

AFRICA LUTHERAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA
9 TO 13 NOVEMBER, 2005

The Windhoek Statement of the Lutheran Communion in Africa

1. Preamble

We, leaders and representatives of the Lutheran Communion in Africa, comprising 30 member churches in 22 countries with over fourteen million Christians: guests and partners from Europe, bringing together over eighty participants, met in Windhoek, Namibia, from 9 to 13 November 2005, under the theme **“From Isolation to Communion: For the Healing of Africa.”** We gathered to share experiences, deepen our relationship, and to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the first gathering of Lutheran churches in Africa held in 1955, in Marangu, Tanzania.

We express our gratitude to the government of Namibia, Africa’s youngest independent country, for granting entry visa to all participants and for the good hospitality we received from the government and the people of Namibia. We pray for continued healing and reconciliation of the country and its peoples.

We were blessed and inspired by the presence of Rev. Jason Amakutuwa and Rev. Ephraim Angula of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, and greetings from Rev. Hans-Karl Diehl of the Evangelical Lutheran in the Republic of Namibia, who were participants at the first All Africa Lutheran Conference and are in their late 80s.

We were also inspired by the presence of partners from Finland (representatives from the Union of Church Workers in Finland, Union of Finnish Clergy and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, FELM) and the Norwegian Missionary Society, NMS. We acknowledge apologies from sisters and brothers from Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and Western Europe, North America who were unable to come. We are thankful for their prayers for the success of the conference.

We acknowledge the enormous wealth of Africa’s natural and human resources, diverse cultures and many positive values in our traditions, which cannot be quantified in figures. We therefore strongly believe that there is no justifiable reason for the excruciating poverty and all kinds of human made suffering inflicted on Africa and the African people.

During the Conference we received with gratitude the election of a new President of Liberia and the first female president in Africa. We pray for continued peace and reconciliation process in Liberia. In a similar vein, we celebrate positive signs of political stability in a number of African countries.

We met in the background of the challenges of globalization, poverty, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the threat of terrorism, bad governance, religious plurality, the constant threat of war in some of our countries, corruption, marginalization of minorities and the vulnerable, and disunity in some of our churches. These challenges impact negatively on our churches, manifesting themselves in various ways, the most visible being the increasing economic difficulties experienced by our churches. This results in poor working conditions of church workers and pensioners. We therefore reflected on the response of the church to challenges of ensuring decent working conditions in the church; holistic approach to the mission of the church; and the journey ahead.

We reaffirm our unity, which gives us hope and strengthens us to contribute meaningfully towards the search for a healthy Africa. We celebrate the progress made by Lutheran churches since Marangu in 1955 and pay tribute to the pioneers for their courage and vision to breakdown all borders and walls that isolate us from each other.

We however recognize that since Marangu the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Conferences have made progress in implementing the vision articulated in Marangu and subsequent Conferences. However we acknowledge that significant visions and recommendations envisaged in Marangu and subsequent Conferences remain un-implemented. These include theological education, leadership formation, communication, sustainability, good governance, ecumenical engagement, appalling working conditions, conflict caused by misunderstanding among religions, issues related to human sexuality, poverty and under development, HIV and AIDS.

We commit ourselves to the following processes and plans in order to respond to these challenges:

2. The Prophetic Role of the Church

Reminded of our diaconal and prophetic role in church and society, we undertake to continue to witness against all kind of forces of hate; violence against children, women and vulnerable persons; economic injustice and poverty; civil wars in including the recruitment of child soldiers; forced religious violence, terrorism and extremism; corruption and bad leadership that perpetuate poverty.

3. The Renewal of the Lutheran Communion

We recognize the need for the renewal of the entire Lutheran Communion to strengthen our cooperation and enhance our efforts to address the aforementioned challenges in the Africa region. We commit ourselves to actively engage in the renewal process by implementing our decision to establish Lutheran Council in Africa, which, among other things, will:

- 3.1 guide and ensure the participation and input of all member churches in the region towards the renewal process;
- 3.2 appoint a doctrinal committee to manage doctrinal issues in member churches and the Communion;
- 3.3 serve as monitoring mechanism in the implementation of our commitments;
- 3.4 dialogue and interact with ecumenical and other regional bodies on issues of common interest;
- 3.5 set up mechanisms for pastoral peer review within the Lutheran Communion in Africa, in order to ensure good governance, transparency, and equity in the sharing of power in the churches that includes the involvement of women, youth and people with disabilities.

That in view of the radical changes that have occurred since the LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1990, we call on the LWF to engage the churches once again in a comprehensive process of LWF renewal in order to put in place a new LWF by the year 2010.

4. Communication

We recognize that lack of effective communication impedes our Communion. We therefore resolved to establish the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET) with the following components for the time being:

- 4.1 Web site located in LUCSA;
- 4.2 print media located in LUCCEA; and
- 4.3 audio and video (airwaves) located in LUCCWA.

Furthermore, we commit ourselves to strengthen among us exchange programs, pastoral visits and sharing of resources.

We are appalled that communication and transportation remains a serious barrier in Africa. For example, some African delegates to the Conference had to go through other continents in order to get to Namibia. We strongly call on the Africa Union (AU) to enter into serious dialogue to find ways of improving this situation.

5. HIV and AIDS

We reaffirm our commitments in Nairobi in 2002 to break the silence on HIV and AIDS, and actively engage in the fight against the pandemic. In order to further our commitments we undertake to do the following:

- 5.1 develop in our churches, policies on HIV and AIDS that do not stigmatize or discriminate against people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHAS);
- 5.2 mainstream HIV and AIDS in all activities of our churches;
- 5.3 denounce discrimination and stigma of any kind and undertake to develop strategies to deal with stigma, discrimination and other cultural practices and beliefs that exacerbate and complicate the impact of HIV and AIDS;
- 5.4 to continue to learn and share best practices from/with each other, from other faith based communities, governments and organizations in order to advance the campaign;
- 5.5 reflect, and continue to find ways to incorporate positive African values that will enhance success of the campaign;
- 5.6 reflect upon Christian ethics as it relates to issues of HIV and AIDS.

6. Theological Education and Leadership formation

We recognize the increasing difficulty and the urgent need to provide relevant leadership for the church in today's context. We further recognize the vast needs in our growing churches and congregations that ordained leadership alone cannot manage. Therefore, we commit ourselves:

- 6.1 to review our theological curriculum to ensure their relevance;
- 6.2 to establish management and leadership training programs for senior church leaders (continued education) in our churches and institutions;
- 6.3 to embark on lay leadership training and empowerment in line with our Lutheran understanding of priesthood of all believers, to address some of the churches' leadership needs;
- 6.4 implement the resolutions we have taken regarding the empowerment of women in various levels of leadership in the church (ordination, advanced theological education);
- 6.5 implement our many resolutions and commitments regarding the inclusion of youth at all levels of leadership in the church;
- 6.6 mandate ACTEA to undertake the additional task of research and publication on issues related to Africa from Lutheran Theological perspective;
- 6.7 pursue our self-understanding as a Communion, and clarification on theological education, ethical, dogmatic, and charismatic issues, and clear understanding of hermeneutics before entering into dialogue.

7. Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations

We affirm that we cannot work in isolation, especially in dealing with the various challenges confronting our communities, societies, and the continent as a whole. We therefore:

- 7.1 commit ourselves to ecumenical engagement;
- 7.2 commit to inter-religious dialogue to strengthen healthy relationship and cooperation towards peace and development;
- 7.3 commit to theologically clarify our understanding of interfaith dialogue, especially the tendency to relate or equate dialogue to conversion.

8. Sustainability in the Church

We recognize the difficult conditions that workers in the church often find themselves, which affects their human dignity and performance level. We are further saddened by the growing rate of unemployment especially for young people. We therefore commit ourselves to pursue the following:

- 8.1 to develop and implement visions, systems and structures that strengthens good governance, transparency and sharing of power in our churches as a basis for sustainability of the mission of the church;
- 8.2 take positive steps to ensure good governance in the church while we continue to advocate for the same in our governments and civil societies;
- 8.3 set up an advocacy team comprising representatives of the sub-regions to work with sister churches to support, encourage, advocate and sometimes challenge our governments to take up their responsibilities and implement decisions to create jobs and safety in the countries;
- 8.4 each church to embark on drawing a plan of action to address the issues relating to sustainability and working conditions in the church, and to seek the accompaniment of the LWF and partners.

9. Decent Work and Working Conditions in Church and Society

We shared impressions and experiences on working conditions and quality of life in the church (including pensions schemes, retirement grants, salary policies, vacation and holidays, life insurance and other benefits for church employees and youth unemployment.

We recognize that only a few Lutheran churches in Africa have reasonable personnel policies. This situation leaves much to be desired, requiring an urgent action. Therefore we commit ourselves to:

- 9.1 improve the quality of working life in the church. In the immediate term we undertake to come up with a plan of action to improve salaries and other conditions of work in our churches;
- 9.2 to come up with a strategic plan to expand the resource base of the church, including, exploring possibilities of tax exemptions on donations to support social services institutions of the church;
- 9.3 explore diverse means of an investment plan, for example, by establishing church banks;
- 9.4 to encourage cross border investment with fellow Lutheran churches and NGOs;
- 9.5 to develop policies for diversified investments;
- 9.6 embark on advocacy for the return of the resources of Africa that were obtained through illegitimate means;
- 9.7 encourage economic status of the people, by utilizing the vast human and economic resources that we have;
- 9.8 embark on continuous dialogue with our governments for the creation of jobs to halt the growing poverty rate throughout the continent;
- 9.9 develop strategies for reducing youth unemployment by:

- 9.9.1 discussing with government and policy makers at the MACRO level regarding prioritizing youth active participation in the work force. Young people should not be seen as a problem but as a resource for the economic market;
- 9.9.2 re-visioning of education and its relation to life and work, which should include refocusing priority on the training of middle level entrepreneurial skills and making scholarship and financial assistance available, exploring possibilities for creating self-employment;
- 9.9.3 exploring the possibility of loan fund schemes and training for networked small businesses with forward and backward as well as lateral linkages, as un-networked small businesses are too fragile to succeed in a situation of widespread poverty and negative economic globalization;
- 9.9.4 requesting to the LWF through the Africa desk to undertake research regarding alternative education approaches (education for life) that can help reduce unemployment amongst the youth.

10. The LWF Mission Document

We receive with gratitude the LWF document “**Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment.**” We acknowledge this valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of holistic mission and diaconia which are at the heart of the nature and being of the church. We therefore commit ourselves to better understand and utilize the document in our churches and various contexts. We further commit ourselves to the translation of the document into national languages for the benefit of the congregations.

11. The LWF Endowment Fund

We reiterate our gratitude to LWF for establishing the LWF Endowment Fund, which shall serve the whole Communion. We undertake to continue to seek ways of supporting the Fund.

12. Statement by the Youth Participants

We are grateful for the active participation of the youth at the Conference. We receive the statement presented (which is appended) and commit ourselves to bring the issues they raised to the governing bodies of our churches and the LWF.

13. 50th Anniversary Celebration

We offer our thanks to God for the first Conference in 1955 and the opportunity to celebrate 50 years together. We thank God for the forbearers Faith in Christ and all those who suffered or died for the freedom of Africa. We undertake by the grace of God, to continue the faith that our forbearers handed to our children and ourselves.

We affirm that the growth of the Lutheran Communion in Africa has not, and cannot be isolated from worldwide sister churches in Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. We express our gratitude for their support and cooperation over the last fifty years.

We send through the LWF General Secretary, our congratulations to, and prayers for God’s blessing on the Lutheran Communion in Asia, which shall be marking its 50th Anniversary in 2006, and the LWF Worldwide Communion’s 60th Anniversary in 2007. We pray for God’s blessings during these celebrations.

14. Follow Up

The LWF secretariat is asked:

- 14.1 to enable the setting up of the Lutheran Council in Africa, and doctrinal committee, in consultation with the sub-regional expression leadership;
- 14.2 in consultations with sub-regional expression leadership, to find amicable solutions to concerns which rose about sub-regional set up and the proposal to review them in accordance with the AU political regional, which will be set up by mid 2006;
- 14.3 to find specific ways of continued dialogue with church unions in Finland;
- 14.4 to enable the setting up of the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET).

15. Conclusion

In conclusion, we express our deepest gratitude to the LWF for accompanying the Lutheran Communion in Africa since its first Conference in 1955 and for making it possible for us to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our gathering. We are committed to the process of enhancing and strengthening Communion in our region and within other regions. We give glory to God!