with these profound upheavals. Fences and walls are no way to shape a good life together for people." In this context, Bishop July recalled Germany's gratitude to Hungary, which in 1989 opened the borders and thereby made an important contribution to "tearing down the Iron Curtain." July described the visit to Hungary as "a symbolic occasion to thank the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary and Bishop Fabiny, and to support him and his church for their efforts to enable refugees to be received appropriately in Hungary, too."

Together the bishops reminded the countries of origin and the global com-

munity of their responsibilities towards the people who are seeking refuge in Europe. "We appeal to the countries from which the refugees come to take up peace negotiations and create safe conditions. We remind the governments and rulers of these countries of their responsibility before God and humankind to finally do their utmost so that no one needs to leave their home. We call upon the global community to take its responsibility in this respect."

In addition to the Hungarian church, other European LWF member churches are reaching out to thousands of people fleeing conflict and poverty mainly in the Middle East and Africa. Lutheran churches in other LWF regions are also providing support and expressing their solidarity.

At their May 2015 European Church Leadership Consultation in Trondheim, Norway, the LWF churches in the region declared their commitment to increase efforts to welcome refugees "in our midst.

Through its Council, and in General Secretary Martin Junge's statements and letters to the member churches, the LWF continues to remind churches in Europe of the need to advocate with their governments for approaches that affirm the Christian duty to "welcome the stranger" in the respective communities.

LWF's assists around 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons globally, including Syrians who have fled to Jordan.

*(Adapted from a press release by Oliver Hoesch, spokesman of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg; with additional information by LWF Communications.)*



*"Fences and walls are no way to shape a good life together for people," say Europe's LWF Vice-Presidents, Bishops Tamás Fabiny, Helga Haugland Byfuglien and Frank Otfried July, following a solidarity visit with the Hungarian Lutheran church in Budapest. Photo: ELCH*



# Winter clothing needed for refugees – LWF assessment team

## LWF mission assesses the situation at the Serbo-Croatian border

**BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI)** – A fact-finding mission by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and aid agency Diakonie Hungary is looking into ways of providing joint assistance to refugees at the Serbo-Croatian border where refugees continue to cross en route to Germany.

Attila Mészáros, secretary for refugee issues at Diakonie Hungary, and John Damerell, adviser to the LWF Department for World Service, were tasked with seeing how the two agencies could better support LWF member, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary.

Since the Hungarian government closed the border crossing at Röszke with Serbia, refugees have had to look for new routes.

From Serbia, some now try to reach Germany via Croatia, Slovenia and Austria. However, most choose the route via Croatia, Hungary and Austria, said Mészáros.

The Hungarian border closure had only held up the flow of refugees for two days. Since then, some 3,000 to 7,000 refugees cross the border with Croatia every day, heading for Hungary, he said. Most of them were fleeing from the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan. The Hungarian government transports them in buses and trains provided free of charge from the Croatian border to Austria.

In October, the team visited the towns where most border-crossings occur: Šid in Serbia and Tovarnik, on the Croatian side.

In Šid, Mészáros noted that a good relief system is in place, providing for the needs of thousands of refugees every day and guiding them on their way. “I had already been to Röszke and the Keleti railway station in Buda-



*A refugee carries a child near the Serbo-Croat border.  
Photo: Paul Jeffrey*

pest. There was great confusion there and some of the police behaved very unpleasantly. In Šid, I thought: that's another way of doing it.”

When they arrive at Šid, aid organizations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a Serbian ecumenical aid organization wait for them.

A pastor from the Slovak-speaking Protestant congregation in Šid, Serbia, near the Croatian border, told Mészáros that volunteers from the local Protestant and ecumenical congregations regularly work with refugees, as she does herself.

“Since we know that in autumn and winter more and more warm clothes, shoes and blankets will be needed, we are thinking about possibly providing support in this area,” Mészáros said. As it was difficult to transport supplies to Serbia, a non-European Union country, it was easier to transfer monetary donations, he said.

The LWF team also met representatives of Diakonie Bavaria, UNHCR, the Helsinki Committee and Menedék, the Hungarian Association for Migrants.

Besides the Hungarian church, other LWF member churches in Europe are directly assisting the refugees, and additional support and solidarity has been received from Lutheran churches across the world.

In statements and letters to the churches in Europe, both the LWF Council and General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge have repeatedly underlined the need for governments to create refugee policy that lives up to the Christian duty to welcome strangers.

At the beginning of October, during a visit to Hungary, European LWF vice-presidents called for a dignified refugee policy in the region.

The LWF supports about 2 million refugees and internally displaced people worldwide, including Syrians who have fled to Jordan and Somalis at the Dadaab camp in Kenya.

*Article by LWF correspondent Lisa Erzsébet Weil, Hungary. Edited by the LWF communications office.*

# A peer support network for mutual accompaniment in leadership

## LWF induction program for new church leaders

**GENEVA (LWI)** – A group of newly elected leaders among The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches have formed a peer support network to mutually accompany each other and minister to one another in times of need.

This is one of the outcomes of the LWF “Induction of Newly Elected Leaders” pilot project. It is aimed at helping first-time heads of churches to deepen their understanding and practice as transformative leaders, able to offer strong leadership to their churches and in the Lutheran communion.

Bishops and Presidents from 14 LWF member churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) took part in the 28 September to 9 October program that concluded its first phase in Geneva on 2 October, and continued in Wittenberg, Germany.

Geneva provided an opportunity to improve their knowledge of the operational work of the LWF Communion Office and its strategic alliances with other church organizations at the Ecumenical Center, and with the United Nations.

### Pastoral care

“Venezuela is a very small church in terms of human resources and because human resources are central, our challenge is how to grow when we are six or seven churches and barely five pastors,” said Rev. Gerardo Hands, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (IELV). “We are very grateful to the communion for the opportunity to work and share together, and the knowledge that we are not alone,” said the leader of the church with nearly 2,000 members.

Participants observed that formation as a pastor, while extensive, does not specifically equip one for the suddenly new role of “shepherding” the entire church. A crisis, for example, requires not only immediate but skilled approaches, which the new program offers.

“In Suriname, if you show your humanity or weakness as a pastor you are seen as not being a good pastor. Here we have been able to share our experiences, to network and it has been lovely to laugh with colleagues. It feels like we are one,” said Rev. Marjory Slagtrand, chairperson of

the Church Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS).

### A source of encouragement

For Rev. Dr Samuel Ndanga-Toué, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic (EELRCA), the program is a source of encouragement, especially in a context of ongoing civil conflict in the case of CAR. “I have learnt so much about the LWF, about the World Council of Churches, and the kind of work that they are doing in the world,” he said. “I now feel better equipped to go back and be the leader of my church and better prepared to do the work that awaits me,” he added.

“I am thankful to the LWF for the opportunity to be part of the induction and to get to know other leaders of the member churches,” said Rev. Antonio Reyes, President of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines. “Whether you are from a big church or a small church and regardless of your financial status, we are brothers and sisters standing together. We can help each other in times of hardship, be a source of encouragement and the assurance of the presence of God,” he emphasized, referring also to the need for healing and reconciliation in the 18,000-member LCP after a divisive crisis.

“The success of the Geneva part of the induction is grounded in the participatory approach that allows participants to be engaged, listened to and included,” said Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for LAC. “They were able to bring their own expectations as newly elected leaders who have a deep interest in serving their



Participants of the “Induction of Newly Elected Leaders” pilot project, at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva.  
Photo: LWF/Stephane Gallay

churches better and finding support among each other.”

In addition to the CAR, Philippines, Suriname and Venezuela, the leaders also

represent the LWF member churches in Cameroon, Chile, Costa Rica, Guyana, two churches in India, Republic of Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal and Taiwan.

In Wittenberg, their discussions focus on leadership and management, communion building and conflict resolution.

## Addressing the legacy of fear in Suriname

### Role as peace builders and advocates for justice is key, says Lutheran church leader Slagtand

**GENEVA (LWI)**— Growing up in Suriname, Rev. Marjory Slagtand had no ambition of becoming a pastor. She chose to study social sciences at university instead.

However, political events were to thwart her ambition. “In 1980, there was a military coup in Suriname and that had a great impact on my life and my faith,” she says. “While I was at university the military regime killed 15 prominent members of society and one of them was a professor who taught me psychology.”

After the university was closed, Slagtand, who is one of four children brought up by a single mother, began a course in theology at the Moravian Theological Seminary in 1982 and won a scholarship to study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Amsterdam in 1985.

Five years later she became the second female pastor not only in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS), but also in the small South Ameri-

can nation, following in the footsteps of trailblazer Lucretia van Ommeren.

The chair of the ELKS church board was in Geneva recently for an induction for newly elected Lutheran leaders.

Slagtand is the first woman to hold the post of chair of the ELKS church board. She also worked at the country’s psychiatric hospital and provided pastoral care to staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the first challenges she faced as a new church leader was “how to make the structure of the 4,500-member ELKS clear” following a separation in the church.

“I have a good team behind me,” the 52-year-old mother of two says. “So we worked on the constitution, stability and structure and now we are at the stage where we can make more small steps.”

Other challenges facing the church include how it strengthens its own connections in a multi-religious and multicultural context, how it addresses issues of social justice and how it

responds as a peace builder to the culture of fear and intimidation that is a legacy of the 1980s military coups, she says.

In May, Dési Bouterse, Suriname’s former military dictator, was elected for a second term as president. He led a military coup in 1980 and ruled until 1987 and again, following another coup, from 1990 to 1991. Bouterse was accused of involvement in the 1982 murder of 15 government opponents, a claim he denies. An amnesty law passed in 2012 gave him immunity.

Formerly known as Dutch Guiana, Suriname is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in South America, with descendants of Indian contract laborers being the largest ethnic group, followed by Creoles, Javanese and Maroons.

Slagtand’s own background reflects her country’s diversity. Her grandparents on her mother’s side were Muslims from Indonesia who converted to Christianity in Suriname.

“But as a child I had influences from other religions. I was used to being among other religions and that openness to others,” she says. “The Lutheran church and theology is also one of openness through grace.”

Churches in Suriname need support in order to address issues such as property and land rights among people living in the interior as a result of the gold mining industry, HIV and AIDS, violence against women and poverty, she adds.

The ELKS is to host the LWF pre-assembly gathering for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2016, the first time it has done so.



Rev. Marjory Slagtand, of Suriname, says the church must work to overcome the culture of fear and intimidation that is a legacy of the 1980s military coups. Photo: LWF/S. Gallyay



# Holding together a fragile peace in the Central African Republic

Dialogue is essential to diffusing religious conflict, says Lutheran church leader Ndanga-Toué

**GENEVA (LWI)**— When 50-year-old Rev. Dr Samuel Ndanga-Toué heard the news that he had been elected President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, he remembers being overcome with emotion.

“I was thankful for the grace and favor of God. It was really God’s grace to be chosen from many candidates and to be the people’s choice,” he says of his election by the Lutheran church synod on 25 April 2015.

But what is even more overwhelming are the many challenges religious leaders like him face in a country that is caught in an intractable cycle of violence which has resulted in population displacement and death, destruction of homes and properties, increasing poverty and growing mistrust between ethnic and faith communities.

“Conflict has plunged the country into total chaos and has pitted Christians and Muslims against each other. Our church’s response is that we are making a big effort to create dialogue, to come together again, to strive for reconciliation through peace building and social cohesion,” Ndanga-Toué says.

CAR has experienced periods of instability since its independence from France in 1960. After the Seleka rebel alliance seized power in 2013, the country descended into ethnic and sectarian violence, and tens of thousands fled their homes.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates



*Churches in the Central African Republic strive to help warring factions reconcile, says newly elected president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, Rev. Dr Samuel Ndanga-Toué. Photo: LWF/S.Gallay*

that at the peak of the unrest in 2014, more than 930,000 people had been displaced, including an estimated 460,000, who fled to neighboring countries. More than half of the population of the landlocked country still needs humanitarian assistance. New waves of violence occurred as recently as last month.

“Peace is very fragile at the moment. The church has established platforms at national and regional levels for Christians and Muslims to sit together and talk,” Ndanga-Toué adds. “One of the main objectives of this is to reach a place of forgiveness and tolerance, and to look forward together.”

Churches urgently need support in order to reach out to people in poverty,

he adds. “One thing our church does is to initiate small projects where there could be a financial component. We are helping people to start up a small business with livestock, agriculture, and also coming together as a group to work on a plot of land.”

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) collaboration with its CAR member church includes assistance for food security, women’s empowerment, institutional support as well as emergency humanitarian response for the internally displaced people in the country.

*(LWI correspondent Moyette Marrett wrote the stories on pages 13–15.)*

## Seeking church unity for the sake of the world

LWF President Bishop Younan visits South Korea

**SEOUL, South Korea/GENEVA (LWI)**— Churches must use their global voices and moral authority to challenge systems per-

petuating inequality, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) said in South Korea.

Addressing the General Assembly of the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK), Younan said churches must be pro-



From left: LCK President Rev. Dr Chul Hwan Kim said the visit by LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan was important as Korean people struggle with “living in the pain of division.” Eun-hae Kwon (right), LWF Vice-President for Asia, accompanied the Lutheran leaders. Photo: LCK

phetic in the face of growing inequality between and within nations, including between urban and agricultural communities.

“The churches are called to rise to this challenge. We must ask hard questions as we seek to call things what they are,” said Younan, who is also the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

The LWF president preached at the Daejodong Lutheran Church, visited the border dividing North and South Korea at Panmunjeom and met church leaders and government officials during the 1-6 October visit.

In his keynote address at the LCK assembly, Younan emphasized the unity of the church as essential, and its relevance in serving the world. “Our unity is not focused on ourselves alone. It is not a goal for the benefit of our

churches. It is not even a goal we seek to honor and bless God. The unity we seek as followers of Christ is for the sake of the world,” he said.

On the notion that religion and politics do not mix, he challenged the church to address inequality in society. “Our world is dying for fresh streams of water that will transform inequality to equality, injustice to justice, egocentric economies to economies of equal opportunity.”

Turning to the refugee crisis in Europe, the destination for thousands displaced by conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa that the international community has not solved, the LWF president spoke as a church leader who is also a refugee.

“Both my faith and my history oblige me to speak up for these women, men and children who are washing up on beaches, are found decomposing in

trucks on the highway, are crossing borders of barbed wire, and are barely surviving in makeshift camps,” he said.

In his sermon at the Daejodong Lutheran Church, Younan underscored the importance of honoring diversity as the church seeks unity. He added that the mission of the church is oneness in Christ in order to share God’s love with a broken world, something the LWF attempts.

The LCK president Rev. Dr Chul Hwan Kim thanked the LWF president for his visit, saying he had brought solace to the church members. “Born as a Palestine refugee, President Younan is one who can relate to the pain from division and anxiety over war. We are grateful for his visit in Korea. He is a comforter sent by our Lord to the Korean people living in the pain of division.”

The LCK has 5,000 members in 50 congregations. As the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 approaches, its planned programs include visiting Reformation sites, establishing a new church as well as holding academic seminars and publishing related books.

LWF vice-president for Asia, Eun-Hae Kwon, expressed deep appreciation for Younan’s visit and for reminding church leaders of the importance of unity in ecumenical work and in social responsibility today.

“The church is called to be always reformed and so we reaffirm our call to be a communion that is always reforming itself and always preparing to be reformed by God’s response to the world,” Kwon noted.

## South Korea: walls between people counter peace efforts

### LWF President Younan visits border village of Korean Peninsula

**PANMUNJOM, South Korea/GENEVA (LWI)** – At the border village of Panmunjom that divides the Korean people, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan

said peace between people cannot be realized by erecting physical walls.

“When there is a wall that is separating people, it is a wall of hatred, not

security. Such borders are borders of hatred, division and scepticism. It is not a wall that will bring peace and justice. The peace of the Korean

people lies with their co-patriots,” he stressed.

The border area he visited is where the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on 27 July 1953 and is used by the two Koreas for diplomatic engagements. It is the only portion of the Korean Demilitarized Zone where North and South Korea forces stand face-to-face.

“This is not how God created us,” commented Younan. “Let us call on the leaders of the world to allow the unity of the Korean people to become a reality. If it happens here, it will also succeed in Palestine and other parts of the world,” he added.

Earlier in his meetings with Lutheran and other church leaders, Younan, who is also the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, urged the churches of Korea to unite and embrace the idea of one nation. He urged Christians to intensify their prayers so that the political struggles and the “vicious circle of hatred” might end. For its part, the LWF will work with its member church and pray for it so that it might be the “instrument of peace” that helps broker unity on the Korean Peninsula, he said.

At the conclusion of the visit the delegation offered a prayer for peace: “May the wounds of separation and division be healed and may this nation be united as one nation of liberty, peace and justice, building a better future for all human beings. May God’s will be done for our nation,” they prayed.

“It’s not in a wall, the army, protecting the border. Peace is when there are human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, freedom

for every being, and gender justice,” Younan added.

He was joined at the border by Lutheran Church in Korea President Rev. Chul-Hwan Kim and LWF Vice-President for Asia, Ms Eun-Hae Kwon.



LWF President Bishop Younan joined congregation members in a church service in South Korea. He condemned the division between the two Koreas, saying walls incite hatred. Photo: LCK

## “Violence cannot solve the conflict”

### ACT Palestine Forum calls for civilian protection and access to Holy Sites

**JERUSALEM/ GENEVA (LWI)** – On 16 October, the ACT Palestine forum has issued a statement, voicing deep concern “about the loss of life and human suffering we experience across Palestine and in Israel these days,” in view of recent violence in Palestine and Israel, and especially around the city of Jerusalem.

The forum strongly condemned violent acts such as “the killing of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians, use of excessive force by Israeli police and army against protesters, extra judicial killings, collective punishment in the form of severe restrictions of movement, closure of Palestinian neighbor-

hoods and punitive home demolitions in East Jerusalem.”

It is composed of local churches and church-related development and humanitarian organizations including The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“We are convinced that violence cannot solve the conflict,” the statement reads. The signatories, including the LWF member church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the LWF local office in Jerusalem, called upon the international community to open negotiations “that will bring an end to the Israeli occupation” and to take measures for the protection of civilians.

It also urged faith leaders to advocate for the protection and free access to Holy Sites in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

The forum appealed to its partners and people of faith “to help carry the vision of peace, justice, hope, and dignity for Palestine and Israel, especially at times like now, when young and old alike are weighed down by despair and discouraged by the lack of a viable peace process.”

The LWF has been serving the needs of Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian territories for more than 60 years, providing vocational training, scholarships and material aid.



The LWF Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem provides specialty care for Palestinians from across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with services such as a cancer center, a dialysis unit, and a pediatric center. The LWF chairs the ACT Palestine Forum and is actively involved in advocating for justice, peace and reconciliation.

[Read the statement here](#)

[www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/act\\_palestine\\_forum\\_statement\\_0.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/act_palestine_forum_statement_0.pdf)



*The LWF is among ACT Alliance members condemning deaths, housing demolitions and destruction in Palestine and Israel, including Gaza. File photo: ACT Alliance/Paul Jeffrey*

## Young Lutherans get Living Reformation projects off the ground

### Living Reformation projects take shape in over 50 countries

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Young people from around the globe are starting a series of Living Reformation projects. They hope these will bring change to the lives of people in their communities and further afield.

Reformation Day, 31 October, marks the beginning of dozens of initiatives conceived by members of the Global Young Reformers Network following their international workshop in Wittenberg, Germany, in August.

Young reformers across the Lutheran communion are working with fellow youth and church leaders in other regions to find new ways to be a church, under the banner *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda* – a church in an ongoing state of reformation or change. Convinced that the church must keep reforming, even 500 years after the movement that Martin Luther started, young Lutherans are learning about Lutheran identity, working to counter unemployment, training as leaders and working for environmental justice.

The Living Reformation projects will help churches interpret the theme of both the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and the LWF Twelfth Assem-

bly, “Liberated by God’s Grace.” Young reformers will lead the way in illustrating how the sub-themes: Salvation – not for sale, Creation – not for sale, and Human beings – not for sale, relate to critical issues in their countries and resonate with concerns in other LWF regions.

Arek Arkadiusz of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland is planning a project titled, Who are we? What’s our vocation? His group is focusing on Luther’s notion of God’s grace. “Firstly, Martin Luther was moved by the Word of God written in the Scripture. We want to give youth a chance to encounter Luther’s discovery and give them the space to carry God’s love to one another.”

Youth in Poland have linked up with other young reformers in Colombia, Madagascar and Namibia, whose projects also focus on Lutheran identity.

Young members of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria will launch a training program to help reduce the number of unemployed youth in Nigeria. By teaching young people to develop capacity to earn a living, it is hoped they will no longer be exploited. The goal

is to ensure at least 50 young people secure employment by the end of 2016.

“Unemployment has caused youth to be used by desperate politicians in achieving their goals. These idle young people are given money to engage in drug abuse, shout and roam the streets campaigning for politicians; sometimes engaging in conflicts and other vices,” project leader Nickson Ibrahim Makama said.

“Our training will help youth understand their value in society, provide them with the skills needed to grab employment opportunities and be better members of society. It will help people see how every human being is not an object to be used and misused by others.” He will work with young reformers from Guatemala and Zimbabwe.

Kelly Cruz has designed a Living Reformation project focusing on training young people for leadership roles in the Lutheran Church of Peru.

“Our church needs a new leadership team, one which includes our younger members. At the end of 2016, the church will have 26 teenagers and

youth who are highly trained, knowledgeable, aware of our Lutheran identity and of the gifts, abilities and skills needed to serve the church,” she said. Cruz will work with young reformers in Liberia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, El Salvador and Papua New Guinea.

Climate change is the driving force behind a project supporting the holistic focus of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. “In India, forests are decreasing day by day. Pollution is very high, temperature levels are increasing, and there are

no rains in some places. Without rains farmers can’t farm their fields, and many are committing suicide because of drought,” says project leader and young reformer John Peter Paul Ponugumati.

“I think churches are focusing only on spirituality but not on the social implications. So it’s time to reform our spirituality with social concerns,” Ponugumati added. He will connect with his team from Suriname, Philippines, Russia, Taiwan and Nicaragua.

In his Reformation Day letter inviting churches to reflect on the meaning of the 2017 anniversary theme, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge referred to the efforts of young reformers. The results and lessons of the Living Reformation projects will be shared in 2017 in the home countries of the young reformers and at global level.



Young Lutherans: excited about the prospect of launching Living Reformation projects. Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine P. Valeriano

**Global Young Reformers Network:**  
<https://youngreformers.lutheranworld.org>

## Madagascar: Involving the whole church in service

Evangelistic and development ministries in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) should gain broader support among its 3.7 million members following a workshop on sustainability and good governance led by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Church leaders said the workshop should make the church more self-reliant. It drew 38 participants from across the church’s 9,000 congregations and 1,100 pastors.

“The issues that this workshop highlighted for the Malagasy Lutheran Church are sustainability and good governance, leading to the self-reliance of the church,” said MLC President Rev. Dr Rakoto Endor Modeste. General Secretary Rev. Samoela George said the workshop was important for the sake of the whole church.

The MLC was started in 1866 by the Norwegian Missionary Society. This initiative was followed by the planting of two more churches by American missionary societies, with the three groups joining to become the Malagasy Lutheran Church in 1950.

The church carries out its work in the former French colony in an environment of severe poverty and inequality, which has in recent years been exacerbated by political instability and violence, as well as food insecurity and child malnutrition. In 2009, cyclones and floods hit the country. The MLC runs numerous schools, spiritual revival camps, hospitals and other health centers, as well several development projects. Since 2013, the LWF has been funding a major project that helps the church better coordinate its efforts and broaden support among members.

Commenting on the impact of the workshop on sustainability and governance, Richard Rasolofomoandrisoa, who is responsible for self-reliance, noted that it offers the church a new way of understanding its diaconal – or service – ministry. He said the

workshop offered the church a new perspective and enables it to carry out new work. Evelinah Jeanne Raoserasalina, director of a Bible school for women, added that the workshop will bring renewal, progress and change to the church and help leaders utilize local resources to support its ministries.

“The workshop on church and sustainability and good governance allowed all these national leaders to learn lessons on how to be more focused in their work in order to sustain the MLC,” concluded Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, who runs the church support group, Empower MLC.

Participants expressed appreciation for the partnership between the LWF and the church and urged further such gatherings at the regional level.



MLC President Rev. Dr Rakoto Endor Modeste says the workshop highlighted sustainability and good governance as areas of importance for the Malagasy Lutheran Church. Photo: MLC



# South Sudan: New classrooms needed for refugee children

## Conflict in Kordofan causes massive influx to Ajuong Thok refugee camp

**AJUONG THOK, South Sudan/GENEVA (LWI)**—

“When I left my village in South Kordofan, I wondered how to survive without my parents,” Amona Tia, 15, says.

The teenager fled conflict in Sudan’s South Kordofan province in January, together with her siblings. They were separated from their parents as they fled to South Sudan. Tia’s 16-year-old sister has become the head of the household, which includes two more sisters and two brothers. The Lutheran World Federation makes sure the children are supported and able to go to school.

The number of children like Tia has doubled in Ajuong Thok refugee camp, just over the border in South Sudan, since an surge in the South Kordofan conflict caused a new influx of refugees.

According to the United Nations’ refugee agency, UNHCR, the refugee population of Ajuong Thok had risen from 18,000 to nearly 31,130 by 20 October. By December the camp is expected to be filled to the capacity of 40,000 people. More than half the residents are children. One third of the total refugee population are children of school-going age. One in 10 children arrives without a parent or adult caregiver.

### Scaling up child protection

Being the UN partner for education and child protection in the refugee camp, LWF South Sudan has scaled up activities to meet increased demand. It runs three primary schools and one secondary school, six child-friendly spaces and several child-rights clubs. It facilitates an accelerated learning program that helps older children whose education was interrupted by conflict and war make up for schooling they missed.



*Sudanese refugee Amona Tia prepares the evening meal for her siblings at the Ajuong Thok refugee camp in South Sudan. With help from the LWF, she has resumed schooling. Photo: LWF/A. Kiura*

Through child help desks and child rights clubs, LWF identifies vulnerable children as early as possible. Tia was registered by LWF child protection staff in January 2015 at the reception center in Yida, South Sudan, close to the Sudanese border, before she was moved to a camp. When she arrived in Ajuong Thok, LWF staff made sure that she and her siblings were enrolled in school, and received books, sandals, clothes, soap and sanitary materials for the girls, together with the food rations provided by the World Food Programme.

Through follow-ups and regular home visits, the family of children is checked on regularly. Tia was encouraged to take part in recreational activities and has been linked to other children in one of the peer groups. Through group counseling by LWF the children are able to mix with each other share.

### Difficult school situation

Like many children in the camp, Tia has embraced the opportunity for edu-

cation. Initially enrolled at a local public primary school, Merowe, she was later moved to another primary school as the camp filled up. This was helpful, as the school is closer to home and the children can attend sessions at different times. Tia and her brother learn in the morning, while her sisters attend the accelerated learning program in the afternoon. The arrangement has helped the children continue learning while they share household chores and look after each other.

Still, conditions are far from ideal, as team leader Anne Mwaura points out. “Merowe Primary school currently holds 2,854 children in 21 classrooms – a ratio of one to 123 students,” she says. Most of classrooms are improvised tents made from plastic sheets and pieces of wood, which LWF obtained from UN agencies. South Sudanese standards allow for up to 50 students a class. “The situation is worse in terms of sanitation,” Mwaura says. The school has six latrines, three each for the boys and girls. This means up to 500 students have to share one toilet. “School children are forced to



learn in congested classrooms, share text books, sit on mats and use home clothes in place of school uniform,” Mwaura adds.

## More effort needed to support refugees

Whereas LWF had planned to support 5,400 students in 2015, the number of school-going children almost doubled within three months.

It has built 47 new semi-permanent classrooms and recruited 41 extra teachers from among the refugee population. It has also established

simple structures from iron sheets and wooden poles at child-friendly spaces to open up a pre-school learning area for 3,000 more children, and trained extra pre-school teachers. Community-based child protection committees, foster care support groups, peer groups and child rights clubs were set up.

With the continued support of local partners and donors, such as the European Commission’s humanitarian aid and civil protection department (ECHO), Church of Sweden, UNHCR and the UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, the LWF team had been able to care

for 12,000 children and students by October 2015, far more than double the number projected. Still, needs are far greater than resources. As children like Tia and her siblings continue to arrive in Ajuong Thok, more effort is needed to make sure their situation does not worsen.

Thanks to LWF’s intervention, Tia can dream again of a bright future. She smiles broadly as she shares her ambition: “I want to be a respected woman in my community,” she says. “I want to complete school and become the president of South Kordofan.”

# Mauritania: stability and income after fleeing war

## “I want the best life for my children”

**NOUAKCHOTT, Mauritania/GENEVA (LWI)** – “We were just looking for peace,” says Bolozi Nzenze Budiaki, as if apologizing for the fact that she is now sitting in a tent and relies on development aid in a country which is not her home.

The 32-year-old woman has twice had to flee for the sake of her family, and is now enrolled in the LWF Mauritania program for community development. Together with other women, she produces shirts that she sells for a living. It is October 2015; the mother of three sits on a mat in the

Mauritanian capital Nouakchott while she tells her story.

Born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she fled in 2003. “I was the last in my family to leave,” she recalls. Unlike many other DRC refugees, however, she did not stay in neighboring countries like Uganda, but went to Mali instead.

“I knew that if I stayed close to the DRC, it would be easier for the rebels to come and kill us,” she explains. Her family is dispersed all over the continent.

## Refuge without a livelihood

Budiaki herself settled in Mali, got married and had three daughters. But even before civil war erupted in Mali, she knew her children would be at the risk of female genital mutilation. “My husband wanted to cut the girls,” she says. “That’s why I left him and came to Mauritania. When we came here, thank God we had peace.”

Peace however did not solve her basic problem of subsistence. In the intervening period she re-married. “As a refugee, it was difficult to get a job in Mauritania,” she says. “I worked as a waitress and as a maid, while my husband stayed with the children. As a woman, I could more easily find employment in the service sector than him.” Budiaki cooked small meals and sold salted fish.

People like Budiaki are the target group for the LWF Mauritania Integrated Community Development Program, which has three key objectives: disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness, sustainable livelihoods, and community-led action for justice and peace. It targets vulnerable people from the districts of Nouakchott, Brakna and Hodh El Charghui. Unlike



Armed with tailoring skills taught by the LWF, Congolese refugee Bolozi Nzenze Budiaki has the chance to support her family in new home, Mauritania. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

Nouakchott, where a quarter of the population lives in poverty, the latter two are small communities in the Sahel desert with high rates of poverty and malnourishment. In Brakna, more than 300km from the capital, two thirds of the population lives in poverty, while in the even more remote Hodh El Charghui, every second person lives below the poverty line.

LWF provides communities with material and financial aid, as well as training and access to micro-finance institutions, which are often closed to foreigners.

“We did not only observe changes in people’s everyday lives but also noticed their participation in community matters increased,” LWF Mauritania country representative Kasongo Mut-shaila said.

“They help families affected by flooding, organize sanitation cam-

paigns whereby people clean public places, such as markets and water points, and they meet to discuss critical matters affecting their communities.”

### An alternative to daily wages

The project focuses on empowering people who face special challenges: single mothers and female-headed households, the elderly and people living with HIV and AIDS or with disabilities.

“Many women turn to prostitution as the only way of making an income,” Budiaki’s friend Lou Diena Victorine Irie says. She fled the conflict in the Ivory Coast in 2010. Her family is either “divided or dead,” as she succinctly puts it.

Like Budiaki, Irie faces the challenge of being the breadwinner for

her children – three boys and one girl – the youngest a two-year-old toddler, the eldest a 17-year-old teenager. “I want more for my children,” Irie says. “I want the best life for them.”

The program started this year and will run until 2020. It has changed Budiaki’s life. The two women have been trained and formed a cooperative. Together, they produce clothing and food and sell their goods, which in turn provide a more steady income than the day-to-day wages the women used to earn before. “This is better, but still not enough to save money for the future.”

Budiaki’s greatest concerns now are her children. “I hope their lives won’t be as difficult as mine,” she says. “I want them to live somewhere where they will have a scholarship, an education and medical care, in a country that respects their rights as children.”

## World Food Day – Mauritania: Farming in the desert

### LWF project helps Malian refugees increase food supplies

**BASSIKOUNOU, Mauritania/ GENEVA (LWI) –** At the age of 42, Ali agd Forach has learned to farm the desert.

From neighboring Mali, Forach is one of 52,000 refugees who fled conflict in his home country and has been living in Mberra refugee camp, Mauritania, since 2012. The camp is located 50km from the common border, right in the Sahel, a strip of the Sahara desert.

“When I arrived there was nothing here,” Forach recalls. “From here to the horizon only hills of sand.” Now, however, he is growing peanuts and watermelons. Forach is one of 5,000 people who have been taught new horticultural and irrigation techniques for farming in the Sahel by The Lutheran World Federation.

### Fertilize the desert

“It was quite difficult to convince people that they could grow vegetables here,” LWF project coordinator Papa Diallo recalls. During the day, the tempera-



*A woman tends a MARCOL training garden in Mberra camp, Mauritania. Thanks to the program Malian refugees produce more vegetables and the price of vegetables in the market has dropped. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner*

ture climbs to 50 degrees Celsius. Hot winds, frequent sandstorms and sudden heavy rain can destroy many months work within minutes.

The project MARCOL has a curriculum that includes preparing nurseries, seedling production, organic fertiliza-

tion, cultivation and techniques such as drip-to-drip-irrigation that make the most of the meager water reserves in the Sahel. “It’s a big challenge to fertilize the desert,” Diallo says.

The project targets 5,000 people from the camp and the host com-

munity. This includes 4,134 women, reflecting the traditional division of labor and the population in the camp. A select 200 of them received special gardening training. Each of those 200 people are sharing what they learned in groups of 25 people.

Where there was sand before, plots measuring altogether 31 hectares have sprung up in the camp and surrounding villages. "We now have more vegetables available, and since more people are selling them, the price in the market has dropped," Tassayate ub Med says. Her family's situation has improved a great deal. "Before we paid about 3 USD for a meal, now it's only 1 USD."

"I was astonished to see the quantity of our first harvest," her neighbor Taya ub Mazou adds. "It was a proud moment when I could share the fruits of my garden. We can even use the remains of the plants to feed our goats. From each harvest, we have a double benefit."

## A different life

Living in Mberra represents a big change to the refugees. Walking long

distances to work the fields in the heat and carrying heavy water cans is difficult for the women. Back in Mali, many were nomadic pastoralists. Some brought their cattle and goats with them when they fled. But in Mberra, hardly enough water and grazing grounds exist for the local host community. In the neighboring town of Bassikounou, dead cows decomposing near a water point and a high prevalence of respiratory diseases and malnutrition tell visible tales of the challenging environment in which the refugees and the local communities co-exist.

LWF encouraged the nomads to become farmers. "Because of the lack of water and grass, the animals produce less milk," Diallo says. "The vegetables complement and increase the nutritional value of the refugees' traditional diet."

Additionally, teaching gardening techniques has minimized conflicts with the host community. Nevertheless, many refugees are still reluctant to exchange their traditional diet of milk and meat for watermelons, pea-

nuts and eggplants. Some sell their vegetables to buy meat.

## Attacks from the river

Even farmers like Forach needed time to adjust. "I had a home by the Mali river," Forach says. "My fields were right by the stream, I grew rice, and water came from a motorized borehole. I had two big fields and a garden. Water was never a problem."

But when fighting broke out in Mali, his source of livelihood became a death trap. "Militia would come by boat and attack the villages from the river. It was not safe anymore. I had to leave my garden and my animals and come here as a refugee. I was very sad to go," he says despondently. "As nobody is there to take care of it, everything is probably destroyed by now."

The farmer still hopes to go back to what he had to leave. "I plan to rebuild my life in Mali," he says. "I will bring what I have learned here and share it with others if I can. I am a farmer. I don't want to do anything else."

October 16 is World Food Day.

# A girl is not "an item to be sold"

## Sponsorship gives Mauritanian girls confidence to make own decisions

**NOUAKCHOTT, Mauritania/ GENEVA (LWI)**

– The first man who proposed marriage to Fatou Haidana had seen her at the market. He followed her home and asked for her hand. Her mother declined. The second was a Marabout, a traditional healer, who threatened to curse her if she did not accept. Her parents sent him away as well. "I'd like to be married, it's the wish of every girl," the 15-year-old from Mauritania says. "But I have to complete my studies first. With a good education and a job I would be independent."

Independence is not the first thing that comes to mind when looking at Fatou. The young girl is paralyzed from the waist down. To get into her wheelchair, even to just change her position sitting

on the living room floor, Fatou needs assistance. A sponsorship program by the Lutheran World Federation program in Mauritania has ensured her education and given her the confidence to make her own decisions.

## Good support network

In 2009 Fatou for noticed a weakness in her legs for the first time. The traditional healer they called applied herbs and massaged her legs. Yet, Fatou kept falling. Two years later, at the age of 11, she stopped walking altogether. "A lot changed for me," she says. "I always need help, even to dress myself."

Every morning she takes a taxi to school, the only available means of

transport. Her mother has to move her from the wheelchair into the vehicle. "Some taxis don't stop when they see my wheelchair," she says. "But there are also kind drivers who help to move me. I am often late because of this taxi problem."

At school, she is supported by friends and teachers, who also provide lessons when she misses class – either because there is no taxi, or her mother is ill. The sponsorship covers her school fees, school supplies, medical check-ups and insurance for both Fatou and her mother, as well as extra assistance in school, such as a school manual, teaching aids and tutorials. However, the taxi fare of USD3.30 a day and the assistance at home have





*Fatou Haidana, 15 and paralyzed, has rejected numerous offers of marriage. A LWF sponsorship program is putting Fatou through school, enabling her to turn away suitors. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner*

to be provided by her family. She also needs to buy lunch as she cannot return home at midday to eat like other students.

### Plans to study medicine

Fatou lives with her mother, her stepfather and two siblings in the poorer part of the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott. The unpaved street full of small rocks and puddles is almost impossible to navigate with a wheelchair. Fatou's mother stopped working because she has back problems. Lifting a teenage girl many times a day is taking its toll. The family is struggling to make ends meet but unwavering in their support for her.

LWF sponsorship is designed to ensure the education of children in difficult situations. Fatou is one of 330 recipients, 70 percent of them girls from vulnerable families. Eleven percent of the sponsored children live with disability. Individual donors in Finland, through the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission support a child by sponsoring school fees, teacher's assistance and tutoring. They receive a report twice a year and a report of Fatou's grades. Although the only student with a disability in her school, Fatou always finishes one of the best in her class.

Fatou spends many afternoons at home, studying and listening to music. But she also maintains her

circle of friends, who come to visit, help her move around at school and invite her for birthdays. Support from family, teachers and friends has given Fatou the confidence to plan her own life. She wants to study medicine and "become the best doctor in the country." She dreams of visiting the United States, where her uncle lives there and has told her many good things

### "They wanted to possess me"

The one thing Fatou does not like are weddings. Too noisy, too crowded and full of people staring at the girl in the wheelchair. "They ask me why I don't walk, since I have two legs," she says. "I would rather spend my time with people with whom I am comfortable."

Like other Mauritanian girls her age, Fatou would like to marry and have a family one day. The teenager has since received more marriage proposals. One promised her a house, another wanted to buy her a car. Most said she would be able to continue her education. All offered to pay for medical examinations and treatment which might enable Fatou to walk again.

Fatou has refused all these offers. "I am not ready for these men," she says. "I did not like the way they were speaking. It was like I was an item to be sold. They wanted to possess me."

## How a refugee girl becomes a leader

### "I hope to be part of the solution"

**PAKELLE, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI)** – "I came to Adjumani with only the clothes on my back and just one Sudanese pound. I was 12-years-old, alone and afraid," 14-year-old Gift Minzi says.

Today\*, the young girl lives in a foster family, has become head girl of her school in the refugee camp and is leading her school's Child Rights Club.

Gift is one of many children who arrived at the refugee camp on their

own. Registered as separated children – those who have lost their families during flight, or as unaccompanied minors (children who came without parents) – they are especially vulnerable to exploitation and neglect. Providing for them, finding and monitoring a suitable foster arrangement is part of The Lutheran World Federation work in the Adjumani refugee camp in Northern Uganda.

Gift's life was not easy even before she was forced to leave her home. Born in the town of Nimule in the County of East Equatoria, South Sudan, she lost her mother at the age of seven. "When one loses a mother the only hope is to have a father," she says. But the girl was neglected by her father and she never enrolled in school. From a very early age she learnt how to survive on her own.

## Killing was something she will never forget

When violence erupted in South Sudan, Gift decided to make the harrowing journey from Nimule to Adjumani on her own, covering over 100km. While at home she feared for her life, she was uncertain of what to expect across the border in Uganda. As she fled with hundreds of other unaccompanied children, she witnessed the shooting of another young girl. Gift says she will never forget that moment.

In Adjumani, Gift was reunited with an aunt who enrolled her in school for the first time. The girl received support for school materials. Her well-being is monitored by LWF case workers and field extension staff, who regularly visit to see she is taken care of and well-treated. Although she was traumatized, she was able to embrace education. In a short period of time, she became one of the brightest students in Boroli Primary School and was selected as head girl. In this position, Gift takes on the role of peer educator, stressing the importance of education and urging girls to stay in school.

“Even before crisis strikes, girls tend to be the most vulnerable, a situation only exacerbated by disaster and conflict,” LWF Uganda program officer, Pius Kikomeko, says. “Despite the challenges of trauma, violence and abuse, each day, we are struck by their resilience, intelligence and enthusiasm.”

## Putting their lives into their own hands

Gift's story reminds us that even in the most dire circumstances, girls around the world are initiating change, Kikomeko says.

Early this year LWF introduced Child Rights Clubs to several schools in the refugee settlements, such as Adjumani. Gift was quickly appointed

chairperson of Boroli Primary's Child Rights Club. Through drama and song, the club conveys fundamental messages relating to early marriage, child abuse, education and health.

Gift is particularly concerned about the falling number of girls at her school, many of whom she believes have been forced into marriage. She encourages her female peers to exercise their right to make informed choices and tries to create a safe environment for them to learn about sexual reproductive health and important life skills.

According to September 2014 statistics by the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, about 96,000 refugees have been settled in Adjumani District, Northern Uganda. Two thirds are children. At least three percent of these children were registered as unaccompanied or separated from their families. More than other young refugees, these children are vulnerable to exploitation, recruitment into armed forces and forced labour. Girls are especially in danger of being married off at a young age.

As Gift leads her group in song it is difficult to ignore her strong sense of presence, founded on her own experi-

ences as a child. “I was not lucky to know my rights as a girl child, but this club can help others,” she explains. Gift feels that the club is helping her heal the wounds of a traumatic childhood. She hopes that by raising awareness other girls understand when their rights are being denied. Most importantly, they will know the right channels to report their grievances.

Gift's leadership has not gone unnoticed. Dennis Andruma, a teacher in Boroli Primary School and patron of the Child Rights Club stresses the impact Gift has had on her fellow peers. “Not only is she a strong performer in the classroom, she is also a role model for the rest of the students, especially the girls. It will be my pride when she succeeds.”

What is next for Gift? “Nursing school,” she says. Even though she still has a few years of primary and secondary schooling left, she is confident that nursing is her passion. “I want to be able to help others. Hospitals here often do not offer the best care. So in the future I hope to be part of the solution.”

*Contribution by Charnelle Etti, LWF Uganda.*

*\*16 October 2015.*



*Gift leading the Child Rights Club at Boroli Primary School. In just two years she has become head girl of her school in the refugee camp and is leading her school's Child Rights Club. Photo: LWF Uganda*

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# Christian and Islamic relief agencies join hands to reach Nepal's most vulnerable

## Unique Christian-Muslim partnership “an inspiration”

**RASUWA, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI)** – They walked for six hours on muddy trails, crossing mountain streams and braving landslides. Many were mothers, carrying small children. They came alone, as their husbands had left to work in Qatar or Malaysia. Old men were among the number too, their backs bent from a life of exhausting labor. One of them braved the treacherous road on an artificial leg. When the distribution started they sat down in the hot sun, waiting for their names to be called.

The people of remote Yarsa in Rasuwa district were doubly hit during the earthquakes that struck Nepal earlier this year. They not only lost their homes and were forced to live under a tarpaulin or in a cow shed, they also got cut off from the rest of the world because of recurring landslides. Among them are disabled people, women without husbands and so-called Dalits – ‘untouchables’ tainted by birth in a caste system that deems them impure.

But on 29 September 2015, the people of Yarsa received materials to build a temporary shelter and toilet. The much-needed support is the outcome of the world's first official collaboration between global Christian and global Islamic humanitarian organizations. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) in August signed an agreement to cooperate in humanitarian relief efforts.

In Nepal, LWF Nepal and IRW joined hands to support the people of five Village Development Committees of Rasuwa district. This mountainous district bordering Tibet was among the five worst affected provinces. A total of 430 people were reported killed and 753 injured. Most of the casualties occurred in an avalanche that buried Langtang village and its surroundings. An estimated 80 percent of the popu-



Sita, middle, and neighbors sitting around emergency toilet kits. Photo: LWF/Lucia de Vries

lation of Rasuwa was affected by the earthquake and 8,000 buildings were destroyed.

The Yarsa people were among the last to be reached by LWF and IRW. The road leading to the area had been wiped away by fresh landslides, and the agencies faced logistic difficulties in getting enough corrugated iron sheets from India. In the presence of the Lutheran World Federation Nepal officer Manoj Timilsina and Islamic Relief Worldwide officer Bilal Achmad Zargar, materials such as high quality corrugated iron sheets, mesh wire, plastic squat toilets, pipes, cement and nails were handed over to the Dalit families. They also received 2,000 Nepalese rupee each (just over USD 19) to pay for construction expenses.

### No longer living under tarpaulins

After living in a cow shed or under a tarpaulin for five months, the materials were a welcome gift. “I feel so relieved today,” said Sita BK. “It's been quite a challenge to live under a tarpaulin. We

still experience aftershocks and the monsoon rains give us much trouble.” The 42-year-old mother of three will have to organize the construction of her new shelter and toilet alone. Her husband works as a migrant labourer in Malaysia.

Subha BK, 40, reached the distribution point with the help of his artificial leg and a kind neighbor. “Life became difficult after I became disabled and my wife left me. But I am supported by my friends. With their help and thanks to these materials I can build myself a better shelter,” said the Dalit farmer, showing a big smile.

The distribution raised some concerns too. A worried Dhan Bahadur BK, 60, wondered out loud where he should build his shelter. “No place is safe in our village. We are surrounded by landslides. Unless the government provides us with a safe piece of land we will continue to feel vulnerable.”

### Cooperation an example of social harmony

In the first phase of the collaboration between LWF Nepal and IRW, which



involved the local partner Manikor Society, 2,042 families were supported with temporary shelters and toilets. During a 10-day workshop, 90 people were trained in carpentry to ensure the construction of safe and strong structures. The second phase of the partnership will focus on building permanent new homes.

“The partnership between LWF and IRW acts as an inspiration,” LWF Nepal Country Director Prabin Manadhar

said. “Faith-based organizations working together to reach out to the most vulnerable show the way forward towards solidarity and social harmony in a divided world.”

Manandhar believes the unique collaboration helps agencies critically look at their own prejudices and weaknesses, as well as complement their strengths. Says Manadhar: “A Christian and Muslim agency work closely together in a largely Hindu country to

support a Buddhist minority. This partnership proves that religious harmony does not have to be a mere dream.”

During the relief phase, LWF and IRW have separately provided assistance to more than 110,000 Nepalese people, and in the recovery phase are able to reach many more by combining resources.

*(By LWI correspondent Lucia de Vries)*

## “Live with more dignity and respect”

### LWF support bears fruit six months after the Nepal earthquake

**KATHMANDU, Nepal/ GENEVA (LWI)**—When a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Nepal in April 2015, it seemed to Saraswati Purkoti that life had ended. The single mother of three lost her home and chance of earning some income as a daily laborer. But life took an unexpected turn. Today, with the support of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal and its partners, Purkoti has a steady income from vegetable farming. She and her children no longer go to bed hungry.

“I was cutting grass on the hill with my son when the earth started trembling. We hugged each other, crying. After some time we ran down to the village, only to find that the house had gone. I felt my life had ended,”

recounts 40-year old Purkoti. Her life has never been easy, and got even harder when her husband disappeared during Nepal’s civil war in the 1990s. “Being illiterate I had no other choice but to work as a daily laborer to feed my children. I no longer felt like eating and lost so much weight,” she says.

#### A new livelihood

With less work available after the earthquake, Purkoti no longer knew how to survive after the distribution of relief goods finished. She had received materials to build a temporary shelter and toilet, but still felt there was no future for her and the children.

That was when LWF Nepal stepped in and encouraged her to rent a piece of land for vegetable farming. The woman, looking weak after months of hunger, received seeds, tools and materials to build a simple greenhouse. In two months, she earned 8,000 Nepali Rupies (428 USD) from selling vegetables. Most people in Nepal live on 14 USD a month.

When visiting Chhampi, a village in the deep south of the Kathmandu Valley, one notices some major changes after the earthquake. As many houses sustained major damages, their occupants still live in temporary shelters, made from corrugated iron sheets. One of the schools has been transformed into a shelter area, where people live in class rooms, and keep their animals in makeshift huts. But the most surprising change can be seen in the rolling fields below the village: in between large patches of rice one finds vegetable gardens, under greenhouses made from bamboo, covered with plastic sheets. The pumpkins, cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach and cauliflowers create colorful patches in the landscape.



Saraswati Purkoti in her garden. Photo: LWF/ Lucia de Vries

#### Living on the edge

People like Purkoti are among the poorest of the poor, and were already living on the edge before the earth-

quake. They belong to Dalit or artisan communities, who despite the eradication of the caste system, tend to face discrimination in all spheres of life. Although Lalitpur district is situated inside the Kathmandu Valley, some 35,000 people – 10 percent of the population – here live below poverty levels. One third of the population have no access to safe drinking water, 16 percent of the children are malnourished. Only one in five adults can read and write. Some villages are located over 70 km from the city, and some of them are completely inaccessible in the monsoon season.

During the earthquake, 177 people in Lalitpur district lost their lives, 24 percent of the houses were destroyed, and 149 of 200 government schools collapsed.

LWF Nepal, with its implementing partner Integrated Community Development Organisation (ICDO) has been operating an integrated development program in five village development committees (VDC) of the district since 2010.

After the earthquake, with support of Amity Foundation and ACT Alliance, an emergency response was put in place in 11 villages, and the livelihood support was extended to those villages which had been destroyed. More than 2,300 families were supported with temporary shelters and toilets, solar lights, blankets and water tanks, and 5,500 people received psycho-social support.

## Prevent poverty and starvation

In Chhampi VDC alone, 810 families lost their property during the earthquake. The most vulnerable like Purkoti, received livelihood support. Social mobiliser Durga Purkoti says the help has been a lifesaver for these families: “The families are now able to feed their children and work whenever they have time. They have nutritious food to eat, and their life in general is not as hard as it used to be before. But what is most important: they have new hope,” says the social worker.

Six months after the earthquake, LWF has moved from providing emergency relief to recovery support. The organization and its partners will be providing support in building permanent shelters for the most vulnerable, including the very poor, single-headed households, the elderly and people living with disabilities. The families will also receive livelihood support in the form of seeds, tools or training. Broken water systems will be repaired, hygiene improved and psychosocial support continued.

The interventions consist of relatively small amounts and may not seem much to some. But they have the potential to prevent starvation and abject poverty among earthquake survivors, says LWF emergency response manager Sufi Mohammed Faiz. “Some cry when we hand over materials. They tell us it’s the first time anyone ever reached out to them. ‘Now we can live with more dignity and respect’, they say.”

It takes only one look at Purkoti to know that to be true.

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