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## Migration and Refugee Movements Worldwide

### Address of LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge

#### At an event on the refugee situation, hosted by the Confederation of Protestant Churches in Lower Saxony for Parliamentarians

*14 April 2016, Hanover, Germany*

From time immemorial people have had to suffer expulsion and been forced to flee. We find a classic example in chapter three of the first book in the Bible and can reflect on this primordial experience in the story of Adam and Eve being expelled from paradise. The sacred scriptures of other religions also take up the issue and, as in the Christian tradition, conclude that people who have had to flee should be protected. “Welcoming the Stranger” is the title of an interfaith statement that was also signed by the Lutheran World Federation in 2013, and confirms this basic consensus of the religions.<sup>1</sup>

This basic consensus has probably contributed to refugee protection finding its way into a convention adopted as binding by the international community and thus being included among the recognized human rights.<sup>2</sup> Human rights are, and remain, the common language of the human family and transcend religious boundaries. Thanks to human rights, we can find a common denominator for global challenges and tackle them together. One of the great contributions by Martin Luther was to relate the two areas – the religious and the secular. That is the ground on which I, too, stand, as I speak to you today.

Further, I will focus on a *global, worldwide* perspective, which is what you expect of me. This perspective is the specific contribution that I can make this evening to your already intensive political and social discussion here in Lower Saxony.

Let me first illustrate this global perspective with a few facts and figures. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 60 million refugees

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming\\_the\\_Stranger.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming_the_Stranger.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Status of Refugees (“Geneva Convention”), 1951.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

worldwide – internally displaced persons, refugees or asylum seekers counted altogether.<sup>3</sup> Never have so many people been fleeing, not even after World War II, when there were about 50 million displaced persons.

There has been enough detailed information in the last few weeks about the breakdown of the 60 million refugees worldwide. What is important for my following remarks is that of the 60 million people about 59 million have found refuge outside Europe, or live there at present.

Another figure is informative here: while 20 years ago approx. 80 percent of refugees were fleeing the consequences of natural disasters and about 20 percent from conflicts and violence, this ratio is reversed today: 80 percent of refugees are currently fleeing war, violence and conflicts.<sup>4</sup> This statistic makes it unmistakably clear where a systemic tackling of the causes has to start.

Referring to the number of refugees straight after the Second World War brings me back to the time the Lutheran World Foundation (LWF) was founded. The situation after 1945, and the new geopolitical division of Europe resulting in massive migration and expulsion, was one of the main reasons why the LWF was founded in 1947. Lutheran churches worldwide joined in confronting the challenge of migration and expulsion together. They understood this as a tangible expression of Christian responsibility.

Today the LWF is the fifth biggest partner of the UNHCR and is supporting 2.3 million refugees worldwide. We work today in Dadaab in Kenya, and in Erbil in North Iraq. We are active in Za'atari (Jordan), where we have supported Syrian refugees for years. We do this on behalf of our 145 member churches worldwide, including the 11 member churches in Germany. As stated at the beginning, our action is profoundly rooted in our faith. Caring for our suffering neighbors is an inalienable part of our Christian identity.

Let me state plainly: [No, ladies and gentlemen,] anyone who argues that Europe must close its borders in order to protect its Christian identity and roots has not understood what Christian faith is about, or its command to love our neighbor. That argument counteracts everything that Christians generally understand as the essential tenets of their faith.

For that reason, I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the churches in Lower Saxony, to their congregations and groups, for putting this basic belief into practice so impressively. Be it in supplying food, or offering housing and other facilities, be it in the form of integration initiatives or also of awareness-raising campaigns and public statements: it encourages us worldwide to see the churches and congregations here in Germany, but also in Hungary, Italy, Sweden the Netherlands and so on, taking such clear positions and with such a high profile. It is good to find that – beyond denominational borders – we have come together in the unanimous conviction that refugees must be protected. So please continue to hold to the message that refugees must be treated humanely. Hold fast to the attitude that people who have fled their homes have given up and lost a great deal, but not their human rights.

My thanks go to your country, in particular, to Germany, for the impressive way it reacted to the challenge of refugee flows in summer 2015. The Federal Government sent a clear signal. It took its moral, humanitarian responsibility and ignored populist propaganda when it came to protecting human lives. This attitude cannot be praised highly enough.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>

<sup>4</sup> Oral briefing during the meeting of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR – <http://schr.info/>) in March 2016 in Geneva (Switzerland).

Now, in Germany, and also in Lower Saxony, you are having to learn in a hurry – at the state, district and municipal level – how to implement the reception of refugees in practice. In view of these challenges, allow me to voice the respect that this assumption of an ethical-moral leadership role and your awareness of humanitarian responsibility have earned you at the international level. The humanitarian idea would find it harder to prevail without your taking such an unequivocal position. The humanitarian fiasco that is unfortunately continuing to this day in Idomeni and Calais would presumably have spread over large parts of southeast Europe without your actions. And finally: something much more fundamental – that seems to be shaking in Europe today – would have entirely collapsed. By that I mean the value system on which Europe is built. You would presumably have fewer tensions in Europe today, but Europe would have lost its foundation.

Since summer 2015 I have been concerned with the contradictions becoming visible in the political and social discussion in Europe. New walls in Europe, after the trauma of this one Wall that also cut through your country? The country in which the Iron Curtain fell first, Hungary, becoming the country in which a wall was erected again. Precisely relating to the Hungarian situation: in the 1950s the LWF and the International Red Cross resettled over 100,000 Hungarians worldwide, including in my home country, Chile. Should that be irrelevant today? And where is the memory of the Dresdners of what it is like to run for cover under a hail of bombs? Isn't that exactly what Syrians are seeking protection from today?

There is an unhealthy Zeitgeist around, that is hard to deal with. A striking 'immediatism' – if you will forgive the neologism – according to which everything has to happen here and now and right away. And because this spirit is so predominant, we sometimes live as though we had no past. And perhaps even more dramatically: because that is so, we sometimes live as though there were no tomorrow.

It is this short-termism that is aiding and abetting the populism spreading in politics worldwide. The system of parliamentary democracy is facing the urgent task of naming not only historical political obligations but also sustainable prospects for the future, and feeding them into everyday political action.

With these ideas I would like to turn now to the second part of my presentation, in which I offer some input for further discussion and action. Again I would like to focus on the global perspective.

The first idea I would like to offer comes from our decades of work with refugees all over the world. I mentioned before that the LWF is active in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. In 2012, when the camp hit the headlines because of the massive flow of Somali refugees, we were entrusted with managing the camp. We were, so to speak, the mayors of the camp with its 400,000 inhabitants at the time. Dadaab gets its name from the nearby city with its 90,000 inhabitants. Do you perceive the dimensions? Hanover would have a camp with two million inhabitants on its doorstep – in terms of distance, somewhat to the north of Langenhagen.

Naturally the inhabitants of Dadaab, a city in the desert, ask where the water would come from for all the refugees? And the firewood? How will the social and economic interaction with the camp be organized? The "host community relationships", i.e. relations with the local population, are a fundamental component of all our engagement worldwide. Without considering and responding to the basic, sometimes very desperate concerns of the local population the sustainability of all efforts for refugees would be fundamentally put in question.

In another quality, people here in Germany are asking similar questions. That does not make them rightwing extremists, although I know, of course, and am concerned, that such attitudes are resurfacing again. The hate and violence coming from these extremist circles must be consistently rejected, loud and clear. However, if people's questions and anxiety about their livelihoods – however justified or unjustified this may be – are not answered by the political system or not taken into account, that will prepare the ground for, and boost hate-filled and violent currents. If concerns about people's livelihoods are left to the extremist groups, then soon or later that will cast its shadow on the existence of a social middle ground with its basic consensuses. Accompanying the local population that receives the refugees – by that I mean that besides their huge diaconal involvement, churches and congregations can continue to make a crucial contribution, particularly in interaction with political actors in cities, districts and federal states.

The second idea that I would like to offer this evening is based on a theory arising from statistics: the present flow of refugees, however much it seem to be plunging the European Union into crisis, is not a European crisis. It has to be located in its global context in order to be appropriately managed – in Europe, too.

For me, the year 2015 will go down in history as the year in which Europe arrived in the world, or, vice versa, as the year in which the world broke into Europe. The debt crisis – a burden under which many states and their populations have been groaning for decades – knocked on the door of Europe's outer border in 2015, and is far from having ebbed. The last two decades worldwide have seen extremist violence, political fragmentation and turning away from the common good in favor of national or regional groups and that and has now arrived in Europe. And to top it all, the refugee movements no longer take place in distant regions, Europe is experiencing them at first hand.

How does Europe imagine its interaction with the rest of the world in an age that affirms globalization? Can it be a sustainable response to reinforce the external borders and relocate refugee flows outside European territory, as is being worked on so feverishly at present? The experiences of the last few years make it clear that this approach is short-sighted.

What I'm getting at is the following: however important and urgent it is to reach a rapid agreement on a uniform policy of the European Union on migration and refugee movements, achieving such a uniform policy cannot mark the end of a European contribution in view of this global challenge. It might solve a European problem, but it would be far from meeting the challenges facing the worldwide international community.

In this context, two hands-on forms of this global commitment are important to me, and with these thoughts I would like to conclude my input. In referring to these global topics it is clear to me that I am not talking to the European Parliament, or the German Bundestag, but to parliamentarians who have come to the parliamentary evening of the Confederation of Protestant Churches in Lower Saxony. And yet I think that you, too, have a potential influence on the overall architecture within which you wish to continue your role and efforts here in lower Saxony.

My first point: keep up your worldwide assistance for development cooperation. The reason for my request is the decision by several European states to finance their local refugee work by re-designating some of the funds appropriated for official development assistance. Naturally, financing a non-designated refugee reception project would cause problems to any budget. But what is the medium-term perspective, if support for development aid in continents numbered among the losers of globalization is now completely stopped? Does the appalling poverty not

offer the soil for recruiting mercenaries and adopting extremist positions in general – as we see, in particular, with Boko Haram in North Nigeria, and also with the self-styled Islamic State in Syria and in Iraq?

The repurposing of official development assistance may help to handle an immediate problem but in the medium term it will create a formidable challenge that will be impossible to deal with.

- My second point is an appeal to you: please back the human rights and binding international instruments that protect these human rights. Let us take another look at history. The ashes of the Second World War were still warm, and the resultant trauma still profound, when – under the impact of this experience – the international community acquired a basic understanding according to which every person has inalienable rights, and it is the task of the state to protect them. Inspired by this spirit, the 1951 Geneva Convention was adopted, which promises refugees special protection.

It worries me greatly that today the principles guaranteeing the binding, inalienable and universal character of human rights and their instruments are being loosened, perhaps only slightly so far, but perceptibly.

Ladies and gentlemen, as someone who is familiar with such situations from his own experience – I grew up under the dictatorship in Chile – I come to you with a fervent plea: do not allow human rights to be sabotaged.

Quite specifically, I hold it for a development with unforeseeable negative consequences if certain aspects of human rights and the Geneva Convention are undermined by the recent deal with Turkey. For example, refugees must not be detained. Nor must refugees be returned to countries that are classed as unsafe. What applied in 1950 for Hungarians, Latvians and Germans and in the 1980s for Chileans, Argentines and Iranians, must now apply in 2016 for Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis. Anything else would, in terms of cultural history, be a step backwards with disastrous impacts.

With this urgent request, which comes from the heart and from my own life, yet is also deeply rooted in the Christian faith which I profess, I will now conclude. Once again I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude for Germany's role since summer 2015.

I have addressed my questions and requests to you precisely in view of this role of moral leadership that you have assumed. You have noticed – it is about people and their rights. And you will certainly have noticed as well: because it is about people and their rights, it is about so much more.

Many thanks!

[\\*\[English translation of the original German\]](#)