



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

General Secretariat - Office for International Affairs and Human Rights

Asia Regional Human Rights Training Workshop Bangkok, Thailand, 22-27 September 2000

Message from the participants

We, the participants in the LWF Asia Regional Human Rights Training Workshop, held in Bangkok, Thailand, 22-27 September 2000, send this message to all LWF member churches in the Asian region, with our greetings and prayers.

Participants

We represent 18 churches in 7 countries in the Asian region (out of 43 LWF member churches in the region). We were joined by representatives from 2 LWF field programmes in the region.

Purpose of the workshop

The purpose of our meeting together was to raise awareness of human rights and receive training in the use of strategies and mechanisms for addressing human rights issues.

Theme for the workshop

The theme adopted for our workshop was “The human rights of the poor: the eradication of poverty as a human rights challenge”.

The eradication of poverty and the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights are inter-related goals. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”.

The theme was used as an entry point to our overall discussion of human rights. It helped make the exercise contextual and prevented us from approaching the topic of human rights purely in a theoretical way.

Human rights issues in the Asian region

In the course of our discussions we became aware of serious human rights issues in our region and often we were moved as we heard first-hand accounts of human rights abuses.

Human rights issues that were particularly highlighted included the following:

- poverty in many of our countries
- reconciliation and social justice issues in relation to Aboriginal people in Australia
- discrimination and violence against Dalits and tribal people in India
- discrimination against women in all countries, including in employment and labour conditions
- forced prostitution in Thailand
- violations of the rights of the child in all countries
- sexual abuse of children in Thailand
- religious intolerance in many of our countries
- religious conflict in Indonesia
- denial of civil and political rights in Burma and Indonesia
- internally displaced people in Burma
- treatment of refugees in many countries.

Human rights and the churches

In the course of our discussions we often felt challenged to reassess our values, attitudes and behaviour in the light of God's word.

We feel that our churches are challenged to see involvement in human rights issues as an essential part of their ministry, not something to be left to government and non-government organizations. Promotion of human rights and opposition to human rights abuses should be part of a holistic Christian ministry.

In the workshop we were encouraged to view involvement in human rights ministry in relation to creation theology, in which every human being is seen as having innate value and dignity as a result of having been created in the image of God, and in relationship with the whole of creation.

In our Bible studies we were reminded again and again of God's special concern for the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, and the victims of injustice. Bringing good news to the oppressed, healing the broken-hearted, and announcing freedom for prisoners and captives (Isaiah 61:1) belong to the central task of the church: the preaching of the gospel.

One of our facilitators in the workshop, a human rights practitioner at the grassroots level, presented the challenge to the churches in a particularly vivid way by referring to the terror of the disciples when they first saw Jesus walking on the water in the storm (Matthew 14:26). He said, "If people in the churches see where Jesus is when he comes to them, they will be terrified. He is out in the storm, in the wild sea. He is where there is poverty, fear, violence, intimidation, forced labour, exploitation, oppression, injustice, sexual abuse. The question for us in the churches is: Are we ready, like Peter, to step out of the boat, onto the wild water, to go where Jesus is?"

Commitments/Recommendations

We, the participants in the LWF Asia Regional Human Rights Training Workshop, held in Bangkok, Thailand, 22-27 September 2000,

commit ourselves

- to promptly report, in writing and, if called upon, verbally, to our respective churches and/or organizations on this workshop, its content and its outcome;
- to acting as multipliers of the information we have received and the skills we have acquired during this workshop, within our churches and within our communities, through workshops, publications and/or other means;
- to promoting closer attention by our churches to human rights issues, both in our societies and in our churches themselves, and to continuing to work on behalf of our churches and the LWF communion in a human rights ministry;
- to promoting an awareness and a culture of human rights not only within our churches but also within the other organizations, institutions, associations, and relationships in which we are involved;
- to reviewing, where available from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the translations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into our respective mother tongues, and where these translations are inadequate, to preparing, by ourselves or with the assistance of others, better translations and to providing these translations for the use of our church and others;
- to maintaining contact with each other to the maximum extent possible, and to praying for and otherwise supporting each other in our human rights ministries;

recommend to the LWF member churches in the Asian region:

- that they provide the space, in their synods, conventions, assemblies, conferences or other governing bodies, for their representative(s) (if any) at this workshop to report in detail, in writing and verbally, on the workshop, its content and its outcome;
- that those churches which were not represented at this workshop invite one or more of us to report on the workshop, in writing and verbally, before the governing bodies of such churches;
- that they, whether represented at this workshop or not, arrange for the translation of the message and commitments/recommendations from this workshop into the mother tongue(s) of their membership, and that they send a copy of same to all pastors;
- that they also send to all pastors, with the message and the commitments/recommendations, a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the mother tongue(s) of their membership (provided by participants in the workshop or obtained from the United Nations);
- that they publish the message and commitments/recommendations from the workshop in church magazines and/or other media organs;

- that if their representative(s) in the workshop has revised or arranged for the revision of the relevant translation(s) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such revised translation(s) should, as well as be disseminated by the church within the community, be

provided to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for wider publication;

- that they reaffirm, at the level of the synod, convention, assembly, conference or other governing body of the church, their commitment to a human rights ministry as part of the mission of the church;
- that each church which has not already done so should establish a structure or mechanism within the church to act as a focal point for the church's human rights ministry, whether such structure or mechanism be a desk, committee, contact person or some other structure or mechanism;
- that where churches were represented at this workshop they utilize those present as resource persons in their ongoing human rights ministry;
- that steps be taken to increase awareness of human rights and to promote a human rights culture amongst the congregations, clergy, family, and society as a whole, through the vehicles of:
 - prayer
 - preaching
 - liturgy
 - Bible studies
 - human rights workshops and discussion forums
 - human rights courses as part of theological formation and other educational curricula
 - a human rights component in Sunday school programmes, and
 - special observances (e.g. a 'Human Rights Sunday');
- that such awareness-raising steps include reflection on specific human rights issues at the local level;
- that the churches undertake, or continue and deepen any existing theological reflection on what we consider to be the natural and necessary relationship between the Lutheran confessions and a concern for human rights;
- that the churches actively seek ecumenical, inter-faith and non-governmental organization partners and alliances in order to pursue an effective human rights ministry;
- that the churches integrate and utilize human rights principles and approaches in their existing and any future sectoral ministries (such as with women, youth, children, the poor, minorities and marginalized communities [including Dalits, tribal/indigenous peoples], human development, etc.);
- that they and the relevant LWF National Committees consider convening sub-regional human rights workshops/seminars, in order to more sharply focus on the human rights challenges facing the churches at the sub-regional level;

- that they match their concern for human rights with action, through:
 - prayer
 - direct support for the victims of human rights violations (such as counselling, legal aid and assistance, rehabilitation services, and
 - advocacy on behalf of the victims, with the perpetrator(s), the relevant bureaucracies, the governmental authorities at national levels, and any relevant UN or other inter-governmental bodies, and in particular focussing on the root causes of the violations;
- that they formulate programmes of human rights education (through workshops, publications, etc.) for submission to the LWF's Department for Mission and Development;
- that they confirm that all communications from the LWF Secretariat to the LWF member churches in the Asian region regarding human rights-related matters may be copied, as appropriate, to the participants in this workshop and to any human rights structures or mechanisms established by the churches;
- that they notify the LWF Secretariat of the human rights action plans they formulate in response to these recommendations;

request the LWF Secretariat:

- to publish the message and commitments/recommendations from this workshop in the LWI and any other appropriate LWF communication vehicles;
- to include the issue of a human rights ministry on the agenda of the next Asian regional church leaders' consultation; and
- to support, to the maximum extent possible, the human rights ministries of the LWF member churches in the Asian region, with information and materials, advice, and financial and logical assistance as appropriate and/or as requested.