



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

Office of the General Secretary

LWF Council, 31 August-6 September 2005, Jerusalem/Bethlehem

The Council VOTED:
to adopt the following public statement:

Challenged to a Ministry of Reconciliation in the Holy Land

The LWF Council has met in the Holy Land on the invitation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) which has enabled us to visit its congregations and the people of this region. Our visit has opened the eyes of many of us to the daily sufferings of the Palestinian people, often not shown to us by the media and in which context our member church speaks boldly a message of hope and reconciliation.

We have come to more fully understand the urgency of a genuine commitment to building peace in these communities. As Bishop Dr Munib Younan has told us:

“Healing must begin with truth-telling and with breaking the silence that hides the suffering of those who are vulnerable and violated. Only such a start will allow the possibility of healing with justice and forgiveness. Only when the light of truth exposes the lies that have been used to inflict suffering on innocent people can the seeds of reconciliation take root.”

We reiterate our call for an end to the occupation, bearing in mind a number of its manifestations which contribute to the daily struggles faced here. We view the Israeli disengagement from Gaza as but a first positive step in following the Road Map and ending the occupation, establishing a two-state solution with a shared Jerusalem.

Many of us have encountered or been able to visit the separation wall and found shocking its impact on the daily lives of Palestinians – such as church members unable to attend services, farmers cut off from their fields, school children delayed in or prevented from reaching their schools, and patients, doctors and health workers unable to reach hospitals and clinics, a denial of their right to health care.

We found that freedom of movement has been significantly compromised or prohibited, for example, leaving married persons separated from their families because they lack the same required residence permit as their partner or children. This lack of family reunification is but one of a series of pressures upon Palestinians in the Jerusalem area. Houses are being demolished by the Israeli authorities and other facts on the ground, such as the enlargement of Israeli settlements, are being created, forcing Palestinians off their land. The prevention of home and land confiscation and the creation of additional housing is essential in the Jerusalem and other areas to help maintain their human right to housing as well as the demographic status quo. The churches are assisting with such projects but need additional funding.

The increasing constraints on Palestinians are leading to fewer and fewer Christians being able to continue to be a living witness in the Holy Land. Their enduring presence must be assured. A Christian presence is an essential precondition for the further development of church-related educational institutions, for which funding is urgently needed. Such assistance is an investment in



people's hope for positive change and contributes to preparing a fertile ground for building understanding among Palestinians and Israelis for reconciliation now and in the future.

Justice and the rule of law must be respected and prevail in this land. Building reconciliation and establishing justice will require mutual recognition of the needs of the other. We hear of the fears of Israelis and the anger of Palestinians, reminding us that the security and freedom of each is interdependent.

Our experience here calls us to ask the member churches to encourage pilgrimages of peace to the churches in this region to enable people to experience the living conditions in Palestinian areas and to promote renewal of their faith.

We have noted that some member churches have developed specific action strategies in support of peace in this region and we encourage all member churches to consider such efforts to move from supportive words to action.

We endorse the call of the Bishop of the ELCJHL for an annual gathering in Jerusalem for prayer for peace and reconciliation involving Christians, Muslims, Jews, Palestinians and Israelis.

We continue to support inter-faith dialogue, especially here in the Holy Land.

As churches we pledge ourselves to work for justice, peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF currently has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, with a total membership of nearly 66 million.