

Lutheran World Information

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Lund Cathedral where the Commemoration will take place in 2016.
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Joint Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund

Pope Francis, LWF President Bishop Younan and General Secretary Junge to lead October event

GENEVA/VATICAN CITY – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Catholic Church will hold a joint ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation on 31 October 2016 in Lund, Sweden.

Pope Francis, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge will lead the Ecumenical Commemoration in cooperation with the Church of Sweden and the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm.

The joint ecumenical event will take place in the city of Lund in anticipation of the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017. It will highlight the solid ecumenical developments between Catholics and Lutherans and the joint gifts received through dialogue.

The event will include a common worship based on the recently published Catholic-Lutheran “Common Prayer” liturgical guide.

“The LWF is approaching the Reformation anniversary in a spirit of ecumenical accountability,” says LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge. “I’m carried by the profound conviction that by working towards reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics, we are working towards justice, peace and reconciliation in a world torn apart by conflict and violence.”

Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) explains further: “By



THE
LUTHERAN
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A Communion
of Churches

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A digital LWI

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) information bulletin *Lutheran World Information*, (*LWI*) has been published since 1946. During most of that time it has appeared in print format. This changed with advancement in online publishing. In recent years the individual news that make up *LWI* have first been posted on the LWF website and subsequently compiled into a magazine. Since 2011 the English version is produced only in a digital PDF format, while the German has maintained both the online and printed edition.

In today’s media environment, the goal is a fully digital version of *LWI* in English and German. The first quarter of this year will mark that change as *LWI* will be available in a digital format

only effective May 2016. At the same time we intend to improve the *LWI* email newsletter and the website in order to make news more accessible to readers around the world.

Lutheran World Information is and will continue to be an important channel for sharing the work of the LWF and its member churches.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank our devoted readers all over the world. In particular we thank our subscribers in Germany. Your continued support means a lot to us.

Further information on the *LWI* can be found on our website at www.lutheranworld.org/lwi.

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concentrating together on the centrality of the question of God and on a Christocentric approach, Lutherans and Catholics will have the possibility of an ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation, not simply in a pragmatic way, but in the deep sense of faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ.

“It is with joy and expectation that the Church of Sweden welcomes The Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church to hold the joint commemoration of the Reformation in Lund,” says Church of Sweden Archbishop Antje Jackelén. “We shall pray together with the entire ecumenical family in Sweden that the commemoration will contribute to Christian unity in our country and throughout the world.”

“The ecumenical situation in our part of the world is unique and interest-

ing. I hope that this meeting will help us look to the future so that we can be witnesses of Jesus Christ and His gospel in our secularized world,” says Anders Arborelius OCD, Bishop of the Catholic Church in Sweden.

The Lund event is part of the reception process of the study document *From Conflict to Communion*, which was published in 2013, and has since been widely distributed to Lutheran and Catholic communities. The document is the first attempt by both dialogue partners to describe together at international level the history of the Reformation and its intentions.

Earlier this year, the LWF and PCPCU sent to LWF member churches and Catholic Bishops’ Conferences a jointly prepared “Common Prayer”, which is a liturgical guide to help churches commemorate the Reformation anniversary together. It is based on the study

document *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, and features the themes of thanksgiving, repentance and commitment to common witness with the aim of expressing the gifts of the Reformation and asking forgiveness for the division which followed theological disputes.

The year 2017 will also mark 50 years of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which has yielded notable ecumenical results, of which most significant is the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). The JDDJ was signed by the LWF and the Catholic Church in 1999, and affirmed by the World Methodist Council in 2006. The declaration nullified centuries’ old disputes between Catholics and Lutherans over the basic truths of the doctrine of justification, which was at the center of the 16th century Reformation.

‘What unites us is stronger than what divides us’ Joint Commemoration in Lund is a bold step to deepen relations between Lutherans and Catholics

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge encourage LWF member churches to seek ways of deepening relations with the Catholic Church globally and at the grassroots, and to work together to promote peace and reconciliation in joint diaconal work. In this interview they elaborate on the significance of the Lund event for relations between Lutherans and Catholics globally and for joint service in the world today.

Why is the ecumenical commemoration in Lund important?

Junge: It is historic that Catholics and Lutherans are commemorating the anniversary of the Reformation together in October 2016. In Lund we come together to give thanks for the gifts of the Reformation and our 50 years of dialogue together, repent for the human suffering and disunity of the church that

followed the Reformation and commit to joint witness in the world.

We are committed to take a step towards unity. We are seeking openness and encouragement to overcome the

differences in practice and doctrine that still remain and move forward with the conviction that they can be overcome.

Younan: The dialogue between the LWF and the Pontifical Council for



The Catholic-Lutheran commemoration in Lund, Sweden, is an important opportunity for Catholics and Lutherans to remember that the reconciliation to which God calls them is for the unity of the Church of Christ and of the world. Photo: LWF/S. Gallyay

Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) has been ongoing for nearly 50 years now. An important milestone was the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999. This was very important as a step towards reconciliation. Lund is the next step. After 500 years, both churches are seeing together the faithfulness of the gospel and acknowledging that we are sent together as the body of Christ to serve in the world.

What do you mean when you speak of unity?

Junge: Lutherans and Catholics have committed together to seek visible unity, as expressed in our joint report *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. The things uniting us are more powerful than those dividing us. In the future we need to further discuss the church, the ministry, and Holy Communion or Eucharist. The steps undertaken until now, and the encouragement we will receive from our joint commemoration will give us focus for that discussion.

When we speak of unity we also speak of reconciliation, of being convinced that it is possible to overcome fragmentation and that we can and will learn from each other. We believe it is possible to heal memories and we need to do so in order for us to jointly serve our wounded and fragmented world.

Younan: The Lund event is an important opportunity for Catholics and Lutherans to reflect together that the reconciliation to which God calls us in Christ is not for ourselves but for the unity of the Church of Christ and of the world. We remember what is written in John 17:21 - “I pray that all of them may be one. so that the world may believe.” Our relationships have deepened over the years, and when people see us working together, they can trust us.

It is also important that we not only think in terms of the leadership of the LWF or of the Catholic Church. This is about the grassroots where we can be united in diakonia, and where we can

build more trust. The LWF World Service and Caritas, the diaconal arm of the Catholic Church, are serving people in need throughout the world. We should explore ways of carrying out our diaconal work together in many places such as the Middle East where the presence of Christians is threatened; in Malaysia where Christians are prohibited from using the name Allah; in Nigeria where extremists use violence against Christians; and at global level in fighting economic injustices and many forms of extremism including Islamophobia.

How was the venue chosen?

Junge: Lund was a joint decision of the LWF and the PCPCU. Lund is the birthplace of the LWF, in 1947. Catholics and Lutherans have worshipped in the Cathedral of Lund for 1,000 years.

But the Reformation anniversary will also be commemorated around the world. In Wittenberg, which holds a special place for Lutherans around the world, we have already started with the *Luthergarten*, where we aim at planting 500 trees by 2017, representing the 500 years of the Reformation. Prior to going to Lund the LWF Council will meet in Wittenberg in June this year.

Younan: Then in 2017 we will move to Windhoek, in Namibia where the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF will take place. By tracing this journey from the city of Wittenberg into the European context and then into the African region—Wittenberg to Lund and to Windhoek—we want to underline a message which we have been stressing throughout these years: the Lutheran Reformation has become a global citizen.

How does the Lund event help both partners to move forward?

Junge: Sometimes we churches deal with our past as if we didn't have any future. The significance of the Lund event is that while we remain aware about our past, we are not going to conduct our dialogues against the background of past memories and our history. I believe that this very shift to intentionally leave

conflict behind and embrace communion is going to make a difference to the way in which we will be able to talk to each other.

Younan: The action of reconciliation with the Mennonites in 2010 has inspired what we are going to do in Lund. We have experienced the power of forgiveness and reconciliation as the most encouraging and freeing power which has made us free to work, engage, connect, work together, to trust each other. We hope that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us with the Catholics to Lund and beyond.

What has been the response to the announcement of the event in Lund?

Junge: The response has been very strong and positive both from the churches and secular media. We have been saying that we are carried by a profound conviction that by working towards reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics we are contributing towards justice, peace and reconciliation in a world that is wounded because of fragmentation and sectarian violence. I interpret the strong attention this announcement has gotten as a sign of hope that reminds us there are other ways to deal with differences and conflict that lies behind us.

We are looking into ways of live streaming the event to make it accessible to people around the world, so that they can participate with their prayers, attentive listening and with their gathering internationally around the event.

Younan: We welcome the strong affirmation and endorsement received about the Lund event. We know very well that Lutheran churches around the world are at different stages when it comes to how they live and experience their relationship with the Catholic Church and the same applies for Catholic churches on the ground. Yet, knowing these realities, we want to emphasize the quest of our unity—leaving conflict behind and working work towards communion.

Ecumenical witness for peace and reconciliation in Colombia

Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism

BOGOTÁ, Colombia/GENEVA (LWI) – Global representatives of Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite churches meeting in Colombia, heard how the local churches are promoting peace and reconciliation in the country caught in a protracted 50-year civil conflict. “It was a very powerful experience to discuss the theme of discipleship in Colombia and at the same time be able to hear how the churches there are contributing to the peace process, particularly in lifting up the voice and expectations of the local people and communities affected by the violence,” said Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Hintikka and other representatives of the LWF, Mennonite World Conference and the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity participated in the fourth meeting of the International Trilateral Dialogue Commission, held 29 Febru-



The fourth meeting of the International Trilateral Dialogue Commission in Colombia was an opportunity to hear how the local churches are promoting peace and reconciliation. Photo: LWF

ary – 4 March in Bogotá, and jointly hosted by the local churches.

The Trilateral Commission discussed the topic “Baptism and incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church.” Its next and final meeting will take place in Germany, 8-14 February

2017, and will conclude with a final report to the three global bodies.

Read the Communiqué

https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/field/communiqué_trilateral_dialogue_commission.pdf

Empowering people to claim their rights

Workshop focuses on human rights work in the LWF

GENEVA (LWI) – “Our key achievements was getting information directly from the communities”, says Francesca P Traglia, Deputy Programme Coordinator with The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Myanmar. “We have been able to strengthen civil society in understanding that they have a role to play in improving the human rights situation in the country, and that they have a big influence with the government.”

The human rights situation in Myanmar is once again a topic at the UN Human Rights Council as the organization follows up on the recommendations made to the Myanmar government at the country’s Universal Periodic review (UPR) last fall.

The UPR process is a unique mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council aimed at improving the human rights situation on the ground of each of the 193 United Nations Member States. Under this mechanism, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every 4.5 years. As part of the process, non-governmental organizations are invited to submit first-hand reports, so-called parallel reports. The member states can take these findings into consideration when they present their list of recommendations to the country under review.

LWF managed to contribute the people’s voice to the global stage

by having community consultations, strengthening local civil society organizations and raising their issues on the global stage with the UN in Geneva. As they are meeting this week to follow up on the recommendations taken up on Myanmar, other LWF country programs consult on addressing human rights in their context of work as well.

“In 2011 there was not a single organization that raised issues pertaining to refugees, so LWF is filling that gap,” Jennipher Achaloi from the LWF program in Uganda says. “We see that as an opportunity for local voices to be brought to the international arena.” Like in neighboring Kenya, the country has



Community consultations in Mozambique led to a parallel report raising the issue of land rights, women's rights, the right to justice, and the rights of minorities. Photo: LWF/S.Oftadeh

been hosting a large number of refugees for a long time. Their special situation has raised issues which might not be there for the local population, such as identity of refugees born in the country, secondary education and land issues.

"Another issue that was raised by them was freedom of movement, and

how the encampment prevents them from having a livelihood," Lilian Kantai from the LWF country program in Kenya says. "Some refugees have been in the camp for over 25 years. Many of them have been born in the camp," she adds.

With workshops and consultations LWF brings local organizations to-

gether. "We just facilitate the process," Michael French, LWF program officer, says. "We are very conscious not to replace a local organization. We want to empower people to claim their rights, and support them with our connections to the global level."

Civil society organizations in Mozambique, Myanmar and Nepal have already successfully submitted parallel reports for the human rights reviews of their countries. In many others, LWF engages with local organizations to collect data and evaluate their findings as a first step on putting human rights issues into the spotlight. This work takes a careful approach and also quite a bit of encouragement in some countries, as civil society actors fear retributions from international organizations and the government for speaking up about problems. "In some places, people would be more comfortable to drill as many boreholes as possible as to demand the right to clean water," one LWF staff says.

Global Lutheran bodies discuss the journey from conflict to communion

Interaction with each other at local and global levels

WITTENBERG, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)—Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) highlighted the need to continue discussions between the two global organizations and presented ongoing work related to the Reformation anniversary at their annual meeting this year. They also discussed the document *From Conflict to Communion*. The LWF extended an invitation to the ILC to attend the Joint Ecumenical Commemoration in Lund in October this year.

"Both Lutheran bodies have a real wish to move forward in harmony and mutual respect for each other," says Rev. Dr. Fidon Mwombeki, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development, reflecting on the 24-25 February meeting, held in Wittenberg, Germany.

"Despite differences of opinion over some issues, we can still engage with each other in a respectful manner, and

this is important for our members," notes Mwombeki, attending the LWF-ILC meeting for the first time, as he



LWF and ILC representatives met at the International Lutheran Center in Wittenberg, Germany. Photo: ILC

joined the Communion Office in January 2016. “The devotions held together and informal talks around meals and break times are an important bridge-builder,” he adds.

In a communiqué following their meeting, the two partners said they had discussed the response of the ILC to the document *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. Approaches and procedures for the ILC possibly joining the *From Conflict to Communion* process were discussed.

The ILC and LWF representatives discussed how they will interact with each other locally and internationally. The ILC presented a document outlining their understanding of ecumenical dialogue. LWF sought clarification

about specific experiences and situations over which it had raised questions.

The ILC accepted LWF’s invitation for the Council’s representative to attend the Joint Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation to be held in Lund, Sweden, on 31 October 2016.

The ILC was established in 1958 as an association of those identifying themselves as confessional Lutheran church bodies that support one another and study theological issues together. Founded in 1947, the LWF communion currently has 145 member churches worldwide. Some of the Lutheran churches are affiliated to both organizations.

The meeting was attended by five participants from the LWF and four from the ILC. It was hosted by the ILC and co-chaired by LWF General Sec-

retary Rev. Dr Martin Junge and ILC Chairman Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt. The two Lutheran bodies have been in ongoing discussions since 2006 and have met five times since 2011, honoring a 2005 memorandum of understanding.

The next meeting will be held, 7-8 February 2017 in Geneva, with hermeneutics as the theme, as this subject relates to the unity of the Church. “I look forward to our next meeting, where we will spend considerable time looking at what informs the ways we approach, read and interpret Scripture for Lutherans in both the LWF and ILC,” Mwombeki adds.

Read the LWF-ILC Communiqué:
https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/201602_communique_ilc-lwf_meeting_2016_final.docx_1.pdf

We must address root causes of the refugee crisis

Strategic cooperation with faith-based organizations makes a critical difference

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge has emphasized the need to strengthen collaboration between faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other bodies in protecting refugees and addressing the root causes of displacement and forced migration.

Speaking to representatives of governments, United Nations agencies, church and other faith groups and civil society organizations at Geneva’s Ecumenical Center, Junge said establishing a binding law for asylum in Europe “won’t address the root-causes of migration.” The increasing asymmetries of larger issues including economic, climate and gender injustices compel people to move because “they want to live,” he stressed at the 18-19 January conference.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) organized the event in cooperation with the UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF; its Population Fund, UNFPA; and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The aim is to secure commitments to strengthen coordinated



“The call to protect the vulnerable is part of our deepest faith convictions,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge told participants at the Geneva conference. Photo: LWF/S. Gallay

responses to the refugee crisis in Europe, including the implementation of migration and integration policies, and the establishment of adequate mechanisms for orderly and safe refugee movements across the continent.

Junge recalled that the plight of 40 million refugees in Europe after the Second World War was one of the factors

that led to the founding of the LWF in 1947. “The call to protect the vulnerable is part of our deepest faith convictions,” he said, referring to LWF’s ongoing work. In 2015 the LWF supported 1.7 million refugees and 700,000 internally displaced people across the world.

In his address, he noted that the current refugee crisis in Europe is not

the first major one for the international community, which managed with limited resources to care for the 40 million displaced after the war. “If the international community two generations ago, with much less resources and wealth available compared to what is available today managed to contain the refugee crisis then, how come that today all seems to be so difficult, if not impossible?” he asked. He argued that what is currently at stake are the shared values of accountability, interdependence and solidarity of the one human family in the world.

The general secretary stressed the need to enhance collaboration between FBOs and UN agencies, such as the UNHCR initiative in 2012 to work with other faith actors caring for refugees. One of the outcomes of that initiative is the cooperation between the LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide in supporting refugee communities in Syria and people displaced in the 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

“It makes a difference to people on the ground to see a Christian and an Islamic organization pooling together their resources and capacities for their sake. It speaks to them, as they read the

conflicts and contexts in which they live so much along religious fault lines, to see that in our joint action we seem to be countering that fragmentation,” he said.

Response to the refugee crisis today occurs in a context marked by religious fundamentalism, radicalism and extremism across religious denominations. “We have a responsibility to claim the religious space, through words and action, to show a robust, steadfast moderation, thereby also helping to inform the public opinion in view of what religion is all about,” Junge added.

People of different faiths living side by side

Religious leaders play a critical role, Younan says

JERUSALEM (LWI) – Living and working together as people of different faith in the community is increasingly important in today’s global contexts where extremists are bent on using religion to create violence and division, says Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

Reflecting on the annual World Interfaith Harmony Week observed during the first week of February, Younan said religious leaders play a critical role of educating people to see “the image of God in the other. This will help us to live in a better world—a world of acceptance.”

The week was observed by the United Nations for the first time in 2010, following efforts by faith leaders since 2005. It helps highlight common values shared by humanity, the importance of interreligious dialogue and of mutual understanding.

Younan, who is President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), cited cooperation between LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide since 2014 as one such effort. This joint humanitarian work showed how the “cross and the crescent” supported both Syrian refugees in Jordan and people in remote areas of Nepal following the April 2015 earthquake.

World Interfaith Harmony Week seeks to tell people that religions, including the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, are about loving the good and the neighbor, Younan said.

King Abdullah II of Jordan initiated the week, with support from political and religious leaders in the country. During the period, Muslim and Christian leaders address public gatherings on what it means to live together as people of different faiths. As the ELCJHL runs schools and other institutions that enroll Christians and Muslims as part of its diaconal outreach, the interfaith week is an occasion to affirm that “we can live side by side,” Younan adds.

Younan affirmed the “Marrakesh Declaration” which was signed by a wide range of Islamic scholars from around the world at a 27 January conference in Marrakech, Morocco. Adopted in the presence of other faith leaders, including Younan, the statement calls on Muslim and other religious leaders to confront all forms of religious bigotry that promote hatred and violence.

In Marrakesh, Younan asked scholars in the Arab and Muslim worlds to promote equal citizenship with equal rights



Brass for Peace make music at the ELCJHL School of Hope, Ramallah. Photo: ELCJHL

and equal responsibilities for all citizens, regardless of religious or sectarian affiliation. Such equal citizenship embraces diversity and pluralism, he stressed.

In its 2011 Council resolutions, the LWF affirmed the importance of ongoing relationships and dialogue with other faiths, civil society, state ac-

tors and UN agencies. It encouraged its member churches to observe the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Global conflict risks escalating extremism, LWF President warns in France

Churches must strengthen robust moderation in society

PARIS, France/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, has warned while on a visit to France that globalized conflict is increasing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and threatening civil liberties in Europe and North America.

“If we are seeing a self-fulfilling prophecy of clashing civilizations, extremisms of all sorts are strengthened as identities become more polarized,” said Younan, a Palestinian who heads the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

He spoke on 4 March at the Paris headquarters of the Protestant Federation of France (FPF), during a meeting the FPF organized in association with the Friends of Sabeel France, which supports the Sabeel ecumenical liberation theology center in Jerusalem.

“In many different contexts, globalized conflict will create further strain within and between communities of Christians and Muslims who have lived next to one another for centuries,” Younan stated during a wide-ranging address on “Middle Eastern Christians, Religious Extremism, and the Threats of World War III.”

There is a growing argument in western media, Younan warned, that Da’esh, the so-called Islamic State, “somehow represents the ‘true’ face of Islam and that all ‘civilized’ groups are in battle with ‘savage’ or ‘barbaric’ Muslims.” Such arguments, he said, harm the ability of Middle East Christians to survive, and strengthen extremists on all sides, in Europe and the United States as well as the Middle East.

He called for a new, concerted effort to renew global commitment to con-



Visiting France in early March, WLF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, called for a new, concerted effort to renew global commitment to confront the destructive cultural impulses of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Photo: LWF/S. Gally

front the destructive cultural impulses of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which “are two sides of the same coin.”

Referring to the November 2015 terrorist attacks on the French capital, in which 130 people died, Younan said “we share our pain [in the Middle East] with you; we expect to receive some of your pain as well.”

Strengthen robust moderation

The Holy Land bishop said he was convinced that faith institutions, including churches, have a responsibility to strengthen political and religious moderates throughout the world, as the clearest way to diminish the appeal of extremism. “This is not a wishy-washy moderation; it is instead a robust moderation that claims the mandate of faith and defends the well-being of all people, not only Christians.”

His 4-6 March visit included meetings with the Prime Minister’s office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sunday preaching at St Thomas Church, and meeting with journalists.

Empower refugees

The Holy Land bishop highlighted the situation of the hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe.

“With many of you, we have been distressed to see such strong resistance to refugees seeking safety and security in Europe. This is not just because we know intimately the conditions they are fleeing, but because this is not the face of Europe so many of us know,” he stated.

He described as “against human rights,” the situation near the French port of Calais, where up to several

thousand people, many seeing to reach Britain, are camping out in conditions that have been denounced by churches and humanitarian organizations.

The LWF president urged churches to embrace and empower refugees through education and formation so that they may eventually return and rebuild their societ-

ies. The FPF which organized his visit, includes three LWF member churches: the Malagasy Protestant Church in France, the Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine, and the United Protestant Church of France.

A Palestinian refugee himself, Younan said he did not know if he would

have become a pastor and eventually a bishop, “had the churches not embraced me and prepared me for justice.”

Stephen Brown, a freelance journalist and communicator based in France, contributed this story.

A strong commitment to ‘leave no one behind’

Faith discourse, a positive force for gender equality in sustainable development

NEW YORK, United States/GENEVA (LWI) – As the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) begins its 60th session in New York this week, representatives of faith-based organizations including The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) are advocating for greater effort to reduce gender inequality.

The current session of the commission meets under the theme “Women’s empowerment and sustainable development.” The UN underlines gender equality as a critical factor in achieving global targets for sustainable development agreed by world leaders in September 2015.

At a side event organized by the Ecumenical Women’s platform, Rev. Cibebe Kuss, executive director of the Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia (FLD) discussed how a feminist faith discourse can help to achieve gender equality. She noted that throughout history, a predominantly male religious elite has influenced and shaped traditional interpretation of Holy Scripture. She argued for a “democratic reading” of the Bible that includes the voice of all people, integrating the perspectives of both men and women.

Kuss is among a six-person Lutheran communion delegation at the CSW session, bringing faith perspectives from the different world regions. FLD, which is the diaconal arm of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, works with over 60 local networks addressing domestic and social violence, indigenous rights and food insecurity throughout the country.

In her presentation, Kuss, a member of the LWF Council, stressed



LWF’s Maria Cristina Rendón (center) called for strong commitment by faith-based organizations to eradicate global poverty. Rendón, moderating a panel on “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development” at the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Other speakers included (left) Lopa Banerjee, UN Women; and Caterina Tino, UN Children’s Fund – UNICEF. Photo: Nick Jaech.

that one of the current struggles for feminist theologians in Brazil and other countries in Latin America is the religious power that “dominates our [women’s] bodies.” Women are increasingly excluded from participation and decision-making within faith-based organizations, she remarked.

She called for a new faith discourse on the concept of God and power that includes all perspectives and voices, especially those of women who are “left behind.” She said the LWF Gender Justice Policy and a parallel one produced by the FLD provide concrete strategies to address structural issues on access to decision-making and inclusion.

Other speakers at the event included Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, general secretary of the World Young

Women’s Christian Association. She noted that often, faith institutions play a negative role with regard to women’s rights, and urged efforts to reduce gender inequalities.

Maria Cristina Rendón, LWF program assistant for Women in Church and Society, urged faith-based organizations to respond with strong commitment to the 2030 agenda of eradicating poverty and “leave no one behind.” She noted that despite a global increase in the number of educated women and economic development, gender inequality was on the rise and women continue to occupy poor quality jobs.

Rendón reiterated the crucial role of faith organizations by highlighting the LWF, ACT Alliance and World Council of Churches joint statement

to the CSW: “As a faith-based alliance, we acknowledge that religious conviction can be harnessed as a positive force for transformational change and we celebrate the contribution toward

gender equality made by the faith sector.”

The LWF is part of a coalition of 18 church congregations and ecumenical organizations accredited with the

UN. The 60th CSW will conclude on 24 March.

Nicholas Jaech, program associate at the Lutheran Office for World Community contributed this story.

German and Tanzanian Lutheran leaders affirm mutual solidarity

Wittenberg meeting on “Reformation and One World”

WITTENBERG, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Tanzania and Germany met in Wittenberg, Germany, where they reflected on the Reformation and its global implications. Following discussions over issues of common concern, they affirmed their mutual solidarity in the Lutheran communion.

The bishops’ conference of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) and representatives of bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) had a lively encounter and intensive sharing about issues of common concern for the LWF member churches. The theme “Reformation as a Global Citizen: Reformation and One World,” guided their 4-8 March deliberations.

For Presiding Bishop Dr Frederick Shoo, heading ELCT’s delegation of six

church leaders, it became clear in the discussions that Reformation means a holistic change that takes into account the mission of the church in the world. In view of global challenges such as climate change, resource shortage or security, a radical change of human action was necessary in order to protect and care for the creation entrusted to human beings, noted Shoo, who is bishop of ELCT’s Northern Diocese.

Presiding Bishop Gerhard Ulrich, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, led the 17-member VELKD delegation comprising bishops and other church officials. The multicultural and multinational background provided the setting for inputs and lectures on a broad range of issues including the LWF policy paper “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion.” A presentation on hermeneutics explored the different

traditions of interpreting Scripture as Lutherans. Intercultural dimensions of the Reformation in Africa and the challenges currently facing Lutherans in Tanzania were discussed under the topic, “From Marangu to Wittenberg.”

Participants in the conference included among others ELCT Coastal Diocese Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa, LWF Vice-President for Africa; Württemberg Bishop Dr Frank O. July, LWF Vice-President for Central Western Europe; Dr Claudia Jahnel, coordinator for intercultural mission at Mission Eine Welt in Germany; and Rev. Rachel Axwesso, ELCT deputy secretary general for social services.

The conference included sessions with visiting leaders of LWF member churches in the Czech Republic, Denmark Finland and Sweden, and participants in the 27 February – 12 March international seminar at the LWF Center in Wittenberg.

The VELKD and ELCT leaders stated their commitment to ongoing mutual conversations and exchange. For the Tanzanian church, this meeting continued a series it started in 2014, with a goal to enriching mutual exchange with its partner churches in the Lutheran communion.

VELKD comprises seven German churches with a total membership of 9.5 million. The ELCT has more than 6.5 million members in its 24 dioceses throughout Tanzania.

The VELKD press office contributed to this article.



Meeting in Wittenberg, German and Tanzanian Lutheran church leaders stated their commitment to ongoing mutual conversations and exchange. Photo: VELKD/Gundolf Hoffert

Helping communities move toward change

Good practices and challenges in managing diaconal initiatives

GENEVA (LWI) – Responsible management of human and financial resources in institutions across the Lutheran communion is empowering communities to fight social and economic injustices and affirm churches' transformative contribution to the public sphere.

A virtual conference of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) attended by participants from 72 countries heard how church-run schools in Jerusalem offer qualitative and inclusive education; and how advocacy by Dalit women in India has improved community access to basic services. From Nigeria, a beneficiary of international study scholarship has created a local sponsorship scheme targeting even more needy students, and churches continue to mobilize community action to mitigate against the impact of climate change.

Organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), the 10 March conference included 16 video presentations on how to strengthen management capacity by providing opportunity and space for mutual learning and experience sharing among practitioners in the varied contexts of the LWF member churches. The nearly

200 persons who visited the conference website were actively engaged in mutual conversations, and over 300 questions and comments were submitted.

Clear tasks and goals

"I am so inspired by hearing your thoughtful sharing about the use of our resources in meaningful ways," remarked Rev. James San Aung, Myanmar Lutheran Church. He emphasized the need for churches to have concrete plans for theological seminary graduates so that churches can benefit from the skills gained.

Aung was responding to a presentation by LWF consultant Prof. William O. Ogara. He exemplified the "heart of diakonia" in the case of a graduate of medicine, thanks to an LWF scholarship at a time when the beneficiary was "broken, bruised, and battered." In return, the newly trained doctor offered bursaries to two children in primary school, one in secondary school, and another at the university—who eventually graduated.

In his keynote presentation on the theological dimensions of good management, DMD director Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki discussed Joseph's

dedicated accountability to Pharaoh and his commitment to manage resources (grain) for the people's sake (Genesis 41). "A responsible steward or manager focuses on others. The tasks and goals must be clear, and he or she must allow other people who are involved to execute their tasks."

Mwombeki said it was important to have "competent people" who can deliver on the tasks at hand. "The position we get is not just for us, it belongs to the church, the people and the community we serve," he added.

Access to information

Language and access to information on good practices were identified as key challenges to facilitating learning from the different actors in the delivery of social services by churches.

"Language is an important mechanism of participation for all people," remarked Cibele Kuss, who works with 60 networks of the Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia, which addresses domestic and social violence, indigenous rights and food insecurity in Brazil. She was responding to a presentation by Ms Rosilin Bock, evaluation officer, Bread for the World, Germany.

Dinesh Suna, participating from the World Council of Churches, pointed out the strong connection between planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. "These cannot be done in isolation but are interlinked as one leads to the other."

A holistic approach

From Jerusalem where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land runs primary and secondary schools, Dr Charlie Haddad talked about holistic education that concentrates on all aspects of a child's development. This includes a co-educational approach to promote



DMD staff has facilitated the LWF online conferences, aimed at highlighting diakonia as an important part of Lutheran church identity. Photo: LWF/S. Gallay

healthy gender interaction, and inclusive enrollment that reaches out to children with learning difficulties.

One of the sessions focused on Christians' concern for the global climate crisis. Dr Per Ivar Våje, Church of Norway, said "we justify our involvement from our faith, it becomes fundamental. Care for creation should

be a part of our basic value-systems." From the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana, Ms Thamesha Watson, noted that "the foremost reason we care for the environment is because God commanded us as Christians to do so. As believers, we know that this is just a temporary world and eternal paradise waits us."

The recent virtual conference builds up on two previous ones held in June 2013 and September 2014. More than 1,000 diaconal practitioners and other interested participants from all world regions have followed the global online discussions, aimed at highlighting diakonia, as an important part of Lutheran church identity.

Equal access, safety and meaningful participation

Interview with Rev. Dr Busi Suneel Bhanu on the role churches in the public space

GENEVA (LWI) – The church is a public space for people with diverse attitudes and orientations to share their ideas and resources for the wellbeing of all, says Rev. Dr Busi Suneel Bhanu, who took part in a global discussion on religion in the public space in Sigtuna, Sweden. One of the findings from the February meeting of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) study group on Lutheran Engagement in the Public Space was that equal access, safety and meaningful participation are the three aspects that make it possible for all people in society to engage in the public space.

Bhanu shares his reflections on caste-based discrimination, which recently led to violent protests by farm owners in India's northern state of Haryana.

What are some of the factors that inhibit equal access to public space in India?

India's 1.3 billion people live in a pluralistic society marked by several cultures, religions and social classes. In the name of what many describe as "ritual purity and pollution," there are more than 210 million people categorized as untouchables or Dalits—the lowest of the lowest in the caste system. Insensitivity to gender justice, the growing phenomenon of religious intolerance and increasing indifference to the hope and aspirations of the poor and other vulnerable groups are some of the factors that inhibit equal access to public space.

Whose voices and issues need to be heard more and why?



Rev. Dr Busi Suneel Bhanu (second left), other LWF member church representatives and staff, at the February meeting of the study group on Lutheran engagement in the public space, in Sigtuna, Sweden. Photo: LWF

There are three issues that stand out in the Indian context: the rights of Dalits, women's dignity and human sexuality.

Dalits: Although caste-based discrimination is outlawed in India, there are serious gaps in the implementation of this legislation. The social stratification of Dalits as untouchable means that they are ordinarily assigned the most dirty, menial and hazardous jobs, and many are subjected to forced labor. Most of them have limited access to resources and live in severe poverty. The majority of India's population—80 percent—is Hindu, and most Christians are Dalits.

In February precious lives were lost and public property was destroyed, as private land owner sub-caste groups in the northern state of Haryana demanded their rightful access and participation

in the country's economic sector. Their livelihoods are seriously threatened by diminishing agricultural yields due to recurring failure of monsoon rains. The daily labor wage in the private sector ranges from 249 to 300 rupees (USD 3.83 to 4.61), while a worker in the public sector is entitled to a daily rate of between 670 to 945 rupees (USD 10.30 to 14.53). In addition, a government appointed commission recommended a minimum monthly wage of between 7,000 to 18,000 rupees (USD 107.69 to 276.92). The agitations in Haryana were not only about the disparities of the caste system but also about the injustices of the country's economic policies.

Women's dignity: The freedom, choices, aspirations and dignity of women are eroded in India's traditional and male chauvinistic ideals of a woman:

a dutiful housekeeper, submissive to her husband and bears him children. Many still remember the 22-year old woman in Delhi who was gang raped by six men in December 2012, and later died from her injuries. The public protests over this case and widespread violence against women led to the amendment of the criminal code in 2013 to include stiff penalties for rape. Churches are called to speak out and act more for the dignity of women, who make up 51 percent of our population.

Human sexuality: In a predominantly conservative society, homosexuality is considered a taboo and thus criminalized, although some smaller sections of the society are in favor of de-criminalization. In its historic judgment of April 2014, the Supreme Court directed the

government to declare trans-genders as a ‘third gender’ and include them in the Other Backward Castes quota. By bringing them into the mainstream, the court affirmed their legal rights, including marriage, adoption, divorce, succession and inheritance.

How can churches help to improve the quality of public conversations?

The church is a public space for people with diverse attitudes and orientations to share their ideas and resources for the wellbeing of all. Church, as the fellowship of the faithful and as the Body of Christ ought to be a pro-active agency to realize God’s mission here and now.

How is this LWF study process relevant for the churches’ work in India today?

I deeply appreciate the work and witness of the LWF and its many study processes that are becoming catalysts in renewing life in our societies. The meaningful participation of vulnerable communities will enrich the life of the society to which they belong. For the Indian church, this process is a challenge and wake-up call to for a life-affirming gospel that offers hope.

LWF Council Advisor Rev. Dr Busi Suneel Bhanu is a former bishop of India’s Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church. He currently teaches religion, interfaith relations and Dalit theology at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, where he also serves as dean of the Department of Research and Doctoral Studies.

Meeting the people behind the numbers

Canadian Bishop visits Adjumani refugee camp

KAMPALA, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI)– “Someone told me: statistics are human beings with the tears dried off,” Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada says. “Having the chance to meet refugees reminds us of the individuals who make up those statistics.”

From the 18th to the 21st of January, LWF-Uganda hosted the 2015 Canadian Lutheran World Relief Global Encounter Tour. The program takes Canadian Lutherans all over the world to visit communities supported by Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR). This year, the group which included the National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, visited Adjumani Refugee Settlement in Northern Uganda which has been supported by CWLR since March 2015.

120,000 refugees, numbers rising

Adjumani District has a long history of hosting refugees from South Sudan. Everytime conflict breaks out, people flee to safety across the border, to



Bishop Susan Johnson handing out relief goods to refugees in Njumanzi reception center. Photo: LWF Uganda

return when things calm down. Currently Adjumani is experiencing one of those peak times again: 120,181 South Sudanese refugees have come here since the outbreak of violence in December 2013. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is providing support to 60% of the refugee population.

The journey of the Canadian delegation also marked the first landing at the new airstrip in Adjumani,

which was built by LWF to ease staff travel and the transport of relief goods to the camp. The airstrip was just completed in December 2015.

The group, which also consisted of Robert Granke, Executive Director of CLWR, and board member David Schulze, began their tour in Kampala where they visited one of Kampala’s slums; Bwaise 3 in the Kawempe division of Kampala. Under the ACTogether,

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) works towards increasing access to secure tenure, adequate shelter, basic services and many other building blocks required for healthy communities.

In Bwaise 3, the group engaged with locals who demonstrated how LWF income generating activities and saving schemes were improving their livelihoods. They also highlighted how negotiation and partnership skills have been instrumental in allowing them to communicate with authorities, preventing forced evictions. In his concluding remarks, CLWR Executive Director, Robert voiced that “we are deeply impressed by the creativity and hard work especially by women and moved by the courage and hope of the LWF.”

Scope of work expanded

In Adjumani, the delegation visited the Nyumanzi Transit Centre where recent arrivals spend 2 to 4 weeks as they await land allocations within the settlements. The rest of the afternoon was spent in Nyumanzi Settlement where the group witnessed the distribution of NFIs to unaccompanied minors and separated children and visited

women’s groups who have benefited from CLWR-supported agricultural trainings. “The scope of the work has expanded, you can see that,” Bishop Johnson said. “While interacting with people in the settlements, there was a sign of contentment which suggests to me that basic services are being provided.” There was also a visit to the host community, which had been provided with CLWR-supported boreholes.

“I am most impressed by the dedication of the staff. People work in really difficult conditions but their commitment to the work and the people they serve is exemplary and it makes me really proud to be part of the Lutheran World Federation,” Bishop Johnson said.

Address gap areas

The most powerful component of their trip came in form of a visit to Elegu Border Point. Managed by LWF, the Elegu border point serves as the point of entry for majority of South Sudanese refugees into Uganda. At Elegu, the group gained insightful knowledge on how new arrivals are processed upon arrival, including registration, the identification of vulnerable individuals and psycho-social support.

On the day of the visit, LWF processed 205 new arrivals, the majority of whom were women and children. While speaking with recent arrivals, the group received a firsthand account of the situation in South Sudan, with many citing hunger, violence and fear as reasons for leaving their homes.

One of the refugees who shared her story was a 14 year old girl who had lost her parents and her grandmother. She had just made the journey from Bor County all by herself and arrived the previous evening. Most likely she will be registered as an unaccompanied minor and will be cared for in a shelter if none of her relatives are found or are willing to take her in.

“At CLWR we keep on thinking on how to challenge our government to respond to the South Sudanese influx and through the good work of our team,” CLWR-director Robert Granke said. “It is my hope that this is just the beginning of more support for LWF-Uganda. We continue to look for ways in which CLWR can help address gap areas like psycho-social and agricultural extension work. My general feeling is that this is the beginning of a longterm relationship.”

Tanzania’s Presiding Bishop Shoo underlines service to the people

LWF General Secretary Junge at installation

MOSHI, Tanzania /GENEVA (LWI) – Global Lutheran church leaders, ecumenical guests, thousands of members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), representatives of other faiths and government officials attended the installation of Bishop Dr Fredrick Onael Shoo as the new ELCT Presiding Bishop.

Shoo called on the church to serve the community by collaborating with the government and resist from operating like a private company. “The church belongs to Christ whom we all serve and believe in. The mandate of the church is to serve the people in a

holistic manner—spiritually, mentally and physically,” he said.

He also encouraged the government to intensify the fight against corruption in society: “The boils need to be burst thoroughly in a systematic way and caution needs to be taken in order to be fair. We support the government in these efforts to rid the country of the corruption in society, but avoid victimizing those who are innocent.” He called for an end to the political impasse in Zanzibar, where results of the October general elections were nullified over malpractices,

and new elections are scheduled for March this year.

Tanzanian Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa and other officials represented the government at the installation. The prime minister praised religious institutions and in particular the ELCT for contribution to the country’s social services especially to the education and health sectors. He welcomed Shoo’s declaration of support in the fight against corruption and in ensuring affordable primary and secondary school education. Majaliwa promised to address concerns raised by the ELCT leader.



New presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania says the church in Tanzania needs to better serve the community. Photo: ELCT

The public voice of the church

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge preached at Shoo's installation, and encouraged the ELCT to be a church that serves without "leaving anyone behind." He underlined its contribution to the Lutheran communion, and leadership in Tanzania and the region. "People are in desperate need of signs of hope, looking up to the hills to find inspiration and encouragement to leave conflict behind and cope with their differences in peaceful ways," he said, reflecting on his sermon on Luke 15:2-7.

The general secretary thanked the ELCT for its "steadfast commitment" to the Tanganyika Christian Refugee

Service, which has cared for hundreds of thousands of refugees from East Africa's Great Lakes region since 1964. The LWF associate program also works with local communities, empowering them to improve living standards.

Junge said today's challenge of people's marginalization due to the injustices of climate change, the ever-growing gap between the rich and poor, and prevailing civil conflict, require the public voice and actions of the church at local and global levels. "Your way of journeying, witnessing and serving together matters far beyond the realm of the church," he emphasized.

Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany) spoke on behalf of

church Leaders from across the globe. "Ours is not a relationship between churches and leadership but it is a partnership between people across countries, having a unity that is expressed in a bigger picture that we are one in our Lord Jesus Christ whom we all serve," he said.

6.5 million Lutherans

Shoo, 56, was elected presiding bishop at the August 2015 ELCT General Assembly. He will continue in his leadership of the ELCT Northern Diocese, which he served as assistant bishop from 2004 until 2014 when he was elected bishop. He holds a PhD in divinity from the Augustana Divinity School in Neuendettelsau, Germany. He pursued his undergraduate studies at the ELCT Makumira Lutheran Theological College, today, Tumaini University Makumira. From 1995 until 2003, he served as Provost of Mwika Theological College in the Kilimanjaro region.

Outgoing Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa, who has led the Tanzanian church for eight years presided over the installation. He is bishop of the ELCT Eastern & Coastal Diocese, and is the LWF Vice-President for Africa.

The ELCT joined the LWF in 1964. Its 6.5 million members are organized in 24 dioceses, each led by a bishop.

(ELCT communication coordinator Ms Elizabeth Lobulu contributed to this story)

Human rights remain a challenge in Mozambique

Mixed feedback after Universal Periodic Review

GENEVA (LWI) – The government of Mozambique has accepted most of the human rights issues addressed in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is among the civil society organizations that advocated for these themes with UN member states to raise these topics during the UPR of the country.

Mozambique is still struggling with the legacy of a 16 years civil war which ended in 1992. Although it has since then made slow but steady progress in peace building and transition to democracy, respect for human rights remains a challenge especially around land rights, women's rights, right and access to justice and rights of minori-

ties such as persons with disabilities, Albinism, people living with HIV/ AIDS, and with different sexual orientations.

On 19 January, the United Nations UPR working group assessed the human rights situation in Mozambique for the second time since 2011. Present for this assessment was a high level delegation of the Mozambican govern-

ment led by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional and Religious Affairs, H.E. Mr. Abdurremane Lino de Almeida.

Women's and land rights remain a challenge

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is a unique mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council aimed at improving the human rights situation on the ground of each of the 193 United Nations Member States. Under this mechanism, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every 4.5 years. As part of the process, non-governmental organizations are invited to submit first hand reports, so-called parallel reports. The member states can take these findings into consideration when they present their list of recommendations to the country under review.

Many of these issues had been brought forward to the attention of the international community by the Mozambican Human Rights League (Liga dos Direitos Humanos, LDH). Through a series of consultation events and lobbying they made sure that civil society voice is heeded and taken into account during the review. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) contributed by conducting the first UPR workshop in Maputo and also coordinating the global UPR advocacy for the Mozambican civil society organizations.

"I am happy that most of the recommendations we advocated for were addressed by many member States today and I am hoping for my government to accept those recommendations," Dr. Sousa Goncalves Shelle, Head of Strategic Planning Department for LDH, stated after the review, at the debriefing

side event organized by the LDH, LWF and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). On the same panel, Mr. Nordine Ferrao, LWF-Mozambique Advocacy Officer, said "I am glad that the issue of land rights was raised today, although not by many States, because it is a very important issue for many Mozambicans living in rural areas".

On the other hand, Dr. Alice Mabote, founding member of the LDH, challenged the government's claim of implementing 90% of the first cycle UPR recommendations. She cited a lack of transparency in the monitoring process and a number of lingering issues from the first review such as effective implementation of women's rights to inheritance, combating discrimination against girls in education, corruption and impunity of law enforcement agencies. Moreover, Dr. Mabote expressed her concern at the lack of adequate attention being given to some of the pressing issues during the review such as the fragile peace process and electoral violence in some parts of the country.

Constructive dialogue with government

Despite the challenges, the delegation of civil society organizations from Mozambique welcomed the interactive dialogue between the government delegation and other member states as constructive. As the government of Mozambique demonstrated their cooperation with the UPR mechanism by sending a high level delegation to Geneva, civil society organizations expect to continue the dialogue for implementation with respective government departments. Throughout the review, the CSOs delegation observed a number of areas where they can collaboratively work with the government to improve human rights on the ground and accelerate implementation of some good laws.

"We look forward to following up on these recommendations," says Dr. Shelle of the LDH. "We expect the government to sit together with the CSOs and draft a transparent UPR implementation strategy and action plan that can be verified through clear indicators."



Community consultation in Mozambique prior to the UPR. Photo: LWF/ S. Oftadeh

UN human rights consultations start in Uganda

Giving communities a voice on the international stage

RWAMWANJA, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI) – Gender-based violence and poor access to education are among the major human rights

challenges for refugees in South Western Uganda. That was made clear during a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) work-

shop at the end of 2015 for local staff and partners of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) working in South Western Uganda.

The UPR process

The UPR process is a unique mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council aimed at improving the human rights situation on the ground in each of the 193 UN member states. The mechanism is used to review the human rights situation of all UN member states every four-and-a-half-years.

In the process, non-governmental organizations are encouraged to submit their findings in first hand reports, so-called parallel reports, which members can consider when presenting recommendations to the country under review. As part of a national Civil Society Stakeholders Forum in Uganda preparing a parallel report to The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), LWF is leading a “cluster” on the “rights of refugees, migrants and post-conflict communities.”

As a first step of the consultation with communities, LWF is training local staff in refugee settlements. During the workshop for staff working in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement in South Western Uganda, participants focused on the main human rights issues affecting refugees in the settlement and how to ensure that their concerns are brought to the attention of the international community and the Ugandan government through the UPR process.

“Perpetrators not prosecuted properly”

The Rwamwanja refugee settlement in the south west of Uganda is home to more than 50,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Refugees and local host communities were interviewed in different focal groups divided by gender and personal situation.

Women refugees in the settlement identified gender-based violence,

caused mainly by strong belief in traditional norms and practices, and poor access to education as major human rights challenges. It's the LWF country program in Uganda provides community-based volunteer groups with information and skills to raise awareness about child protection and sexual and gender-based violence.

“Violence against women and rape still happens a lot in the settlement and the perpetrators are not prosecuted properly,” a woman named Laetitia says. Often, evidence gets lost on the way or victims fear to report to the authorities. Refugees have no trust in the police and the official system in the settlement, she adds. “Girls are especially vulnerable. They get raped/defiled and don't say anything about it,” her neighbor Roussi explains. “When they become pregnant, they try to abort the child.” Traditional structures often create additional risk for the women after the crime itself, as the victims of the crime tend to get blamed by the family.

Men and women alike cited the lack of vocational training opportunities in

the Rwamwanja settlement and the long distances children have to walk to school as issues of concern. Even when children are able to attend school, there are sometimes as many as 200 pupils in a single class, which has a serious impact on the quality of education.

Besides gender based violence and education, one of the main issues mentioned was access to land. Like in many other refugee settlements, disputes over land and access to resources also create tensions among refugees and hosts, intimidation and protection issues.

The LWF Advocacy Officer in Kampala has been conducting similar UPR workshops in the Adjumani settlement and the post-conflict districts of Pader and Kitgum in Northern Uganda.

The UN Human Rights Council reviewed Uganda for the first time in October 2011 and the country is set to be reviewed for its second time in October 2016

A contribution by Saname Oftadeh and Moyette Marrett/ LWF.



Young women in Rwamwanja settlement were one of the focal groups in the consultations. Photo: LWF/S. Oftadeh

Young advocates for peace and justice

Indonesia Lutheran youth urged to work for justice

PEMATANGSIANTAR, Indonesia (LWI) – Lutheran youth in Indonesia want church-

es to utilize the educational skills, creativity and technological aptitude of

young people to enhance the work of the church and its sustainability.



Young Lutherans in Indonesia desire greater participation and visibility in church life.
Photo: LWF/ Fernando Sihotang

More than 110 young adults from various churches, universities and professions attending a youth conference organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Indonesia National Committee called for greater participation and visibility in church life, saying they want to be empowered for leadership.

At the 25-28 February meeting in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra, representatives of the 13 LWF member churches in Indonesia said their involvement in church life was especially important in view of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The conference theme was “Here I Stand,” which is one of Luther’s best known phrases.

“Churches do not want to lose the young people as they have the potential for bringing change in church and society,” said Rev. Basa Hutabarat, executive secretary of the LWF national committee.

This was the first national conference organized by the LWF committee with a focus on youth involvement in the Reformation anniversary. The aim was to explore the anniversary theme “Liberated by God’s grace” and its sub-themes in the Indonesian context, and to encourage young adults to be advocates for peace and justice.

Rev. Dr Martongo Sitinjak of the Batak Christian Protestant Church explored the theme from a biblical

perspective. Dr Asimayanti Siahaan, University of North Sumatra, urged the young people to hold on to their faith and spirituality in a multi-cultural and multi religious society. Other speakers included Rev. Dr Phillip Baker, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who elaborated the theme “Here I Stand” in terms of the critical action needed in Indonesia.

They identified climate justice as a common issue for advocacy and action under the anniversary sub-theme, “Creation: not for sale.” They heard how large-scale deforestation for commercial palm oil production in Indonesia results in the loss of nearly 1.1 million hectares of forest per year, and an increase in CO2 emissions from palm trees (Ministry of Forestry).

The increasing scramble for land directly violates the rights of indigenous people who are forced to give up huge tracts of forests, as they are rarely consulted by the local authorities investors are invited to develop the land. The LWF national committee supports advocacy for indigenous people’s land rights in Indonesia.

There are 6.5 million Lutherans in Indonesia, out of whom nearly 25 percent are youth aged between 16 and 30 years.

A contribution by Fernando Sihotang, LWF Indonesia National Committee.

It is life threatening – end it now

Lutheran churches support new strategy to fight FGM

NAIROBI, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI) – “End it now” is the title of the graphic, chilling but real video. In the final scene a five-year old girl is wailing helplessly as her guardian “mothers and aunts” firmly pin her onto a floor mat. The role of the women is to ensure she goes through the important rite of a girl’s passage into this community—female genital mutilation (FGM) or the women’s cut. The chief circumciser uses a razor blade to do the “cut” and then stitches up the whimpering child,

who is subsequently dressed in a loose garment and left to rest on a thin mattress.

“I feel that I have failed all the girls and women who have suffered this terrible experience because I was not aware of what was going on,” said Rev. Judith Mbabazi from Uganda, one of the coordinators of women’s desks from churches of the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA), when she watched the video clip for the first time.

The video was developed to advocate against FGM was shown at a LUCCEA workshop, held 22-28 February in Nairobi, Kenya. Ms Miriam Daniel Zere from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea could relate to what she had watched. The practice is widespread in her country, and nearly 90 percent of young women and children are mutilated in this way. “It is very common in my country. I was a nurse and midwife for many years and I attended

to many women who had gone through it,” she said.

More than 200 million women and girls

More than 200 million girls and women today have undergone FGM in 30 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia, according to the World Health Organization. The practice, which includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, has no health benefits for girls and women, and is a violation of their human rights.

FGM procedures can cause severe bleeding and urinary problems, and later infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths.

Outlawed but still practiced

In Kenya, where the practice is outlawed, “it is still practiced by all the 42 ethnic groups except three,” noted Ms Judith Nyaata of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. “Sometimes women who escaped the practice in childhood are cut just before giving birth after midwives realize that they had not gone through it,” she added.

Solidarity with victims

FGM prevalence in the East and Central African region varies from country to country. Among those represented at the workshop, Eritrea has the highest rate at 89%; Ethiopia, 74%; Kenya, 27%; Tanzania, 15%; Uganda, 1%; while Madagascar and Rwanda are below one percent. Participants also came from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Madagascar has no indigenous FGM practices or similar rites for girls.



Representatives of Lutheran churches in East and Central Africa expressed solidarity with over 200 million women and girls globally who have suffered female genital mutilation. Photo: LWF/Afram Pete

“This is the first time I have seen what it involves,” said Ms Totomare Femanjafy of the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

A new approach against FGM

The main objective of the training-of-trainers workshop was to move away from the decades-old approach of awareness raising by going around the villages pleading with the mothers, girls themselves and community leaders to stop the practice without graphically showing the negative effects it has on women’s lives.

“The drive now is toward adopting a new strategy of engaging the entire community to analyze the problem in its totality and see how it’s connected to things that previously seemed unrelated,” said Dr Grace Okong’o, one of the facilitators. “This will help churches and communities to develop concrete action plans to stop the practice”.

Okong’o, a gender expert accompanied by a team from the Hope Foundation for African Women, introduced

participants to strategies on how to engage with communities to discuss and act on issues affecting them such as FGM.

LWF advocacy

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria supported the *training of trainers* workshop which was attended by 30 participants from nine countries. FGM is one of the human rights advocacy issues for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) through its regional and global desks, including the Women in Church and Society program.

The women’s desk coordinators declared their solidarity with women globally who have suffered grievous harm as a result of FGM. They pledged to share the workshop’s action plan with the leadership of LUCCEA, which includes eight LWF member churches and the not yet-LWF affiliated Ugandan church.

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

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Humanitarian crisis in Burundi

900,000 people severely affected by post-election violence

BUJUMBURA, Burundi/ GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with the ACT alliance is urgently asking for support to people in Burundi.

Burundi has been suffering from civil unrest since April 2015, when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced to be seeking a 3rd presidential term. Mass protests and a failed coup led to the death of many civilians and even more were internally displaced. As the conflict spiraled out of control and took on an ethnic dimension, new patterns of human rights violations have emerged including cases of sexual violence, increased disappearances and torture. International observers fear a repeat of the Rwanda genocide.

After almost 11 months of instability, the humanitarian impact of the Burundian crisis is felt especially by women and children. Estimates indicate more than 30,000 people are displaced within the country, and almost half a million refugees have fled to neighboring Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. People continue to flee to neighboring countries and currently 1,000 refugees arrive there each day.

Government services have broken down, 900,000 people are severely affected by food shortages and 150,000 children are malnourished. The current crisis has been exacerbated by severe El Nino related flooding that is destroying crops and infrastructure that the Burundi government, working

on a budget of 54% of previous years will find it difficult to respond. An estimated 30,000 people have been affected by floods and landslides.

Health services are strained as staff has been displaced and essential medication is in limited supply. Water and sanitation system are under pressure, heightening the risk of disease. Four out of five displaced people in Burundi have to travel half a kilometer or more to access clean water. Almost all of them do not have enough to eat.

“The people of Burundi are in urgent need of life-saving activities. They need safety, food, health services, water, sanitation, shelter and other relief goods,” LWF Country Representative Jesse Kamstra says. “We to urge you to assist us in soliciting support for Burundi.”

LWF plans to support the most deeply affected families with core relief items and cash grants, and to set up peace-building and social cohesion initiatives. An ACT Alert has been issued to raise donations for the people of Burundi.

Working in Burundi since 2006, LWF works towards promoting sustainable community development through human rights, leadership development and livelihoods. Our flagship projects, CEP and Haguruka continue to yield favorable results for the communities they serve.



Thousands of people have been displaced by the Burundi crisis. These people fled to safety in Tanzania.
Photo: LWF

Renewed fighting causes refugee influx to Uganda

More than 5,000 new arrivals in 2016

PAKELE, Uganda/ GENEVA (LWI) – Renewed fighting in South Sudan has caused a new influx of refugees into neighboring Uganda.

“Since the beginning of January 2016, Uganda has been experiencing a sig-

nificant increase in the influx of South Sudanese refugees. Since the beginning of the year the Elegu refugee collection point, the main entry for refugees into Uganda, has registered 5,026 new arrivals,” Jesse Kamstra, Representative of The

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Program in Uganda, says. UN estimates that about 500 people from Uganda cross the border in Northern Uganda each day.

These recent arrivals join 172,411 South Sudanese refugees who arrived

since December 2013, when conflict broke out in South Sudan. Currently South Sudanese refugees in Uganda are hosted in the districts of Arua with 18,117, Adjumani: 104,857, Kiryandongo: 42,783, and 7,792 residing in Kampala according to data by the UN refugee agency UNHCR on 1 December 2015.

LWF has been assisting refugees in Adjumani district since the crisis started in 2013. In Addition to receiving them in Elegu border point, LWF transport them to Nyumanzi reception center and provides them with the most needed core relief items, LWF also drilled boreholes and supplies water through water-trucking at the collection point. As a mid-term perspective, LWF intervention aims to make refugees self-sufficient and to build their resilience

by promoting livelihoods, general protection, and action against sexual and gender-based violence, psychosocial support, child protection and community services.

Ongoing violence despite peace agreement

Despite the recent August 2015 peace agreement which was signed in South Sudan to end 21 months of violent conflict, the influx into Uganda still continues in 2016. The majority of the refugees are coming from Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei and Upper Nile States.

The influx is reportedly triggered by the current hunger situation due to poor harvest and a significant devaluation of South Sudanese pounds

which has led to high cost of living for the already vulnerable population, unexplained disappearance of relatives and next of kins, several splinter rebel groups terrorizing civilians and general spread of fear due to the uncertainty around the entire peace process.

“It is already reported that 14 senior ministers lost their jobs in the newly to be constituted transitional government,” LWF Country Representative Kamstra says. “This has created more fear because of the perceived negative reactions from these disgruntled groups.”

The Government of Uganda’s progressive refugee policy allocates land to refugees with the aim of integrating them into local communities and service provisions. All South Sudanese new arrivals are granted refugee status on a prima facie basis, and issued household attestation letters after biometric registration.

“Local government capacity in responding to the needs created by the influx is stretched. This situation is bound to be exacerbated by the recent peak in new arrivals,” Kamstra says. This is especially true for Maaji settlement, which was just opened in late 2015 and will soon be full. “However, a joint initiative from Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR and partners proposes a plan to establish other settlement/s to accommodate more persons of concerns in the coming months,” Kamstra says. “More support is needed to manage this crisis.”



A refugee hold images of family members killed in the South Sudan conflict, Nyumanzi reception center, Adjumani, Uganda. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

10 million Ethiopians need emergency aid

LWF appeals for emergency assistance

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – More than ten million people in Ethiopia are in danger of starvation as the country faces the worst drought in 30 years.

The United Nations says 10.2 million need food assistance.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is supporting affected communities in several states in the country.

“This is the worst I have seen,” said Woday Gelaye, 75, who has been

farming in this area for over 60 years. “Because of the recurrent drought and the heavy, short rainy season even this chickpea crop has been put back.” Extending his hand he shows a few tiny chickpea pulses. The seeds did not yield enough to feed his family. The farmer had to sell his ox to buy additional food for his wife, eight children and four grandchildren. Now he no longer has the animal to plough

his other two small fields – and nothing left to sell.

Like him, millions of Ethiopian farmers have reached the end of their energy and resources. “Since both the failed spring and summer rains – called *belg* and *meher* in Ethiopia – in 2015, over 10.2 million Ethiopians are in need of emergency aid,” LWF Country Representative Sophia Gebreyes says. “The situation is very critical. The *belg* rainy

season should be starting soon, but the usual signs of its arrival are missing.”

The current emerging food security crisis in Ethiopia is the result of the pre-El Niño failure of the spring rains and the El Niño induced late onset, erratic and early cessation of the main summer rains. Nearly 6 million of the people affected are children. 400,000 livestock deaths were reported so far, an estimated 2 million Ethiopians are without safe drinking water.

LWF supports farmers

LWF Ethiopia has been working in Ethiopia for 43 years and is operating in many of the areas where the drought has hit people the hardest. In Lalibela district, LWF supports farmers with a Food Security and Livelihood project. In Bale they have been conducting a resilience project.

Mr Gelaye together with other farmers has benefitted from the LWF Emergency Seed program. After the failure of his crops earlier in the season the LWF provided him with 31kg of seeds. In 2014, LWF launched the Food Security Project supported by CLWR, which is teaching farmers agricultural techniques to improve the harvest and deal with climate change. One of the



Woday Gelaye shows the meager chickpea harvest. He relies on food aid to feed his family.
Photo: LWF/ Hannah Mornement

people participating from the start is Shamble, who was now able to harvest his first crop and even sell some surplus. “Farmers who have been part of these projects and who used the irrigation techniques taught there have been dealing much better with the drought than others. Projects like these can cushion people even in extremely difficult times like the El Niño year,” LWF Country representative Gebreyes says.

While the project has helped its more than 4,600 beneficiaries to prepare for the current emergency, much more help will be needed to avert the

impending catastrophe. Together with the ACT Alliance LWF Ethiopia has launched an appeal to support people in Ethiopia with initiatives to close food and income gaps such as the “cash for work” program which will be implemented in four regions, so-called hotspots in East Hararghe.

“People and livestock are on the brink of starvation,” LWF Country representative Sophia Gebreyes warns. “If it does not rain, the situation will be catastrophic.”

Hannah Mornement contributed to this story.

Preparing for leadership

Life-skills and vocational training for young refugees in Mauritania

MBERRA, Mauritania/ GENEVA (LWI) – “It’s difficult to say how we pass our time in the camp. You wake up and you wonder what to do all day,” Ag Mohamed, 19, says. “There is nothing for us to do here.”

Ag Mohamed is a refugee. He came to Mauritania two years ago, after fleeing the conflict in Northern Mali. In the M’berra refugee camp, 50 kilometers from the Malian border, he finished his high school diploma, or baccalaureat, but he has no possibility to continue his studies and go to university in his present situation. M’berra camp, home to 50,000 refugees, lies

in the Sahel region, literally in the desert. The next human settlement, a small town named Bassikounou, is 18 kilometers away. People here live off raising livestock. There is not enough water and grazing grounds for everyone though, and many refugees cannot continue their traditional way of life. The young people in the camp are left with nothing to do.

Training in life skills

Because of this the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), responsible for camp

management in M’berra through an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), decided to start a livelihoods program targeting the young men and women who spend the formative years of their lives in the uncertainty of a refugee camp. An initial group of 250 now receives training in life skills and community development. In turn each of them will train five other young people.

Their education centers on human rights, child protection and how to participate in community life. Later 250 young people out of the 1,500

youth trained in community building will be selected for vocational training and receive cash grants to set up a business. The goal of the project is to build the community and help them take responsibility in society as much as actually learning a craft. "We prepare them to take on leadership roles after their future return to Mali," LWF camp manager Demba Niang says.

Give something back

This is the first time that young people are the focus of such a project. "We have lots of trainings of this type in M'berra, but we normally work with elders and traditional leaders. Youth are not represented," says camp manager Demba. "The idea is to engage the youth in the camp to give something back and to think about the community."

For some of them this comes quite naturally. Mariam Minte Assalik, 19, the group's vice-president, is eager to contribute. In a patriarchal society which values experience and age, it is a challenge for a young woman to pursue these dreams. "Culturally, women in our community have no right to work, but we can't stay without anything to do in the camp" she says.

Mariam has a diploma, but stopped studying because of the war. Then she got married. Now she wants to show her husband that she can contribute to the family income as well. "If a woman is working, she is helping everyone. The entire family will develop, it will impact their surroundings and eventually the community," Mariam says. Looking at the determined young woman, there is no doubt she will at least try to overcome the perceived double stigma of being young and female.

Keep young men out of trouble

Promoting women's rights and empowering girls in the camp is one objective of the project. The other is to keep young men out of trouble. Due to the scarce resources, relations between refugees and hosts are strained. When something happens in Bassikounou, the locals are quick to blame the young people of the camp. "By training them and keeping them occupied, we also keep stability," camp manager Demba says.

His greatest concern is to protect them from recruitment into militia. "Armed groups are a problem in the entire Sahel," Demba says. "Our young people could become a target." Although the Mauritanian police and military maintain strict border control and even confiscate hunting weapons from anyone entering the country, Demba knows that the only chance to keep young people from joining armed groups is to give them a choice.

Hope for the future

"In Mali, our dreams were different, but for the moment we are living here,"

says Ag Mohamed. The 19-year-old has taken an interest in the rights of children. The human rights workshop has made him aware of abuses, now he wants to advocate for children while in the camp, and pursue his studies when he returns to Mali. Mariam dreams of becoming a nurse in maternity care. Others talk of becoming doctors and lawyers, opening shops and being mechanics.

While many of the young people hope to be selected for vocational training, open a business and earn the money to marry and have a family, for now Ag Mohamed also sees the value of the life skills training that everybody receives. "No matter what we will do after, I want to continue with this group. We have so many ideas, and now we have learned to express them," he says.

"The future is in our hand. We know that."

The project is supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg.



Young people in Mberra camp. They usually meet 3-4 days a week. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

Conditions for Syrian refugees worsen

NGO call for better protection and education

GENEVA (LWI) – Protection of civilians, livelihood assistance and education

are the most pressing needs for Syrian refugees. This is the finding of a call to

action by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and 41 humanitarian orga-



A Syrian family living in an unfinished building in Al Mafraq. Many refugees have to trade their food vouchers to pay the rent. Photo: LWF/ M. Renaux

nizations who are assisting refugees from Syria. In an NGO Position paper (LINK) they are calling upon donors to put additional funding into these areas.

“Warring parties continue to violate UN Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law by deliberately and wantonly attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure, including homes, markets, schools and hospitals (...)” the initial statement of the paper reads.

Exploitation, child marriage and return to the war zone

The Position paper has been published on the occasion of the Supporting Syria and the Region conference on 4 February 2016 in London. The London conference also takes place between the first and second round of Syria peace talks in Geneva. The conference is co-hosted

by the UK, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations. It aims to bring together world leaders from around the globe, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and civil society to raise money for Syrian refugees, improve the assistance to victims of the civil war in country and create education and job opportunities for those sheltered in countries outside Syria.

In clear terms, the paper points out the situation of the refugees in the fifth year of conflict, and the impending humanitarian catastrophe. Having exhausted their financial reserves, a lack of funding forces refugees to “accept exploitative work, driving impoverished parents to send their children into exploitative child labor, forcing desperate women and girls into survival sex and early marriage, and leading men, women and children to return to Syria, or try to reach Europe through informal channels, at great risk to their lives,” the position paper further explains.

Responsibility of hosts

In the paper the 42 NGOs call upon host countries to reform visa and asylum procedures, increase refugee’s access to education and lift restrictions on working for refugees, to enable them to “benefit themselves and those who have welcomed them”.

It draws special attention to the protection and the needs of vulnerable groups such as elderly, people with disabilities, women and children. It also lists protection concerns to male children and young men, such as forced conscription, particular threats to their safety, and the greater likelihood of being refused asylum and resettlement.

The LWF is supporting Syrian refugees in Jordan who are living in Za’atari camp, the surrounding host community in Al Mafraq as well as in other cities such as Amman with food, relief goods, shelter, water and sanitation and psychosocial care.

“LWF Jordan is in the process of launching two 4-year projects that aim at improved learning environments for refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in primary and secondary education,” says Caroline Tveoy, LWF Program Officer for Jordan. “While we commend the host government for enabling access to education for the more than 650,000 registered refugees in the country, we call for more to be done to open up opportunities for vocational training, employment of refugees in income generation schemes and formalization of the position of refugees currently working on an illegal basis”.

Five years conflict in Syria

LWF ‘Peace Oasis’ cares for children traumatized by war and displacement

AL MAFRAQ, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI)– “I was very sad to leave my country, but we came here looking for safety,” 11-year-old Layla* says. “We thought going away was only for three months. We didn’t take anything, as the journey was long and dangerous, and now

we are not able to go back.” Layla is one of the 300 children and youth currently taking part in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) psychosocial support program in the Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan. In its psychosocial support center, the “Peace

Oasis”, LWF works with children and youth between the ages of seven and 18 years. The course includes additional programs that teach refugees to cope with life in a refugee camp aimed at parents and the elderly.



One half of all refugees at the Za'atari Camp are children. Three brothers from a Syrian family sit, hoping for an end to the conflict. Photo: LWF/Maria de la Guardia

“Many children were subjected to violence in Syria, and now have a very difficult life in the camp,” Rachel Luce, LWF Country Director in Jordan, says. “We work with them on communication skills, stress management, conflict resolution and peace. The main objective is to give them means to cope with their situation in the camp.”

Post-traumatic stress and nightmares

The Za'atari refugee camp was established in 2012. One of the largest refugee camps in the world, it is home to about 80,000 Syrian refugees who fled the civil war in their home country. As the conflict in going into its sixth year, the refugees waiting in the desert have reached their limits.

“The children have trouble sleeping, anxiety and eating disorders. Many of them show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. We see depressed children, feelings of isolation and in others, aggression,” Maria de la Guardia, LWF communications consultant

says. The story of Layla and her family is but one of many similar that the LWF staff in the camp encounter every day.

In the early days of the Syrian civil war, Layla lost her father. He worked for the military and did not return from work one day. To this day, the family does not know what happened to him. “Some people told me he had died, some say he was in prison,” her mother Maryam says. She suddenly had to care for 11 children all by herself.

“It was not easy for the children to lose their father. He was a good man whom they loved and respected,” she says. “For two years, one of my daughters was in shock and did not talk to anyone. She would cry all the time, asking where he was. Everyone was nervous, everyone was anxious. The children were angry, fighting among themselves.”

A new life with old baggage

Despite the conflict, the family stayed in Syria after the father's disappearance, hoping he would come back. As the situation became worse, they moved

around, trying to avoid the fighting. “I tried to find a safe place, but it was difficult,” Maryam recalls. “Many bombs, many rockets. I saw five men die right in front of me.” Eventually the family decided to leave. It was a difficult and long journey as Maryam did not want to risk the usual smuggler routes with her teenage daughters. “I was looking for safety,” she says.

The family found a new home in Za'atari camp, but for the children, their home in Syria and the Syrian civil war are still part of everyday life. They keep in contact with their friends who remained in Syria through social media. “When I see their pictures, I feel bad, and when I talk to them I want to go back” 11-year old Layla says. “They all live in bad conditions, but I should be there. My friends tell me of shootings and bombings. I feel guilty and I wonder why I am here and they must endure all of that.”

Hope for the future

Layla and her siblings are taking part in the LWF program now. She herself already finds that she feels better after attending a few sessions. “Many things make me angry all the time,” she says. “It is easy to become upset, to scream and shout. I hope the course helps me to learn how to manage my anger.” Sometimes she tries to imagine the life of other children, who are lucky to live in peace. “Those children live in good conditions, but before the crisis, we did too,” she says. “Our life was happy. We were no different.”

The LWF Peace Oasis is funded by CLWR – Canadian Lutheran World Relief and Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC), and members of the ACT Alliance.

With contributions by Maria de la Guardia, LWF Jordan. All names in the story have been changed.

Nepal: Healing unseen wounds

Psychosocial support for earthquake survivors

GHUSEL, Nepal/ GENEVA (LWI) – It is Saturday morning in Ghusel, a village

almost completely destroyed by the earthquake that struck Nepal half a

year ago. From the village square the sound of a harmonium can be heard.

Soon a *tabla* (drum), tambourine and Nepali drum join in. Then some voices pick up the tune, and a religious hymn echoes across the hills of Lalitpur district.

Krishna Kumari Mahat is one of the 50-odd villagers who gather here once or twice a week to sing devotional songs. “I used to listen to *bhajans* (devotional songs) on the radio. Singing them myself with my friends makes me proud and happy. My favorite ones are those for Lord Krishna. I just wished I could do this every day,” she says.

Total destruction

In Ghusel the physical impact of the earthquake is still visible. All but five of the 355 houses were reduced to rubble or sustained major damage. Villagers live in makeshift shelters, built with pieces of wood from their former houses, bamboo and tarpaulins. Five people died and nine sustained major injuries.

The unseen effects of the disaster are harder to spot. The massive destruction that took place on a sunny Saturday afternoon last April has left scars that will take time and sometimes professional support to heal.

Among the reported psychological impacts of earthquakes are post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, anxiety attacks and depression. Most people who experience acute stress and ongoing fear and uncertainty due to recurring aftershocks will recover naturally over time. A small number, however, will suffer ongoing psychological distress and will need support.

Take people’s minds of the disaster

Communal gatherings like the ones in Ghusel are an important form of intervention by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal. LWF is conducting a psycho-social support program in five

districts affected by the earthquake. The program consists of community-based intervention, workshops and referrals for medical aid.

Community-based interventions aim to take people’s minds off the earthquake – and the many problems they have faced since – and to express themselves more freely. Through recreational activities aimed at different age groups, sharing and expression is encouraged.

The elderly generally prefer singing and are provided with musical instruments. For children art and music activities in the local school are offered. Among the young people, sports is the most popular. Women’s groups receive support to organize singing competitions.

Ghusel school was one of the many buildings that collapsed during the earthquake. The more than 200 students from the village now study in temporary class rooms, built with bamboo and tin sheets. The buildings are dark and cold but on Fridays the atmosphere is lifted with a different kind of curriculum.

Since LWF Nepal provided crayons and paper, students gather at the end of the week to draw. Most want to take their drawing home, to show to their parents, but some agree for their art to be put on the tin sheet walls of the

school. The smaller children are led to sing fun songs, accompanied with gestures to emphasize the words. The songs evoke many smiles, and much clapping.

Mental health surrounded by taboos

“When we think of psychosocial support we usually only think of counselling,” says Pradeep Subedi, the LWF psychosocial counselor based in Lalitpur district. “But in a country like Nepal, where mental health is still surrounded by taboos, it makes sense to embed it in community activities.”

Subedi knows first-hand about mental problems. He has been suffering from hemophobia or an extreme fear of blood since childhood. “I considered myself a failure until I looked up my symptoms on the internet and realized I share my condition with millions of people around the world.” Subedi changed his studies to psychology and joined the LWF program in Nepal after the earthquake.

LWF organizes workshops for village leaders including teachers, volunteer health workers, traditional healers and youth leaders, introducing themes like mental health and the importance of professional support. Subedi has referred five people from Ghusel and



Posters, like the one held by counselor Pradeep Subedi, show the psychological impact of earthquakes on children. Photo: LWF/Lucia de Vries

a total of 65 from his district for professional support. "That might sound like few, and it is indeed hard to measure the impact of our work," he says. "But from the feedback of the people we conclude that the program is helping earthquake victims recognize and deal with psychological distress."

Interventions such as these are backed up by a national radio program called Bhandai Sundai (Talking and Listening) which provides earthquake

survivors an opportunity to ask questions and share their grievances, fears, trauma and concerns on air.

Uniting the village

After the singing workshop, Krishna Kumari returns to her makeshift shelter. "I am very worried about our house, how and when we will rebuild it, if ever," she says. "I also worry about the cold, and my grandchildren's education.

But when I sing I forget my worries for a moment. I feel united with the other villagers, who all experienced the same thing. The village had to wait for 15 years to be able to unite and sing *bhajans*. It's one good thing that came out of the earthquake."

"Come back next time," she adds, "I will be much better by then."

Contribution by LWF Correspondent Lucia de Vries, Nepal

Special care for elderly refugees

Being old is not easy, Hassan can attest to that. "You to need struggle each day to feed your family" he says. The refugee from Somalia is 100 years old and lives in Section D Block 9 in Kambioos Refugee Camp, one of the five camps that make up the Dadaab camp complex. When he came to Dadaab in 1992, he was 77 years old.

Hassan and his family fled from Kismayu, Somalia, in 1992 soon after war broke out. They crossed the border to Kenya to seek refuge, and he and his family were accorded refugee status by the UNHCR and the Kenyan Government. Now he lives with his sister, son and grandchildren in an extended family of 10 people.

When asked about going back to Kismayu, his original home, he says "No. I will rather die here than go back. My son listens to radio news every evening and tells me all about the insecurity in Somalia."

Like many elderly persons, Hassan is facing challenges in life. He is bedridden, almost blind on one eye and has difficulty hearing. He is also starting to suffer from pressure sores. Because he has lost almost all his teeth, he cannot eat solid food anymore and mostly drinks milk. The food provided to refugees by the World Food Program (WFP) is not appropriate for his condition and he says it lacks essential nutrients for elderly.

In Kambioos, Hassan is among the many elderly whom The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Kenya program has supported with material items and psychosocial sessions. Together with 81



Hassan and his carer in their shelter at the Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya. The LWF works to ease the burden for elderly in Dadaab. Photo: LWF Kenya

other elderly persons, he has been provided with high density mattresses, kitchen sets and a solar lamp. He has also been enrolled in a voucher program for purchase of fresh food. "This is a God sent, the voucher came at a time where I needed the most," Hassan says.

LWF is providing material and psychosocial aid to vulnerable people in the Dadaab refugee settlement. Interventions include food vouchers, relief goods and psychosocial support.

By Omar Dahir, LWF social worker and Vitalis Koskei, LWF head of community services.

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