



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

General Secretariat - Office for International Affairs and Human Rights

Final Declaration

Lutheran World Federation Consultation on Illegitimate Debt Buenos Aires, Argentina, 21-23 September 2005

You are exacting interest, each from his brother (...). The thing that you are doing is not good (...). I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses.

Nehemiah 5,7 ss.

Compelled by our commitment to the Kingdom of God and identifying with the suffering of our people, we have gathered here in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from the 21st to the 23rd of September 2005, as representatives of Christian churches and of social and political organizations of Latin America, the United States, Europe and Africa. We have come together, for the purpose of reaching a consensus and of defining common actions regarding the issue of illegitimate external debt, in response to the summons of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Latin America, and under the auspices of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI).

We approached the theme of the Consultation from biblical, theological, pastoral, historical, economic and juridical perspectives. We heard from individuals who are participating in the issue from the perspective of their churches, social organizations governmental responsibility. We also heard about the different strategies, campaigns and actions being carried out in various parts of the world.

The concept of illegitimate external debt, as discussed and recognized by the Assembly of the LWF in Winnipeg 2003, is based on moral, ethical and legal perspectives, rather than only the narrow economic perspective with which governments have dealt with it. Debt is clearly illegitimate if it is unethical, immoral and odious. A doctrine on illegitimate external debt is currently being developed through political and juridical actions promoted in various parts of the world.

During our deliberations regarding illegitimate external debt, we affirmed that:

- The impoverishment and deaths produced by this debt are dramatically increasing. From the standpoint of our faith, we hear the call to address the issue of debt from the perspective of the victims;
- This debt is an instrument of domination and exclusion, a vehicle of the neoliberal model. It impedes human development in the countries subjected to it. It seriously affects the integrity of creation, mortgaging future generations. It threatens human rights, particularly economic, social, cultural and environmental rights;
- Throughout the entire debt process, there are institutions and individuals responsible, even criminally responsible, for it. These institutions and individuals are located both in the North and in the South, and are perfectly identifiable.



Therefore, we join the call of all those who demand the immediate cancellation of all illegitimate debt.

It is imperative that we undertake actions that promote this objective in four crucial areas:

- awareness building
- mobilization
- public advocacy
- legal proceedings

Some of the proposed actions are:

- 1) To motivate the church leadership to become actively involved and to speak the truth to the people, the government and institutions, both within their own context and collectively, calling for an end to illegitimate external debt.
- 2) To include the topic of illegitimate external debt in various places within our churches, including catechesis and worship.
- 3) To promote networking with others involved in awareness building, campaigning, public advocacy and taking legal action on debt.
- 4) To support and promote the implementation of debt audits through existing mechanisms and civil society proposals.
- 5) To motivate and join the churches, ecumenical and interfaith entities, and other organizations, in working towards carrying out joint campaigns on illegitimate external debt.
- 6) To join the efforts to create an International Tribunal on illegitimate external debt. This Court should be based on legal authority and should engage individuals who are internationally renowned for their ethical and professional reputation.
- 7) To join efforts to bring legal proceedings against external debt in national contexts.
- 8) To create a database to link people together and to share available materials.
- 9) To develop and coordinate communication and education policies regarding external debt, by creating, publishing and distributing materials (including liturgical resources and bible studies) to build awareness and increase understanding regarding the illegitimacy of debt.
- 10) To promote the participation of churches, ecumenical organizations and civil society in national, regional and international events that deal with the issue of illegitimate external debt.
- 11) To encourage the encounters and interaction of people who deal with the issue of illegitimate external debt.
- 12) To support and promote specific case studies to illustrate the mechanisms of illegitimate external debt, in order to build public awareness, to encourage grass roots campaigns and to influence governments and their policies.
- 13) To cooperate with the "United Nations Independent Expert on the effects of economic reform policies and external debt", particularly in relation to the drafting of guidelines on external debt, so that they ensure the full enjoyment of human rights.

We specifically recommend that:

- The G8 meeting, to be held in Germany in 2007, and the World Social Forums should be focal points for campaigning for the cancellation of illegitimate external debt and for the creation of mechanisms to prevent future illegitimate debts.

- In the meantime, in order to achieve these goals, the churches should undertake actions such as the ones described above, in accordance with their respective capacities and possibilities, so as to create momentum and synergy towards these events and beyond.

In view of the magnitude of the challenge, but aware of the mercy, love and power of God, we exclaim along with the prophet Habakkuk:

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? (...) Destruction and violence are before me; (...) So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth.

Habakkuk 1, 2-4