



# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

*Office of the General Secretary*

## **Statement by Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko** General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation

### **Press Conference, 15 June 2001**

*As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes..." (Luke 19: 41-42)*

### **The things that make for peace**

The Lutheran World Federation, consisting of 131 member churches around the world and representing over 60 million people, shares with all Christian churches and communities a fundamental spiritual connection with the land of Christ's birth and ministry on earth. The LWF's connection with the Holy Land is also a living one. One of the LWF's member churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, consists of and serves an indigenous Palestinian Christian community in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Jordan, whose historical roots date back to the time of Christ. The Bishop of that church, Bishop Munib Younan, joins me in this press conference.

In addition, since 1951 the LWF has operated the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. This hospital is one of the primary health service providers for the Palestinian population of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

As a communion of churches which derive their essence and being from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as the international expression of a family of churches which includes an indigenous Palestinian church, and as the provider of essential health services to the wider Palestinian community of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the LWF has many reasons to raise its voice against injustice and violence in Israel-Palestine.

Despite the current efforts to secure a mutual cease-fire, for which I thank God, there is no peace in the Holy Land – no true and sustainable peace. Instead, there is the violence of occupation, the violence of domination, the violence of injustice, the violence of revenge, the violence of intolerance and exclusion, the violence of simply not caring, and the violence of forgetting.

We, as churches, profess that every human being bears the image of God and has an inherent God-given dignity. And we believe that justice requires respect for that inherent dignity. We therefore reject the stereotypes which are used to demonize and to justify the oppression of a whole people.

The Lutheran World Federation has rejected and denounced anti-Semitism in all its forms. We have promoted tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect among peoples and religions. We have frequently reiterated our vision of Jerusalem as a city of two peoples and three faiths. We have spoken against violence, and warned of its inevitable tendency to lead to more violence. We have affirmed the fundamental right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their places of origin. We have called for an end to measures designed to alter the region's demographic realities for political purposes, including the establishment and expansion of settlements. We have declared that there can be no sustainable peace or justice in the region without equitable and non-discriminatory access to economic opportunity and water resources, and have spoken against recurrent and frequent border closures. We have promoted dialogue and mutual understanding, and denounced extremism. And we have prayed for peace and reconciliation.

Palestinians desire justice and self-determination. Israelis desire security. Both desire a future for their families and

their communities. Their respective aspirations are not mutually exclusive, but mutually dependent.

The violence must certainly cease, but in order to promote its end the conditions of injustice that provoke the desperation and rage on which extremism feeds must be removed. For the sake of Israeli and Palestinian children alike, dialogue and negotiation must be resumed, the grossly excessive use of armed force must stop, civilian populations must be protected and not attacked, the economic stranglehold on the occupied Palestinian territories must be loosened, the construction and expansion of the intensely provocative settlements must cease, the attacks upon Israeli civilians must be brought to an end, and, ultimately, the occupation must be abandoned. These are the things - the essential things - that make for peace.

On Sunday 17 June 2001, the members of the LWF Council, currently meeting in Geneva under the theme "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation", will gather at the Ecumenical Centre for a worship service at which Bishop Younan will preach. The service will be followed by a seminar on 'Justice and Peace in the Middle East' in which we will initially hear an address by Dr. Kamal Hossain of Bangladesh, a former member of the Commission of Inquiry established by the UN Commission on Human Rights. The centrepiece of the seminar will be presentations by Mrs. Dalia Landau and Mrs. Huda Abu Gharbieh who, being mothers from respectively the Jewish Israeli community and the Muslim Palestinian community, can describe the common hopes and fears of mothers for their children's future in a time of violence. Perhaps it is in such shared hopes and fears that the basis for a sustainable peace may be found. Mrs. Landau and Mrs. Abu Gharbieh will deliver brief introductory statements in a few moments. The seminar on Sunday will also be addressed by two youth representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, Ms. Foutine Ansara and Mr. Said Mreibe, in order to illustrate the current situation from the perspective of Palestinian Christian youth.

In this worship service and this seminar, we hope to deepen our own understanding, and that of the international community represented in Geneva, of the inextricably interlinked nature of justice and reconciliation in Israel-Palestine, and of the things that make for peace.