

Economic Globalization and Human Rights

The phenomenon of economic globalization is one of the major defining trends of our time, and it influences almost all societies from an economic, cultural, social, and political point of view. This process involves highly ambiguous consequences when judged according to standards of justice and ethics. The churches are affected by globalization and involved in it as much as any other community or institution. The moral ambiguity of this process is a special challenge that we must meet in the light of our faith.

In a discussion process on ["Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion"](#), LWF member churches have been challenged to reflect on the dynamics and effects of economic globalization and to discern how to respond in light of the faith we confess, the values we uphold, and the communion we embody.

The LWF has always advocated that human rights have primacy over all other standards of international law, particularly international trade law. Human rights must lead the way in the elaboration of these standards in order that trade deregulation become an aid to the objective of the human well being, rather than a purpose in itself.

Human rights are legal instruments that enable us to implement fundamental principles of our faith, our compassion for one another, and our respect for human dignity. If economic globalization threatens human rights, it also threatens the fundamental principles of our faith. The General Secretary of the LWF, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, emphasized this during [a lecture at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Vienna](#).

In July 2003, the delegates at the Tenth Assembly of the LWF in Winnipeg, Canada, committed themselves to "actively tak[ing] part in transforming economic globalization and to form[ing] partnerships with civil society, particularly with regard to efforts aimed at recognizing the prophetic role of the churches in promoting justice and human rights".

In its [advocacy with regard to trade and human rights](#) (also [here](#)), the LWF has always taken the position that trade must not be treated as an end in itself, and economic globalization must be focused on improving the well-being of people. Human rights should therefore have primacy over international economic laws and policies.

A working paper by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) entitled ["Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion"](#) reached the same conclusion.

A workshop organized jointly by the International Committee on Human Rights in Trade and Investment (INCHRITI) -of which the LWF is a member- and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights analyzed the incompatibilities between provisions of the TRIPS agreement and the right to health, the rights of indigenous populations, and the rights to food, development, and self-determination. Regulations in these and other trade-related fields ought to be based on human rights, and such regulations ought to serve the purpose of translating human rights into action.

The LWF particularly welcomed the initiative of Mauritius as the first developing country to use its human rights obligations as a point of leverage in negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

Peter Prove, Assistant to the General Secretary for International Affairs & Human Rights, said that "this is the way forward." According to Prove, developing countries should rely on their existing human rights obligations to campaign against liberalization measures that could jeopardize their food security, and not associate human rights with disguised protectionism.