

Embargo against delivery

Report of the General Secretary

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

- (1) On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation's secretariat, I greet you all and welcome you to this LWF Council meeting. We are grateful to God for safe travel and safe arrival for those who come both from afar and from within the Republic of Tanzania. I want to recognize and salute the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) for hosting this event. We thank you for your prayers during the months leading up to this day and for your continuing prayers in the days ahead. You have most generously placed at our disposal the human resources of your church. The ELCT Executive Committee itself, the Presiding Bishop, his fellow diocesan bishops, the General Secretary and his staff have spent countless hours making advance preparations to ensure that all participants feel welcome. The size and high level of the representation from the ELCT, whose leaders are here as observers at this meeting, speak well of the importance you attach to the membership of your church in the LWF and your identification with the federation's work. I thank our President for constant communication between our offices and for the collegial way in which we both have worked. I thank you Mark.
- (2) I want to thank all and all staff members for the work undertaken during the period under-review and for the Council preparations.
- (3) According to the schedule there will be a plenary session on Africa. Former Prime Minister of the United Republic of Tanzania Frederick Tluway Sumaye will grace the occasion. Additional information will be shared with you later.
- (4) Since we last met in Lund, Sweden, in March 2007 a lot has happened. Detailed reporting will take place in the Program Committees, and you have received separate reports on the Assembly Planning, Renewal Process, Strategic Plan update, DMD Project Committee, DWS Standing Committee, ACT International and ACT Development. Therefore, taking all these reports into consideration, my report will focus on some of the pressing issues that confront us at this point in our common life.

Theme

- (5) In his Presidential address, Bishop Mark Hanson has explored the theme "Melting snow on Mount Kilimanjaro – a witness of a suffering creation" with a strong theological and pastoral accent. His reflections will, I am sure, provoke us to re-examine our roles and activities in the face of a crisis that is no longer looming, but is already upon us.
- (6) Mount Kilimanjaro stands tallest among a "community" of mountains in Africa. The white crown on her head is an affirmation of the status of seniority (*Mzee*) conferred upon her from time immemorial by her equals. But for Mount Kilimanjaro the position of honor and

seniority that she carries also includes the responsibility for monitoring the wellness of “things African”. The theme is framed in the form of an invitation to the participants at this council meeting and the churches we represent. We are invited to listen with our spiritual ears to the “lamentation” of God’s creation painfully communicated to us by the tallest mountain in Africa. It is a lament, it is a cry, it is weeping for a healthy Africa and for a healthy environment everywhere. Unfortunately the environment in many parts of Africa – as elsewhere – is not in good health, mainly due to the consequences of climate change. It is marked by increasing desertification, more frequent extreme weather events, the drying up of rivers, and the disappearance of animal species. The voices of the most affected communities – especially indigenous peoples – have long been uttering cries of distress and warning.

- (7) Care for God’s creation is part of the stewardship of the human family and is therefore central to the mission of the church. Through the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical movement has advocated for action on climate change for more than 20 years. Through our humanitarian relief and development activities, the Lutheran World Federation and its member churches have long been working to address the effects of climate change in many of the most affected parts of the world – such as in Mauritania, in Ethiopia, and here in Tanzania.
- (8) I also wish to draw your attention to the LWI special edition distributed at this meeting, which also includes this year’s LWF Sunday supplement. Both feature the theme of this Council meeting.

Context

- (9) We meet in the Great Lakes region of Africa, a region that amply demonstrates this continent’s conflicting realities. Africa is a rich continent. Yet the Africans are poor. This reality persists despite the many well-intentioned international and local initiatives to reduce poverty in Africa. Many well-meaning historians and social scientists hold to the explanation that this reality is rooted both in past history and in contemporary international relations, as well as in the persistent lack of good and accountable governance in some parts of the continent. The ecumenical family has with every good intention tried to make a difference but with limited results. Maybe it would help us to move toward a solution if the international community were to ask not simply what should be done to assist Africa, but rather what it should NOT do that prohibits Africans from taking ownership of their resources and apply them for the benefit of their people. The same question must be posed to Africans and to their governments. An honest answer will reveal that corruption by both Africans and non-Africans is a major contributor to the problems that this continent faces. For the LWF this is not an academic question, it is a *communio* question. It concerns us because it impacts on the diaconal capacity of the church to be church. If we agree that these are issues that concern our communion, then let us talk about them as openly as we can for the sake of the credibility of the church.
- (10) I believe that the Council members are aware, from the LWI service, that the Lutheran churches in Africa have appointed a Task Force on Poverty. This is an initiative along the lines of the LWF program on illegitimate debt which is hosted by the Latin American LWF

member churches and which aims to promote political action on this issue. Through this program we are directly engaged in work with the debt audit commission in Ecuador. In cooperation with Norwegian Church Aid, LWF will convene a symposium in Oslo in October this year that will bring together representatives of the governments of Ecuador and Norway, among others, with international financial institutions, academics and civil society networks. We hope that this will promote an ethical approach to the resolution and prevention of debt crisis. Since Lutherans can not by themselves prevent debt crisis these initiatives are a contribution to the ecumenical discussions

Human trafficking

- (11) The most basic notion of human dignity in all religious traditions maintains that human beings are not movable possession (chattels) to be bought and sold. And yet an increasing number of human beings are trafficked each year across international borders, and probably even more within national boundaries. It is reported that some 80% of the people trafficked are women and girls, of whom about 50% are minors. The reasons are related to sexual exploitation, organized begging, forced or underpaid labor, and “organ harvesting” – all of which undermine the dignity of the persons trafficked. According to research undertaken by UNICEF, and UNESCO and other UN agencies every continent is affected in some way by the scourge of human trafficking. Thus no church or religious community can excuse itself from addressing this pressing issue. I am particularly concerned about Dalits and tribals in relation to organ harvest. Their political and social status makes them extremely vulnerable. I believe that you are aware that we are talking about a population of more than 260 million people. I hope that the Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights can prepare a recommendation for action by the Council.
- (12) The reasons for human trafficking are extremely complex because they interconnect with other factors. Therefore there are no stand-alone solutions to this problem. For the purpose of this report I will describe the problem as falling into two categories, namely the “push” factors and the “pull” factors.

Push factors

- (13) *Poverty*: The single most important push factor in the developing countries is poverty. When individuals are living in an extremely desperate economic situation and need to feed themselves and their families, they fall victim to criminal syndicates.
- (14) *Insecurity*: Insecurity is also a major push factor. Insecurity may result from armed conflicts, political crises, domestic or community violence, natural disasters, or from the breakdown of social structures and symbols of authority that protect human dignity in traditional society. People fleeing from violence and other causes of insecurity lose the protection of family and community and find themselves at greatly increased risk of human trafficking.

Pull factors

- (15) *Demand*: A key external pull factor is obviously the demand in the wealthier countries in the Middle East and the West for cheap labor both in the general labor market and in the commercial sex industry.
- (16) *Profit*: For some, trafficking in human beings is a highly lucrative business. According to some estimates, profits are as high as 20 billion US dollars annually. Organized crime cartels involved in human trafficking operate through an amorphous network that involves a variety of intermediaries.
- (17) *False promises/unrealistic expectations*: Many of those trafficked are lured by false promises or by unrealistic expectations of life and economic opportunities in the destination countries. Without reliable information about the real experiences of those who have been trafficked, poor people in rural communities have very few defenses to protect them from following – or sending their children to follow – a mirage.
- (18) The first step towards a solution of this complex social problem should be that the churches acknowledge that it exists in their country and thereafter develop mechanisms of collaboration in order to address it. Is it possible for this Council to take a moment during this plenary and reflect on it. So that we can commit ourselves to do something about it upon our return to our respective home churches. This is a communion concern. This is exactly what the tears of Mount Kilimanjaro are about – a healthy society everywhere.
- (19) The pandemic HIV-AIDS – along with such other diseases as malaria and TB – remains a major threat to families, communities and nations. Churches are responding to the challenge, recognizing the reality that the church itself is living with HIV-AIDS. The new LWF HIV-AIDS Handbook will hopefully be an important resource for churches not only in this region, but around the world. I am pleased that a decision has now been taken to appoint a new LWF Coordinator on HIV-AIDS who will accompany the churches as they continue in our campaign to confront this scourge. In addition to the education and care that churches can provide, changing the attitudes that lead to stigmatization and discrimination against people living with HIV-AIDS is a major priority. One expression of this problem is the number of countries that apply entry visa restrictions on the basis of HIV status. The LWF has been participating in an International Task Team to address this issue.
- (20) Meeting here in Arusha, we find ourselves in the seat of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which is in the process of concluding its mandate to prosecute the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide. Some Council members have already undertaken a pre-Council exposure visit to Rwanda where, among others things, they will have observed the lingering effects of the genocide. Here in Arusha, some of us will have an opportunity to observe the proceedings of the ICTR and to reflect on the challenges of preventing impunity and promoting justice and reconciliation.
- (21) In neighboring Kenya, where the President and I had a very informative pre- Council pastoral visit, we were exposed to consequences of a grave political crisis that resulted in a deep fracturing of Kenya's apparently harmonious society. It is heart warming to see that a political

solution has now been achieved. The majority of Kenyans are willing to do whatever it takes to never again subject their country to such a crisis. The churches in Kenya, as indeed the entire society, have been deeply affected by this episode. The challenge of reconciliation arises in this context too, and we should reflect on what lessons can be learned from this crisis.

- (22) June 27 was the day scheduled for the run-off election for the contested presidency of the Republic of Zimbabwe. It is clear from the international media that the ruling party, having lost the election in the first round, it now intends to make the country ungovernable. The political disaster in Zimbabwe cannot be attributed to anyone but to leadership there. The purpose of the struggle for independence and the lives lost during that process are undermined by the current events. Zimbabweans have lost confidence in the present leadership. Therefore we fully understand the disappointment of the ecumenical community given the prayers and the support availed to them over the years. Meeting here in the African region, we have a special opportunity and responsibility to say something in relation to the current events. I hope that the Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights will be able to propose an appropriate action to be taken by this Council concerning the current situation in Zimbabwe.
- (23) The refusal and prevention to provide humanitarian assistance in Myanmar and Zimbabwe raise the critical questions as to how the international community may implement its proclaimed “responsibility to protect”.
- (24) The situation in the Middle East is of great concern. The threat against Iran may lead to things unimaginable. We welcome the development with regard to Gaza and hope that the cease fire will hold beyond the started time that between now and then both Palestinian and Israeli leaders will once again engage in peace talks leading to the dismantlement of the illegal settlements and end occupation. We are grateful for the initiative of the newly formed Council for Religious Institutions of the Holy Land in which Bishop Younan is member.

Diakonia Seminar

- (25) Diakonia is a defining hallmark of the church and therefore of the LWF. Through its activities in the fields of humanitarian relief, development cooperation and advocacy, the LWF continually seeks to live out its diaconal calling.
- (26) The Department for Mission and Development convened several workshops in the regions, collecting experiences and understanding on diakonia in preparation for the Global Consultation scheduled for October 2008 in Ethiopia. A Core Group is currently working on a draft for an LWF Handbook on the understanding of diakonia.
- (27) To strengthen the ministries of LWF member churches, capacity-building has been identified as a main objective in all our work. This is very much needed if churches shall be able to take upon themselves the role of agents for change in society. However, capacity-building should not just be about replicating models that have worked elsewhere – making others think and behave as we may think and behave. We need to learn from each other, for the integrity,

identity and ministry of the whole communion

- (28) Among other capacity-building activities, DMD has accompanied the LWF member churches in efforts to develop their human resources in ways that include international scholarships for studies in theological and non-theological areas, several training programs, and 17 workshops on Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting. Expressed needs from many member churches point to the need for more focus on enhancing the sustainability of the churches' institutional capacities. Care for the sustainability of the church becomes a deep spiritual expression of stewardship of God's gift.

Action by Churches Together

- (29) ACT International is a key instrument for the diaconic role of the churches in the context of humanitarian emergencies. The LWF's relationship with ACT International is excellent, and LWF remains the major implementing member of the ACT network. We are pleased to welcome the ACT International Director, Mr. John Nduna, to this meeting of the LWF Council.
- (30) With the establishment of ACT Development, we now have a structure for ecumenical cooperation in diaconal work beyond the emergency phase. LWF has been actively involved in shaping ACT Development, and we have taken part in discussions on the possible merger of the two ACTs. A model for unification is presented for discussion at this meeting of the LWF Council (see Exhibit 8.3 para 5, Exhibits 8.3 and 8.4). I urge you to read these documents carefully since the Council is expected to give guidance to the secretariat. I encourage especially DWS and DMD Program Committees to pay special attention to what is being proposed. Within our own structures, we have focused on promoting synergies between the diaconal work of DWS and DMD. Active collaboration between these two departments – in Indonesia, Liberia, Colombia, and Central America – has contributed to a better understanding of the nature of the diaconal ministry of the LWF and of how we relate to member churches in this work.
- (31) Post-emergency reconstruction and development is a special hallmark of the LWF's diaconal work. With the establishment of an independent program in southern Sudan, the LWF is working for the rehabilitation of a whole society in the aftermath of a long and bitter conflict. However, the planning and implementation of this program is overshadowed by political developments and the unsatisfactory implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). There is a real risk that the peace process might derail. We nevertheless continue to set up our operation and seek close cooperation with related agencies and with the churches of Sudan. Similarly, the LWF has set up a new program in Burundi in cooperation with TCRS Tanzania, repatriating Burundian refugees from Tanzania.

Food security

- (32) Over the last months food security has become a major concern in the global political debate and a central challenge for our diaconal response. This is not an isolated issue, but is the

result of a complicated combination of causes that include climate change, increasing scarcity of water, population growth and increasing wealth especially in the fast developing economies, rising oil prices, lack of investment in domestic agricultural production, diversion of agricultural land for biofuel production, and international trade policies that discourage measures to sustain domestic agricultural production capacities. Kenya is a case in point. Kenya was advised to produce flowers for export. Today Kenya produces flowers rather than food. Since no one can eat flowers, Kenyans are importing grain from abroad.

- (33) Some are benefiting from higher prices for staple foods. But the vulnerability of poor communities to food price increases, and the incapacity of the international marketplace to ensure food security, have both been tragically demonstrated by this crisis. Food security – or “food sovereignty” – may be emerging as one of the major challenges of the 21st century.
- (34) By the time the Lutheran World Federation Assembly delegates gather in 2010 in Germany under the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread”, the international media attention to the food crisis may already be gone. But the underlying causes – and their tragic effects – will remain. It will be of critical importance to the future relevance of the LWF as a diaconal and humanitarian instrument of the Lutheran family that we remain focused on those causes and on ways in which the LWF can make a meaningful contribution to addressing and resolving them.
- (35) While I still have your attention let me inform you that the LWF has produced a cookbook titled *Food for Life: Recipes and Stories on the Right to Food* which is a compilation of recipes, table blessings and feature stories from LWF/WS field offices, and which also addresses the issues of food shortages and food security. This cookbook is more than a collection of recipes. It is a testament to the daily struggle for food and for life of some of the most vulnerable communities in which the Lutheran churches are represented and with which the LWF is working in various part of the world.

Theology in the Life of the Church

- (36) You will recall that a process of study and reflection commenced in the year 2005 entitled “Theology in the life of the church”. This program was brought together under the leadership of DTS and an inter-generational group of theologians from the LWF constituency and ecumenical partners. In one of the seminars held in Hong Kong, younger theologians from the Asian context raised fundamental questions about the relevance of traditional Lutheran theological categories. The discussions pointed to a need to constantly revisit and re-interpret theological notions such as justification in a language that will be understood by a modern Asian living in an environment that is predominantly non-Christian and by those facing the neo-Pentecostalism of today that promotes prosperity theology and material blessings. Some glimpses of what the theologians had to say are featured in the newly published third book in the *Theology in the Life of the Church* series, *Identity, Survival, Witness: Reconfiguring Theological Agendas*. This publication will be distributed at this Council meeting. I invite all theological institutions associated with LWF to make use of this book

Unity within the Lutheran family

- (37) Much work still needs to be done in fostering unity within the Lutheran family, so that we can be a stronger witness for the role of church in society and for the unity of the global church. Unfortunately, divisions between major branches of the Lutheran family are played out in the life of individual churches, leading to even greater fragmentation rather than greater unity. However, we continue to seek to improve communication and understanding with International Lutheran Council (ILC) and LWF communion.
- (38) Africa was the setting for the annual gathering with the International Lutheran Council, which included honest discussions of difficult situations and also examinations of ways in which more cooperative and cordial relations among our churches can be promoted. The improving communication and relations between us has already turned out to be very helpful in dealing with some church conflicts, as for instance in the Philippines. We must mutually strive to create moments when we can listen to each other and be transformed in our relationships with each other.

Ecumenical dialogues and contacts

- (39) In our ecumenical dialogues and other engagements, work has continued. The ongoing international dialogues and contacts will be reported on in detail in the Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs.
- (40) With Eastern Orthodox churches we have our longest continuous dialogue, now in its 28th year. In May the Lutheran – Orthodox Joint Commission was welcomed by the Church of Cyprus (and by Metropolitan Isaias) and continued its focus on the Eucharist. The dialogue paid special attention to the social and ecological implications of the sacrament and so their work touches on the themes of this Council meeting. “Recognizing the ways that bread and wine come from the earth and join in the sacrament connects us to all of creation, the dialogue concluded. “As partakers of the Eucharist we are called to rethink our outlooks and practices in fundamental ways, ways that with respect to the environment go further than ever before and may extend beyond traditional patterns of Eucharistic thought and practice.”
- (41) The Council will receive a proposal for a new commission with the Roman Catholics. A preparatory meeting has recommended a brief “Text on the Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017” for pastoral use and then a major focus on “Baptism and Growth in Communion” for the work of this round of the dialogue. In the meantime, work began examining “the biblical basis for the doctrine of justification,” in an expanded collaboration that includes Methodists and Reformed scholars as well as Lutherans and Roman Catholics.
- (42) Plans are underway for celebration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the JDDJ in 2009. At least two venues are planned: one in the USA, and the other a return to the Augsburg site of the original signing. The suggested theme for this occasion is “happiness”. Why choose happiness as theme for such an occasion? Well, because this is how the message of justification is received by human beings and the rest of creation. In the spirit of happiness I therefore encourage all LWF member churches to celebrate this event with their partners in

their regions.

- (43) A means of regular contact with the Oriental Orthodox churches is being explored, as requested by the Council in 2005. A preliminary conversation was held in Geneva in February, and I will visit each of the patriarchates in coming months in order further to explore ways in which our churches, which live together around the globe, may strengthen one another in common witness.
- (44) The LWF continues to be an active voice at meetings of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions, and at the Joint Consultative Council, which seeks to foster collaboration of that body with the World Council of Churches. As we seek to renew and re-imagine the meetings of our LWF Assemblies, these conversations become increasingly important, since the WCC also has committed itself to a new model of Assemblies that will offer “expanded space” in which other bodies might find room to gather. This process is now referred to a “Discernment Committee” on which the LWF will have a seat. The Discernment Committee will then report to the next Central Committee of the WCC. The LWF needs to make a good preparation for how the “expanded space” can be used by us and other Christian World Communion. I will want to discuss with the Program Committee on Ecumenical Affairs a possible way forward and through that committee I will make a proposal to the Council.
- (45) As a unique complement to international dialogues - one that emphasizes local and regional reception - the All Africa Anglican-Lutheran Commission was “re-kindled.” (This vivid verb comes from the Commission’s Anglican co-chair, Bishop Musonda Mwamba, who we are pleased to welcome as an ecumenical guest at this meeting of the Council, representing the Anglican Communion.) After an unexpectedly long pause since 2001, this Commission met in December and enthusiastically re-affirmed the goal of seeking a relationship of full communion between African churches belonging to the Anglican Communion and to the Lutheran World Federation
- (46) The study commission with the Mennonites is moving toward final report. This examination calls us as Lutherans to look steadily at a history in which condemnations were issued from our side that were not matched on the other, and so the process will involve us in a process of re-examination our confessional history that is expected to culminate in an action by the Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010.
- (47) These days in which we meet also embrace an important festival of our Christian year – the celebration of the Apostles, and of the Apostle Paul, on 29 June. The commemoration has particular importance because it is being celebrated as the bimillennium - the 2000th year - of the birth of the Apostle Paul. In announcing the year, which begins this very week, Pope Benedict XVI called for “a series of liturgical, cultural and ecumenical events as well as pastoral and social initiatives inspired by St Paul’s spirituality.” In particular, the Pope has sought to lift up the ecumenical significance of celebrating the Apostle to the Nations, hoping to encourage a “humble and sincere search for the complete unity of all the parts of the mystical Body of Christ.”
- (48) As Lutherans, of course, we have our own history of special devotion to the complex,

inspiring, provocative and elusive figure who is the Apostle Paul. Many Lutheran churches honor Paul in the naming of church buildings and schools. Indeed, without attention to the Pauline writings, it is difficult to imagine the Lutheran movement in the Church. I have sent a pastoral letter to LWF member churches, encouraging all of us to return afresh to the grace-filled message of the Apostle Paul, in collaboration with other Christians around the world. I encourage all of us to seek again the contemporary forms of the Christian message that Paul so powerfully proclaimed.

- (49) In November 2007 in Limuru in Kenya about 250 people gathered for the long-anticipated Global Christian Forum. Perhaps never in history has there been such a diverse group of Christians gathered together to explore their faith: Christians not only from 72 nations and 6 continents but, even more importantly, from an unprecedented range of Christian communities. The vitality of this meeting offers hope for greater collaboration and contact with growing Christian communities around the world.

Working as a communion

- (50) How is the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion reflected in the way it works and communicates? Certainly the strong member church engagement and burden-sharing in the translation, publication and dissemination of “Churches Say ‘No’ to Violence Against Women” is an important example. Another is provided by the LWF program on illegitimate debt, hosted in Argentina and undertaken by the LWF member churches in Latin America on behalf of the whole communion.
- (51) A further example is provided at this meeting, in the form of the first issue of a regional edition of *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* to be printed in Africa, including a supplement of news from the region in local languages. This is the product of collaboration between the LWF/OCS and the ELCT communication office, which seeks to strengthen in Africa the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of churches and enhance communication within the member churches and partner organizations.
- (52) The LWF’s self-understanding as a *communio* also challenges the way the LWF constituency will present itself in the future on the Internet. An important step toward this process was the 19-22 May 2008 Roundtable Consultation aimed at exploring a *Communio Portal* which would act as an Internet entry point not only for the Geneva Secretariat, but for the whole Lutheran communion (member churches, field and regional programs, among others). The Program Committee for Communication Services will receive a detailed report on the outcome of this consultation.
- (53) In all our work and planning, we must continually reflect on how well the LWF serves the needs of its member churches and the societies in which they live and serve. We must examine ways in which the LWF can better function as a point of exchange, sharing and mutual accompaniment by Lutheran churches – from the South and the North, majority and minority churches, from different cultural and linguistic contexts. And we must continue to focus on means of improving the reception and dissemination among member churches of the

work of their unique common instrument. In my travel I hear again and again that the Lutheran World Federation is not known. I think something is wrong somewhere. I am not able put my finger completely on it. May I ask a direct question to all of you? Why is that?

Renewal process

- (54) You have received exhibit 8.1 sent to you in advance. Bishop Schultz will present the report tomorrow. You will recall that this process and the report before you is a draft which is in progress and through which the committee seeks to collect your comments. The committee will harvest the views of the staff during the January 2009 meeting and will also meet again with the representatives of the World Council of Churches, WARC, CEC, YWCA and other ecumenical partners. This year the annual LWF Week of Meetings will take place during the month of October/November. It will be an occasion that I shall use as General Secretary to collect staff input for when the committee comes to dialogue with the staff in January 2009. From my perspective the process will be open and transparent in order to ensure a sustainable outcome.

Assembly Planning

- (55) You have also received in advance the Assembly Planning Committee's report (Exhibit 11) that will be presented by Pastor Abigail Zang-Hofmann on behalf of the committee and in the absence of the chairperson, the Rev. Angeline Swart. On the basis of the committee's information on the occasion of its January meeting this year, the facilities are adequate and comfortable. Let me also inform you that an Assembly Content Coordinator has been identified and that is Prof. Erwin Buck, a retired pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and a former President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon. He is a respected New Testament scholar who brings with him strong theological and pastoral skills both in writing and communication.

Financial and staff issues

- (56) I have reported to the Board of Trustees on the latest developments in the ongoing negotiations concerning the tax status of the LWF's Jerusalem program. It seems likely that in the near future the major threat of the arrears of taxation claimed by the Government of Israel may be lifted, as our negotiations move into a final phase. The same applies to the Kenya Program. I have signed the Tax Exemption agreement with the Foreign Minister of the Government of Kenya in March this year. There is a gap of a few years that is under discussion. Last week I met with the Commissioner of internal revenue in Nairobi. Our request is receiving his office's utter most attention. While I am still on this subject let me alert you that tax exemption for our humanitarian work in the field is becoming an issue of growing concern. A tax free status is not anymore granted automatically by governments and negotiations are taking much effort and time. The countless hours I have spent with Government Ministers and Ambassadors of the same countries giving reasons for why LWF should be exempted indicate to me that this provision will soon be something of the past.

- (57) I would like to highlight certain staffing issues for the information of the Council. We note that in the last period the number of executive staff in the Secretariat has remained relatively stable, but there has been a substantial reduction in the number of administrative staff. This has implications for workload management and staff stress levels. On the positive side, the balance between executive staff from the Global North and Global South has been progressively improving. A slight improvement has also been observed in the gender balance, but more efforts need to be made to secure female candidates for executive staff positions. The increasing average age of LWF staff both in Geneva and in the field remains a serious challenge. The number of youth interns serving in the Secretariat has undergone a drastic decline. We will have to reflect on ways in which the presence of youth in the LWF Secretariat can be restored and sustained, as an important means of formation for leadership in the Lutheran communion and in the wider ecumenical movement.
- (58) A growing practical challenge for the LWF Secretariat has been the increasing difficulty of obtaining visas for meetings or interviews in Switzerland. Delegates from LWF member churches who wanted to participate in LWF organized meetings in Switzerland, or candidates for Geneva Secretariat or DWS Field positions invited for interviews to Geneva have more frequently had their entry visas refused in recent months. This has especially affected young unmarried persons coming from the South. It is distressing to recall that a young theologian from Tanzania had her entry visa to Switzerland refused at the beginning of this year, whereas Tanzania is hosting this Council meeting in which many Swiss citizens participate and have received their visa without any problem. We are considering whether common approaches to the Swiss authorities should be undertaken with sister organizations such as the WCC and others

Conclusion

- (59) Let me conclude on a personal note. I refer to my letter addressed to the President and Council dated March 21st 2008 in which I announced my decision to conclude my service as the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation on 31st October 2010. This will be just after the LWF 11th Assembly. I indicated in the same letter that I hope the Council at this meeting appoints a Search Committee to find my successor. My dear friends, I hope you will understand my sentiments when I say it is an honor and rare privilege for me to make this announcement at a time the LWF council is meeting on the African soil, even more so in Tanzania the home of the late Bishop Josia Kibira (ELCT) the first LWF President from the Global South. He was elected in 1977 during the LWF Assembly held in Dar-es- Salaam. For the time between now and then I will continue to work as faithfully and diligently as I can, to ensure a smooth and orderly succession. Since this is not the last council meeting, let me simply say, thank you for your support.