

The Lutheran World Federation

***Stirring the Waters – Regional Consultation for Asia, 17-22 April 2006,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia***

***Department for Mission and Development,
Desk for Women in Church and Society***

Preamble

We, the thirty-three delegates of the Asia Pacific Region representing Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, gathered together in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from 17 to 22 April 2006 to deliberate on the theme “Stirring the Waters,” affirm that:

- Water is the challenge of the 21st century.
- We need to recognize water as God's precious gift.
- We need to harmonize our voices in regard to water.
- We need to encourage a reverence for water.
- We contribute to addressing water issues by offering a faith-based approach.
- By addressing water issues, we contribute to reducing conflicts around the world.

Introduction

This Asian consultation on “Stirring the Waters” is the third follow-up program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development Desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) to address the commitment of the LWF Tenth Assembly to develop an “Action Plan on Water.” This also includes resource mobilization as a way of highlighting a) how essential water is for every person and for all of creation, and b) the dilemmas of just, affordable distribution and privatization of water, which is occurring increasingly under economic globalization.

It was appropriate to have this consultation in Phnom Penh, a city at the confluence of two rivers, the Mekong and the Tonle Sap. The Tonle Sap River is the only river in the world that flows in two directions, flowing north in the rainy season and flowing south in the dry season, which depends upon the water level of the Mekong River.

Theological Perspectives

The Book of Revelation, which should be interpreted both literally and metaphorically, invites us to explore God's "river of life" as an image of hope and healing for our own rivers and for the world. Waters in the book of Revelation play a dual role: they are locations of healing and renewal as well as of violence and injustice. The waters themselves cry out for justice (Rev 16:6). In our time, when people are denied access to water and when the world's waters are threatened with pollution, privatization and other issues, the water that is given "free of cost" (Rev 21:6, 22:17) promises healing and blessing for all. The critique of violence and exploitation of the Roman Empire we find in the Book of Revelation can speak to our contexts today.

The Gospel of John, helps us to connect the "rivers of living water" that flow out from our hearts (John 7:38) with the spring of water that wells up in the life of the Samaritan woman as she encounters Jesus (John 4:14).

In an age that is ecologically endangered, Asia, with its deep appreciation, receptiveness and confidence in nature, can help us to move away from an anthropocentric approach to a holistic eco-centric model of understanding creation and even to reformulate our theological views through the study of ancient science such as *feng-shui*. Viewing the human/nature relationship from a cosmocentric perspective, ancient wisdom such as *feng-shui* opens our sinful "self-centeredness" to the environmental systems that liberate us from exploiting nature, leading us toward a harmonious co-existence with the mountains and waters.

Key Issues Discussed

- Water is the cradle and source of life, well of health, and God's gift for all living beings. Scarce and over-abundant, the waters of life require human responsibility. Therefore, there is a need for advocacy and action, by placing water issues on the churches' agenda, supporting community-based initiatives, addressing trade and privatization concerns, advocating sufficient support to and funding of water projects, and participating on the basis of the fundamental convictions.
- Irrigation and water management should incorporate a gender perspective and promote women as managers of water.
- Global warming is a moral challenge and there is a need for awareness building and for inculcating moral vision and leadership.
- A visit to the integrated development initiatives of the LWF Department for World Service Cambodia Program helped us to realize the key role that the LWF can continue to play in bringing safe and adequate water to the people for their livelihood.

Action Plans

- Participants made a clear commitment to continue to address the issues of water in their respective countries/organizations and to form regional electronic groups for information exchange and lobbying.
- Join the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) and request the EWN to create a databank and to facilitate joint interfaith action.
- Encourage study/research programs, and conduct awareness-raising programs (with special focus on global warming) for men/women theologians, church leaders, etc.

We request the LWF member churches to:

- Educate their congregations through sermons and seminars on water issues, with a specific gender focus, and to mobilize women's groups in addressing water issues.
- Develop simple education materials, poems and slogans to motivate people and to advocate against the over consumption of water and purchasing bottled water.
- Give priority to water in their development projects and ensure the quality of water.
- Create awareness on water management and global warming.
- Join campaigns against water pollution, water abuse and illegal logging in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- Facilitate visits to water projects in LWF field programs for theological students to build awareness and to work with communities.

While we commend WICAS' efforts in addressing water issues through programs such as "Stirring the Waters" and through LWF development initiatives, we request that it continues to provide leadership and invest further financial resources for seminars to move the member churches to action.

The group strongly recommended that the next Asian Church Leadership Conference address the issue of water in order to encourage the member churches to continue to focus on this issue at a deeper level.

Participants,
Asian Consultation on "Stirring the Waters."
17-22 April 2006