

**LWF CONSULTATION ON DIAKONIA AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE
ASIAN CONTEXT**

Bangkok, 18-22 October, 2005

STATEMENT AND MESSAGE

I. PREAMBLE

Facilitated by the Asia desk of the LWF-DMD, we, the 76 delegates from 32 out of 47 member churches in the Asia region came together in the “Consultation on Diakonia and Development in the Asian Context” at Bangkok from the 18th to 22nd October 2005 and were hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.

Coming from 11 countries, we church leaders, diaconal workers, LWF staff, fraternal guests, stewards and volunteers were called to theologically grapple with, reflect and deepen the understanding of the role of the churches in Diakonia, and to look for ways to integrate it with the tasks of mission and transformation. We also had the challenging task to seek ways to identify common issues and specific strategies for the diakonal engagement of the churches. We were called to reflect on the relation between diakonia and development in order to better define the role of the churches in society. We were also introduced to the statement and process of the International Consultation on “Prophetic Diakonia: For the Healing of the World” which was the first initiative by the LWF in November 2002 at Johannesburg, South Africa , organized to deepen the understanding of the various expressions of national and international diakonia.

We participated in worships, listened to Bible Studies, received a keynote presentation and also presentations on the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diakonia and responses. We also received presentations on education, development, including sub-regional presentations which helped us to understand the realities of the Asian region. We were all moved by the earnestness and openness in the consultation which was a positive input. We also visited the challenging diakonal ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.

This consultation therefore challenged the delegates to explore new ways to understanding and practicing diakonia and development in response to vital issues hostile to life in the Asian continent and also to the future of humankind. In this process we identified the following challenges:

II. ANALYSIS OF OUR CONTEXT:

i. GLOBALIZATION

Processes of globalization have taken deep roots in Asia and encompass all facets of life including economics, trade, politics, governance, culture, etc, thus introducing a new form of colonialism. It invades the whole nation state and communities through the market .Some Asian countries are rapidly moving towards a capitalist economy propelled by the energy of the market under the regime of economic globalization.

Within the Asian region we have different economic realities which challenge us to understand poverty and wealth differently. International debt is unjustly thrust on poor nations who repay several times the original debt. Globalization impoverishes and pushes the poor and the marginalized communities to the extreme periphery of hopelessness.

ii. POVERTY

Poverty continues to be the biggest scandal and a sin with increasing disparities in societies and churches. Several Asian communities are being increasingly alienated from their land, forest and other life resources by the processes of so called modernization and development. Illiteracy and lack of awareness among large masses of people in Asia has added to poverty and marginalization. Natural calamities and emergencies continue to be a challenge to our region. Technological development in Asia has widened further the divide of *haves and have not's*. Movement of labor within and outside Asia lays stress on local economies. The challenges of poverty continue to push many women into the commercial sex industry. Women and the differently-abled continue to be victimized and marginalized by poverty. Children are deprived of their childhood and exploited in the labor market.

iii. HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has to be viewed as a symptom and result of poverty and is compounding its effects. Negligence, reluctance and a lack of exposure to the issues of human sexuality have resulted in the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This ignorance also leads to teenage pregnancies, risky abortions and stigmatization of women, further increasing the pandemic. HIV/AIDS is a ticking bomb in Asia as the prevalence is strongly on the increase in many Asian countries and regions.

iv. SOCIAL REALITIES

The plurality of religions and spiritualities, of missionary work and the presence of the church compel us to use them as resources. Fundamentalism has moved beyond faith and religion leading to a new culture of intolerance and conflict. Caste in India and ethnic challenges in other Asian countries continue to divide, oppress, exclude and discriminate millions of people. Militarization and the arms race in Asia is increasingly life threatening. Public expenditure on the nuclear and other defense projects cuts into peoples' development priorities.

Terrorism is increasingly occupying the everyday Asian reality. We have been made to stereotype terrorism according to imported definitions. The political plurality in the Asian region throws up special challenges in the realms of democracy and secularism within our internal relations. Increasing life span poses a challenge to our societies to address the concerns and security of the elderly.

v. THE CHURCH

The reality of the minority status of the churches in Asia challenges us to examine, seek new and creative ways of interacting and working with governments. Despite this, the churches in Asia have a rich and a long tradition in diakonia though on

occasions they have limited their diakonia to charity alone. Several NGOs and church related projects are facing difficulties due to the changes presented by the neo-liberal economic processes. Though a minority religion in Asia, the church has withstood the test of time and has a rich heritage of gifts and specific resources, which can be utilized efficiently. These resources include a historically rooted presence in the communities. The church is witnessing through its existing diakonal ministries and it has substantially contributed to nation building in several countries.

With this analysis we make the following affirmations.

III. AFFIRMATIONS

i. THEOLOGICAL

- a) Diakonia is the very nature and being of God and hence through the Word and the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, we participate and are empowered in the diakonia of God. Proclamation of the gospel and Diakonia are inseparable. It is the gospel in action and is seen and recognized as one of the marks of the church.
- b) Incarnational mission of the church is to enter and remain in challenging territories of need, marginalization, pain and suffering in order to make the cross relevant to the society.
- c) While the church recognizes the cliché ‘preferential option for the poor’, the understanding should also include an accompaniment with the poor as an act of discipleship.
- d) Prophetic diakonia is about truth telling from the perspective of the victims and it cannot be neutral. Diakonia includes the radical critique of the social, economic, cultural and other structural sins. It also has the dimensions of justice, peace and reconciliation. It involves engagement in advocacy (public and political) even taking risks about its own identity. It also aims at the restoration of justice, reforming unjust structures and transforming relations even within the church..
- e) The diakonal and development responsibilities of the church cannot be outsourced to agencies as it is the prerogative and fundamental responsibility of the church. It reflects a Christian world view which contributes to a holistic view of the mission and development of the church.
- f) Diakonia is an essential part of discipleship denoting the church’s praxis in public life. It essentially involves the processes of transformation, empowerment and reconciliation. It is to be seen as central to the life of the church and is not to be limited to a specialized ministry of a few but of the whole community of God.

ii. DEVELOPMENT AND DIAKONIA

We affirm our understanding of sustainable development as a process of change by which the basic needs and human rights of individuals and communities in any given society are realized; while at the same time protecting the basic needs and human rights of other communities and future generations. As such the vision, aims,

instruments and processes of prophetic diakonia and sustainable development show a remarkable convergence.

iii. POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

- a) Partnership in diakonal and development work is about sharing life. It should not be founded on money and funding. It is an accompaniment in solidarity with dignity and trust.
- b) Churches need discernment in distinguishing between prophetic and political diakonia.
- c) Diakonia partnership should, not be based on power relations but rather on team work and coordination. The church reaffirms its commitment to relating with other networks and partners to fulfill its diakonal work.

With these affirmations we confirm our commitment both to holistic diakonia and sustainable development and identify the following ways of action.

IV. THE WAY FORWARD: Recommendations for a plan of Action

i. To the member Churches and its congregations:

- a) Church to live-out diakonia and proclaim the gospel through diakonia as well. It should restore the centrality of the congregation. Member churches could identify model congregations and accompany them for awareness, training and education to engage in diakonal ministries. This could be a pilot project of the churches and supported by the DMD/Asia Desk. Training of project holders, church workers and church leaders for advocacy work could be a priority area. In this process member churches need to strive for quality in project planning, monitoring and evaluation. Member Churches may cooperate and partner with the LWF/DWS and other ecumenical agencies in disaster relief. Local resources through the process of participatory planning should be utilized for the prioritization of diakonal activities. Churches are encouraged to share information for their diakonal experiences through the Asia Lutheran News (www.asia-lutheran.org) and the Lutheran World Information. Churches should be sensitive to the communalization of politics.
- b) Demand and strive for a good and corruption free governance in management and administration in the South and the North. Confrontation of structures both within and outside the country that hinder diakonal work will enable a deeper understanding of the dynamics of diakonal partnership..
- c) Build the capacities of the congregations and communities to explore alternatives for life and livelihood in response to poverty, HIV/AIDS, etc. Churches are encouraged to study and implement the “Covenant of Life”, the action plan from the Bantam consultation on the churches’ response to HIV/AIDS. This process needs to address the challenges of drugs and substance abuse.

- d) Affirm and recognize the role and leadership of women and youth in planning, governance and implementation in diakonal and development processes of the churches..
- e) Address prophetically the challenges of Dalits, indigenous people and other oppressed communities in Asia.

ii. To the Asian Lutheran Theological Seminaries:

- a) Strengthen diakonal education in all levels of the churches and introduce diakonia studies in the seminaries.
- b) Produce relevant biblical and theological foundation for praxis and strengthening of diakonal understanding leading to the publication of books and other reading materials in the area of diakonia preferably in local languages.

iii. To the Lutheran World Federation and other networks

- a) Actively examine the understanding and motives of diakonia of the North and the South.
- b) Accompany member churches in Human Sexuality studies in congregations and communities to address the challenging issues of HIV/AIDS, etc.
- c) Support networking among LWF departments, related agencies and member churches for mutual sharing of ideas, methodologies and practices, Also support mutual exposure, visitation and exchange programs among Asian churches. To explore strategies to respond to challenges in new places where there are no member churches.

V. CALL TO THE CHURCHES

We encourage the congregations and the churches to become pro-active in addressing the challenges of diakonia. We ask the churches to read and discuss this document in the congregations to identify roles and be mutually accountable in its implementation and report periodically on it to LWF and one another. Partner churches and agencies are to recognize the new understanding of diakonia in Asia and to identify better and new ways of doing diakonia.

We commit ourselves as participants of this consultation, as member churches and as LWF to continue to live out our faith so that when we are asked about our identity, the communities will affirm our uniqueness through our faith and diakonia.

“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” John 10:10

The Delegates of the
LWF Consultation on Diakonia and Development in the Asian Context
Bangkok, 18-22 October, 2005