

Report of the General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

Welcome and introduction

- (1) I would like to welcome warmly all Council members, advisors, ecumenical guests, observers and special guests. Allow me extend a special welcome to WCC General Secretary-elect, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, whom I already greeted on behalf of the Federation on the day of his election. We wish you God's blessings during these months of transition and as you take up your new responsibilities early next year.
- (2) The 2008 meeting of the Council at Arusha, Tanzania, was held under the theme, "Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro: Christian Witness amidst the Suffering Creation." Our discussions and common commitments with regard to climate change have set the tone for the work of the Federation these last eighteen months.
- (3) In 2008, I drew the Council's attention to another issue of global significance, namely human trafficking, a phenomenon that turns human beings into commodities, deprives them of their freedom and rights and robs them of their dignity as creatures made in the image of God. This trade, the currency of which is human vulnerability, dehumanizes both victim and perpetrator. The Council's strong reaction influenced the choice of theme for this Council meeting, "Upholding Human Dignity: Confronting Human Trafficking." LWF President, Bishop Mark Hanson, has already presented to you his reflections on this theme, and a plenary discussion on human trafficking is planned for Friday, 23 October. The daily prayers during this meeting will focus on the pastoral dimensions of this theme. It is my hope that on the basis of the President's address, the experience in our daily prayers, plenary discussions and the work in the committees, the Council will take appropriate action.
- (4) I shall not attempt to report in detail on everything the LWF Secretariat has done since we last met. Council members have received the Annual Report, which illustrates clearly the synergies between the Secretariat's different departments and units. Furthermore, you will have read the reports from the DMD Project Committee, the Standing Committee for World Service, program plans from the various departments and units that will be considered by the respective Program Committees, publications from DTS and Assembly related documents. These, in addition to regular LWI news releases, provide a comprehensive picture of the Secretariat's work and the countless hours the staff has spent preparing for this Council.
- (5) Therefore, I intend to use my reporting time to highlight certain activities that we undertook during the period under review, and thereafter discuss a number of overarching issues.

Context

- (6) ***The global economic crisis:*** Since our last meeting, the world has experienced a financial and economic crisis, unprecedented in modern times and generated by irresponsibility on the international financial markets. As we are all aware, because of this crisis, member churches and church institutions have suffered greatly. All of us are struggling with the current economic realities: in some cases, pastors and staff have not been paid; diaconal activities have been significantly reduced; nursing homes for the elderly and children are facing imminent closure if they have not already been closed; staff have been made redundant; missionary personnel are being recalled and laid off; pension funds have dwindled; existing commitments become unsustainable burdens and some LWF programs and projects remain under- if not unfunded. If funding does not improve, we will have to face the painful reality of having to phase out, if not close down, some of the essential activities much earlier than originally

intended. While dwindling financial resources challenge the material ways in which we express our solidarity, it is my sincere hope that it will not diminish the capacity of our spiritual solidarity, which is a gift from Christ.

- (7) Nonetheless, the crisis also highlights the interconnectedness of our global village and offers a commentary on the Assembly theme: “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.” Its universal tone and appeal invite us to reflect more deeply on the nature and quality of our interconnectedness with the rest of creation. Let me briefly explain what I mean. Over the last few years, I have been watching the “Discovery Channel,” a TV channel devoted to animals on land and under water. Each animal has many fascinating characteristics, but one of the primary traits they all have in common, also with human beings, is the remarkable capacity and determination to search for something to eat. They are food driven. As we watch them carefully, without undue sentimentality, we are likely to conclude that the “us” in the fourth petition in the Lord’s Prayer, is inclusive of the needs of God’s entire creation. Therefore I believe this petition to be a quasi “Statement of Needs” articulated by human beings on behalf of the entire creation. As a consequence, having “dominion” or “presidential” responsibility over other creatures carries vocational obligations, which includes ensuring that human behavior does not become destructive and insensitive to the needs and welfare of the rest of God’s creatures.
- (8) The crisis has added significance to the LWF’s ongoing discussion on poverty in Africa and elsewhere, as well as economic ethics and accountability which are at the heart of the LWF’s program on illegitimate debt, spearheaded by the churches in Latin America on behalf of the entire communion. An open hearing on this issue at the 2010 Assembly will engage delegates and a wide range of other actors.
- (9) I am nevertheless concerned that the challenge of promoting responsibility and accountability on the international financial markets remains largely unmet. The window of opportunity for systemic reform is already closing and we risk returning to “business as usual.” As churches and ecumenical organizations we are caught up in the prevailing economic model and yet, for the sake of justice and the well-being of all, we ought to maintain a critical distance to the economic model under which we live.
- (10) **Climate change:** In Arusha the Council approved a detailed resolution mandating follow-up initiatives in a number of areas. Different arms of the Secretariat have been busy pursuing a number of such initiatives. For instance, at a very practical level, the Secretariat has instituted its own CO₂ compensation system for air travel. This was initiated at the beginning of 2009. The estimated amount of USD20, 000 annually will be allocated to LWF and member church projects that improve the CO₂ balance. Should this system prove effective we shall share the experience with the member churches and related organizations. In addition, we have developed some theological perspectives related to the urgent challenges of climate change and have published resource material for reflection and action by the member churches.
- (11) The timeliness of these publications has been underlined by the recent disasters caused by extreme weather events around the world. The international media have reported widely on the floods that recently occurred in the Philippines, on the high “mortality” rate of rivers and lakes in Africa (Lake Chad is disappearing), on the fact that water scarcity will result in countless conflicts and that migration (refugees) will increase beyond expectation. Every country is a potential destination for climate induced immigrants/refugees, estimated at 200 million by the middle of the century. Therefore the message is loud and clear: We can no longer wait but must actively contribute to global ecumenical and interreligious initiatives to respond to this crisis.
- (12) We have every reason to believe that the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference scheduled for December 2009 at Copenhagen, Denmark, is extremely important. If the right decisions are taken and realistic and achievable commitments made then it will be a milestone. It is our hope that this

conference will be much more than yet another world conference, but an occasion on which the global community commits itself to action oriented programs that will contribute towards the survival of our planet. The LWF is sending a delegation to this conference in the hope that in these complex and highly professional discussions those participating will have the necessary patience and foresight to draw on and integrate some of the important indigenous insights (wisdom) on ethical and sustainable relationships with creation. I am grateful that both DTS and the OIAHR have been trying to do exactly that.

- (13) **Assembly preparation:** Preparations both in Geneva and Stuttgart are well underway. The collaboration between the local assembly committee and Geneva staff is excellent and worship arrangements under the leadership of Rev. Per Harling are progressing well. The Six Year Report has been finalized and the Bible study and village group materials are now ready for dispatching to Assembly delegates and member churches for use in the congregations. We are grateful to Prof. Erwin Buck who was responsible for developing the Assembly content. As had been requested, Erwin, in collaboration with others, ensured that the study material is easily accessible to regular congregants so that the Assembly can be truly an Assembly of the member churches and not just one for the delegates.
- (14) I would like to thank the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) through its chairperson, Ms Angeline Swart, for the diligent work that has brought us this far. The APC's report is before you for your consideration. I would like to thank the German National Committee, the local assembly committee, the Assembly staff committee and others in the Secretariat for their hard work. In the five assemblies I have been involved in this is the first time that the main Assembly documents are ready nine months ahead of time.
- (15) When we gather in Stuttgart fifty-eight years will have passed since the LWF held its Second Assembly (Hannover 1952) in the land of the Reformation. I believe that it is natural that we ask ourselves, What is the significance of this Assembly for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany and for the ecumenical expressions within that country? What are the expectations of the churches in Germany? What does it actually mean for the global Lutheran communion to gather in the land of the Reformation at this point in history? I hope that these are some of the questions that will be discussed during the Pre-Assemblies.
- (16) As I already said in Lund, the 11th Assembly may well be a turning point in the life of the LWF. As you will have noted, the Renewal Committee's report (Exhibit 8.1) encourages us to consider holding our future assemblies within "the expanded space" of future WCC assemblies. If we move in this direction, which I fully support, this will nonetheless require that within this expanded space the LWF conducts its own business in order to fulfill its constitutional requirements.

Strengthening the communion

- (17) **Visits to and by the member churches:** One of the ways to stay in constant communication with the various organs of the communion is through visits to and by the member churches and related church organizations. The Communion Office in Geneva has hosted special round table meetings on specific issues. My Cabinet colleagues and I have held joint meetings with the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden and his senior executive staff in Uppsala, and a similar meeting was held in Germany with representatives of the German National Committee. In Geneva, we hosted a number of delegations from the member churches, related churches organizations and some of the newly elected bishops, presidents and heads and staff of related organizations. These meetings are extremely important because they provide the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about the life of member churches and to let such knowledge flow back into the day-to-day work of the Secretariat. Likewise, I wish to acknowledge the importance of exchange of visits between the LWF and the International Lutheran Council. The presence of Dr Sam Nafzger, who will bring a greeting during the course of this meeting, is more than encouraging. Some years ago, representatives of our respective bodies met in Finland and

made a commitment to invite each other to our respective meetings and conferences. And we are in the habit of doing that.

- (18) Over the years, Lutheran churches have developed a strong tradition of visiting one another. From the LWF's perspective, such pastoral visits must be encouraged and supported with resources when such needs arise. They are an important element of the apostolic tradition of building and strengthening the Body of Christ. When Lutheran churches exchange visits they do so on the basis of the understanding that if Lutherans are to speak credibly about the unity of the Church, they must make every effort to manifest that unity among themselves. Therefore, they are not undertaken in isolation, but in the context of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ.
- (19) **Education and training:** For decades, the LWF, through its International Scholarship Program, has played a vital role in strengthening the churches by enhancing leadership skills and staff competencies. The new LWF program on "Leadership Capacity/Competency Building," which focuses on the human resource development in member churches, will be further discussed by the Program Committee for Mission and Development.
- (20) HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB are at the forefront of the LWF programmatic work of strengthening member churches. In its HIV/AIDS campaign, the LWF seeks to highlight the gender dimensions in HIV prevention and to engage youth in discussion and action. Both are important components of an effective ministry of healing. Nonetheless, I am rather concerned that the pandemic is no longer receiving the attention it should and that there is some fatigue. I am therefore appreciative that the Assembly Planning Committee identified HIV/AIDS as one of the issues for the Open Hearing at the Assembly and hope that committees, especially PCMD, will provide some thoughts on both content and design. Let me also draw your attention to the document "Diakonia in Context – Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment. The Program Committee for Mission and Development will review it and recommend action by the Council (Exhibit 8.2)
- (21) **Women in church and society:** A working document "It will not be so among you! A faith reflection on Gender and Power" (Exhibit 13.1.2) has been circulated for your attention and comments. It is part of the process of systematizing and building up a theological gender vocabulary and understanding about gender mainstreaming in LWF programs and the member-churches. The document reflects on the past commitments of the Lutheran Communion with regard to gender, analyzes how relevant and important gender issues were perceived and envisioned by the church leaders and representatives, and explores how to guide the communion further in being a sign and an expression of an inclusive communion.
- (22) This study is based on experiences in the WICAS Gender and Power program during the last three years. Practical recommendations and discussions came from three regional consultations. The motivation for this study came from the Project Committee of the LWF that asked for more explicit gender understanding to be reflected in project write-ups. This was based on finding of a gender audit done in order to find how gender is intentionally built into the planning, implementation and evaluation of the projects.
- (23) **Theology in the life of the churches:** This program, implemented through a series of regional consultations, has underlined how crucial Lutheran theological insights are for the challenges churches face today. These include such situations where Lutheran churches are in the minority among people of other faiths, where neo-Pentecostalism is increasing in popularity, or where fundamentalism is issuing loud appeals. What is a distinctive Lutheran witness to the faith in the face of these challenges?
- (24) The final, global consultation in this program was held in March 2009 at Augsburg, Germany. With over 120 theologians participating, nearly half of whom were from the Global South, this was the

largest and most diverse gathering of theologians that the LWF has convened in recent history. It was a unique opportunity to gather younger theologians, not only to reflect on academic questions of theology, but to discuss the role of Lutheran theology in responding to the challenges the member churches are facing in the world today.

- (25) **Communication:** Effective communication is at the heart of being a communion. Mutual consultation and accountability cannot function without it. Member churches enjoy varying levels of capacity and resources, but generally, communication in the churches as well as the LWF is struggling for adequate resources. Even at a time of reduced resources overall, it is necessary to ensure that communication systems are functioning and prioritized.
- (26) With its Web-based communication strategy, the LWF has presented the vision of an “LWF Garden,” or web portal, which displays the diversity of communion. The better we are connected, the stronger our communion.

2017: 500th anniversary of the Reformation

- (27) Planning for the commemoration and observance of the year 2017 has begun. On Sunday, 1 November 2009, All Saints’ Day, I will be in Lutherstadt Wittenberg. I will plant a tree in the Luther Garden, which is a part of the 500th anniversary preparations. The tree planting of 500 trees in the shape of a Luther rose is to recall Martin Luther’s famous saying that if he knew that the world would end tomorrow, he would plant a tree today. This is even more apt today, when we clearly see the vulnerability of the world and its life-sustaining environment and affirm God’s continuing care for all its parts. This should not be exclusively for Lutherans. Planting trees with me will be General Secretaries of several of our ecumenical partners, giving visible expression to the ecumenical significance of this anniversary.
- (28) During this period of reflection on the meaning of the Lutheran tradition, I invite our Lutheran sisters and brothers, who are not part of this communion, to join us. In recent years, our relations with the International Lutheran Council have gained momentum and we recognize that in a number of ways we are joined in common mission. We are entering a time of testing this relationship. Will the diversity on a number of ethical issues, which the LWF embraces, divide us from the common work of bearing witness to the Lutheran insights into the Christian faith? I hope not. That which unites us is more significant than that which divides us. We share a common confessional heritage and I urge us to work together in making this Lutheran movement an agent of healing and reconciliation for the whole Body of Christ. How can the Lutheran World Federation and International Lutheran Council engage with each other in light of the 2017 landmark?

Reception of ecumenical achievements

- (29) On 1st October 2009, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodist gathered in Chicago, USA to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). On 31 October, similar gatherings will take place in many parts of the world. One such celebration will be in Augsburg, Germany, the site of the original signing of the JDDJ. We rejoice that Methodists will join us there, since they have also affirmed the JDDJ. This is a sign that it can have healing potential even in ecclesial relationships that are not rooted in the sixteenth-century disputes.
- (30) Earlier this year we entered a new phase in the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. A brief statement on the ecumenical significance of the Reformation for use in our churches will be produced and work on “baptism and growth in communion” will continue.
- (31) One of the significant issues and actions before the Council is one that carries the potential of changing the painful history between Lutherans and the inheritors of the Anabaptist tradition. You will have

taken note of the report of the LWF's dialogue with the Mennonites, which calls Lutherans to reflect on the witness of those theologians and pastors who opposed what Luther, Melancthon and others had approved. It falls on us to find a way in which we can ask for forgiveness from God, as well as from our sisters and brothers who are the inheritors of the Anabaptist tradition, for having used our Confessional Writings to justify persecution and execution.

- (32) Allow me to invite you to reflect on the following: How do we understand the condemnations which we have received in our tradition? How do we continue to honor the Confessions, which contain this language, while recognizing the changed web of relationships with other Christians—some of whom are inheritors of the positions Lutherans have condemned in the past? The answers to these questions will be important for the relationships we are developing with a number of other church families.
- (33) As we continue to realize the implications of our life as a “communion of churches,” we are exploring the meanings of communion with our partners in the Anglican Communion and the emerging new World Communion of Reformed Churches. Our dialogue with the Orthodox Churches—our longest uninterrupted dialogue—continues to explore aspects of the “mystery of the church.” We will consider at this Council meeting a proposal to move to a new stage in the formal dialogue with Pentecostals, building on the conversations conducted on behalf of the LWF by the Strasbourg Institute and on multiple other forms of study and contact over recent years.
- (34) I believe that all of us recognize that ecumenical impulses do not only result from formal dialogues. The LWF's work is ecumenical. Our worldwide diaconal work (through DWS) is thoroughly ecumenical, and our local churches are involved in the development of ecumenical relations in ways that are often way ahead of the formal relations among our global church families. These are the fruits of our commitment to ecumenism and the seeds for further progress toward the visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ.
- (35) *The new ACT Alliance (Exhibit 14.2)* is the result of a specific ecumenical commitment on our part. It expresses the understanding that ecumenical commitment is a task, born out of ecumenical maturity and building on the foundation of ecumenical dialogues and agreements. This new structure represents a wide ecumenical gathering around diakonia, bringing us together with some of those whom we have anathematized. It challenges the fragmentation of our efforts in this important aspect of the churches' common ministry. From this perspective, membership in the new ACT Alliance is not a choice, but an obligation.
- (36) The ACT International Emergency Committee and the ACT Development Assembly voted overwhelmingly to create a unified “ACT Alliance—Action by Churches Together,” commencing on 1 January 2010. The present participants/observers of ACT Development and members of ACT International will be invited to renew their commitment to ecumenical cooperation in international diakonia by applying for membership in the unified structure.
- (37) The LWF is a founding member of ACT International and, since its beginning, participates in ACT Development. We welcome this unification, which will provide an ecumenical platform for a close collaboration of churches and church-related agencies in diakonia beyond effective and coordinated responses to emergencies. Through DWS, the LWF is still the largest implementer of ACT appeals. The Secretariat's and member churches' close involvement in the formation and work of ACT International as well as ACT Development is a visible expression of the strong commitment of the Lutheran churches to diakonia.
- (38) The Federation will be represented in the Executive Committee of the ACT Alliance, whose new constitution foresees that member churches as well as DWS associate programs will be able to join the new ACT Alliance if they so wish. I strongly recommend to the Council the LWF's application for

membership in the unified ACT Alliance, and encourage member churches to consider applying for membership also.

- (39) Another example of ecumenism in practice is the LWF's close engagement with the WCC in addressing a theme that has long been in the heart of the LWF: the situation of the Dalits. "Dalitness" is a spiritual as well as a social condition and our ecumenical work in challenging caste discrimination is an external manifestation of a spiritual transformation against the exclusion and oppression of "Dalitness" everywhere.
- (40) On 21-24 March 2009, the LWF and WCC jointly convened a "Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits," at Bangkok. This event sought to express the churches' commitment to exposing and addressing this issue in the face of the international community's relative silence on this issue. Given the number of people affected, and the radical denial of human dignity that untouchability entails, this is truly an issue not just for the churches of India, but for the global church.
- (41) **Interfaith cooperation:** Ultimately, such issues as development, peace and conflict and caste-based discrimination cannot be effectively addressed by the churches alone. They require connections and cooperation with other faith communities. The LWF seeks to pursue this cooperation in a number of ways.
- (42) In June this year, the LWF convened a consultation of Christian and Muslim scholars in Indonesia. Scholars from around the world explored the meaning of freedom and responsibility in their respective traditions, and their findings will be published early next year.
- (43) **Middle East:** Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are increasingly critical in the Holy Land. The US administration's increased activity and clarity in addressing the key issue of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories give us some reason for hope. Nevertheless, the settlement project is so far advanced and has accelerated to such an extent that despite US demands to put a stop to new settlements the vision of a viable two state solution is fading dangerously. Despite the new robustness of US demands, the international community's inaction is breeding desperation and extremism and encouraging the exodus of Palestinian Christians from the Holy Land.
- (44) At stake today is finding new ways in which respectful discussions can be held without being misunderstood or misrepresented. I call on both political entities to resist the appeal of partisan positions and genuinely to engage in the search for peace. Unless all parties do so, no one stands to gain. Ultimately, there will only be victims. I call on all LWF member churches to stand in prayerful solidarity with the ELCJHL in resisting violence and injustice, in promoting inter-faith dialogue and cooperation for peace and in protecting and maintaining the Christian presence and witness in the land of Christ's birth.

The LWF finances

- (45) **Tax:** I am pleased to report that after a protracted period of negotiations between the LWF and the State of Israel, concluded in December, 2008, an out-of-court settlement could be reached that was accepted by the Israeli High Court on 1 January 2009. Based on the agreed settlement, all claimed arrears of tax up to 31 December 2008 were cancelled and thereby a considerable threat not only to the operation of Augusta Victoria Hospital but to the LWF as a whole could be avoided. It was agreed that the LWF would begin paying employers' tax as of 1 January 2010, and that the LWF and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs would conduct annual meetings to ensure the long-term continuation of the Augusta Victoria Hospital.

- (46) I would like to thank the members of the negotiation team, as well as the many member churches, for their tireless efforts to address this difficult issue with their governments requesting them to be in direct contact with the Israeli government. The successful outcome of these negotiations is a perfect example of our strength as a communion of churches and how we can connect local and global action.
- (47) At the same time, we are increasingly seeing the issue of liability for taxation being raised in contexts in which the LWF operates humanitarian relief and development programs. I fear that the days when we could assume tax exemptions for humanitarian activities are drawing to a close. In future, the LWF and others engaged in such work will have to plan for a different environment for international diakonia.
- (48) ***LWF Endowment Fund:*** One important instrument in improving the LWF's financial stability is the Endowment Fund. Although in the last two years the net assets of the fund have decreased due to unfavorable capital markets, this phenomenon is only temporary. In the long term, the fund will continue to grow. Every year we receive new donations. Last year, new contributions amounted to CHF 687,166 in Geneva and USD 113,640 in the USA. We have so far accumulated funds amounting to over CHF 10 million. The next goal is to reach CHF 20 million by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
- (49) Until now we have responded to the financial difficulties by reducing staff and staff related expenses. This is not sustainable. There is an urgent need for a new, multifaceted approach to financing some of the programmatic activities or meetings. On the occasion of the LWF's sixtieth anniversary, I had asked some churches in Africa and Asia to try and cover at least their participants' travel expenses. A good number of them actually did. While I am fully aware that some small churches cannot manage to cover such costs, I would suggest that what I refer to as the "Lund model" be included in future financial planning. Thus, one of the member churches in Africa, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), has agreed to pay for the travel costs of all its Assembly delegates. We are asking others in the Global South to find ways of doing the same. The "Lund model" increases a sense of ownership of the Federation among the churches. Therefore, an organization the size of the LWF must have on the Geneva staff a professional fundraiser who develops new approaches to funding beyond our traditional sources.
- (50) ***Marriage, family and sexuality:*** Churches around the world are living through a difficult period of discernment and struggle over pastoral issues of marriage, family and sexuality. It is my hope that the LWF member churches could discuss these pastoral issues in the spirit of the guidelines you adopted in Lund and thereafter commended for use in the member churches. Differences have and will surely emerge. However in the face of all these differences and difficulties we are reminded of the unity we have in Christ; that through the sacrament of baptism we are implanted in the Body of Christ. The fellowship we have with one another through Christ is not of our own making but a gift paid for through the priceless blood of Jesus Christ. This gift of fellowship therefore constitutes the context in which we engage one another with respect and humility. May God keep us **together** for the sake of the Gospel.

Thank You!