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LUTHERAN  
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FEDERATION

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of Churches

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Ms Ursula von der Leyen  
President of the European Commission

Geneva, 10 June 2022

### **Augusta Victoria Hospital**

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, members of the Executive Committee of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a Global Communion of 148 Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland on 8 June, 2022, are writing to address you on an extremely urgent matter. As of today, 10 June, the 2021 EU payments to the Palestinian Authority have still not been disbursed by the European Commission. These payments include earmarked funding to the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) and East Jerusalem Hospital Network (EJHN). The effect on Palestinian patients suffering from cancer and kidney failure is catastrophic.

Since 1950, the LWF has owned and operated the AVH in East Jerusalem. Over the last two decades, partly thanks to consistent support from the EU, AVH has developed into a specialized cancer care center, serving five million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As one of six hospitals in the EJHN, AVH offers specialized cancer treatment and kidney care not available in any other hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza, including radiation therapy and pediatric hemodialysis. AVH is accredited by the Joint Commission International Accreditation for its outstanding quality, and is fully licensed by the Israeli Ministry of Health.

AVH and the other hospitals in East Jerusalem have been facing a chronic financial crisis for over a decade. This is because of the extensive delays in the payments of bills for patients referred to the hospitals by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Today, the total debts owed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to all six hospitals are estimated to be EUR 100 million. Of this, around EUR 70 million is owed to the AVH alone. The net billings from January 2021 until December 2021 to the PA amounted to Euro 54.42 million. So far, LWF has collected only Euro 32.91 million. In other words, there is an outstanding gap for the year 2021 which amounts to Euro 21.51 million.

Based on discussions with the local EU delegation in Palestine, LWF was expecting the annual EU support for AVH through the PEGASE mechanism in November last year. A delay until February 2022 was later announced. Drawing on the organization's own reserves and lines of credit, LWF continued to pay suppliers in order to uphold lifesaving operations and treatment. Unfortunately, as of today, 10 June 2022, the funds have still not arrived.

The impact of this delay on patients is already severe. Since September last year, more than 400 newly diagnosed cancer patients have not been accepted for treatment at the AVH. Currently, over 500 patients under active treatment also risk having their treatment interrupted in the coming days. Given your background in medicine, you would be well acquainted with the potentially fatal consequences of such interruptions.

As owner and operator of AVH, LWF has exhausted all financial reserves and lines of credit. Suppliers have stopped providing the necessary goods and services.

On behalf of the LWF, a worldwide communion of Lutheran churches, and ahead of your planned travel to Israel and Palestine, **we call on your urgent action to unfreeze and expedite the funding vital for the safe and effective operations of the AVH and the EJHN.** This funding is absolutely critical to ensuring that patients – including children, who are particularly at risk – will be able to receive the treatment and care they need and deserve.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and for the overall support of the EU to the AVH and LWF. Your assistance is vital to enable us to save lives and help vulnerable people who have a dire need of healthcare services.

Sincerely

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus MUSA, LWF President, Nigeria

Rev. Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, Ethiopia

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. EATON, USA

Rev. Dr Nestor P. FRIEDRICH, Brazil

Pröpstin Astrid KLEIST, Germany

Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes MIRGELER, Germany

Rev. Karla M. STEILMANN FRANCO, Paraguay

Rev. Dr Robin STEINKE, USA

Bishop Henrik STUBKJÆR, Denmark

Ms Desri Maria SUMBAYAK, Indonesia

Ms Vera TKACH, Russia

Mr Johanan Celine VALERIANO, Philippines

Archbishop Urmas VIILMA, Estonia

Archbishop Dr Antje JACKELÉN, Sweden

CC:

LWF General Secretary Rev. Anne Burghardt

Mr. Bjoern Seibert, Head of Cabinet of the EU President