

“Like trees planted by streams of water”
President’s Address to the LWF Council, June 2014
Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan

- (1) My dear sisters and brothers in Christ:
- (2) It is wonderful to be with you here in Indonesia. Gatherings of the Council give us opportunities to renew our faith, renew our relationships, and renew our commitment to our global Communion, the Lutheran World Federation. Indeed, in this rich and beautiful land, we can be reminded every day that our delight is in the Lord, and that we, together, “are like trees planted by streams of water.”
- (3) The months since this Council last gathered have been very difficult for communities throughout Asia. We followed the painful news of the missing Malaysian airliner and the horror of the ferry sinking off the coast of the Republic of Korea. We have heard news of the avalanche on Mt. Everest in Nepal and the landslide in Afghanistan that destroyed an entire village. We of course also remember the collapse of Rana Plaza, an eight-story clothing factory in Savar, Bangladesh, and the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan, which struck the Philippines in November 2013. And finally, September 2013 saw both the bombing of a church in Peshawar, Pakistan, where 81 Christians were killed, and the reawakening of Mt. Sinabung, which erupted violently in February of this year, wreaking havoc on Karo farmlands.
- (4) As the Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the church in Corinth, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it” (12.26). Our dear friends in Asia, your Lutheran sisters and brothers around the world have joined you in these and many other moments of suffering. But we are also glad to be here to rejoice with you in the strong witness of faith you share in the rich and diverse tapestry that is Asia.
- (5) First, I offer my fullest gratitude to the twelve member churches witnessing to our living Lord in Indonesia. We, as the LWF, are deeply grateful for your hospitality. Today, we remember that the invitation to meet in Indonesia was promoted by the late Ephorus emeritus Dr. Mangisi S. E. Simorangkir, whom the Lord called home prior to last Christmas. He stood strongly, promoting our meeting in Medan, Indonesia. As we meet, I would like to give words of condolence to his church, his family, and to Indonesia. May the Lord continue to give you the power of the resurrection.
- (6) I also extend greetings from Medan to our sister, Bishop Dr. Antje Jackelén, who will be installed this weekend as Archbishop of the Church of Sweden. I know that each of you joins me in praising God for this new call on Archbishop Antje’s life and looks forward to the ways she will lead her church, her country, and contribute to this global communion in the coming years.

“Like Trees Planted by Streams of Water”

- (7) The collection of hymns we know as the Psalms opens with this remarkable image: that those who delight in the law of the Lord will be “like trees planted by streams of water” rather than those who reject knowledge of God and who eventually blow away

like dust. Those of us who live in arid or desert climates know exactly what this image intends to communicate. While the desert is not without vegetation, even the trees are usually crouched low to the ground.

- (8) In my own context of Palestine, where this song was likely written, the trees by the wadis wait until the rains come and water rushes through. The roots of the olive tree—a sign in Palestine of steadfast faith in the Lord—reach long and deep, and are masters of conserving the little water they encounter. Trees situated by steadily available water, by contrast, stand up straight, lush and green, a refreshing sign of stability, nourishment and strength for all who encounter them. These are the trees of the streams, the springs, the oases.
- (9) The psalmist identifies God’s law as the living water that brings such abundant life. When we are guided by the word and will of God, which we know to be most fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, we too have this abundant life.
- (10) This image is found again in Ezekiel 47 and in Revelation 22: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (22.1–2). Seen in light of this ultimate hope, our theme provides us with an important opportunity to reflect both on the meaning of Baptism and the call to justice.

Streams of Baptismal Water

- (11) Holy Baptism fills us with a spirit of strength and confidence, like abundantly watered trees stretching strongly toward the sky. In some baptismal rites, we ask the Holy Spirit to impart a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of joy in God’s presence. As a global communion—and indeed as the universal Body of Christ—we grow from this shared strong root, nourished by the living water only Jesus can provide.
- (12) Please allow me to again suggest—as I did during our Council meeting last year in Geneva—that Baptism can be the foundation for ecumenical relationships. While many aspects of church life can be used to emphasize distinctions among us, our shared baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit binds us together as one. Our shared Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit binds us together in love and sends us as God’s children to witness for God’s love in our broken world.
- (13) So what does Baptism mean for us today? Is it simply a rite of passage, an automatic response to tradition and culture within our churches? Today, I call on you to consider Baptism as the beginning of your journey, your pilgrimage in a life toward a deepened spirituality that seeks God’s will. With the common root and foundation of Baptism, the Body of Christ seeks justice wherever water can be joined to God’s word.
- (14) While baptism itself is a onetime occurrence, we live with our baptism as a daily reality and in a spirit that guides us all through our lives. In Baptism, we experience the power of salvation and are embraced by God’s grace. In Paul’s theology, the human being who is Christ has already reached the goal of the race that we all continue to run. The reason for this is that the Christian lives under the conditions of two ages (*aeons*). In our earthly pilgrimage, we cannot fully comprehend God’s work,

but we are empowered by Christ's love, received by us through the Cross. In Luther's theology of pilgrimage, the Christian is ever en route, in as much as the Christian is simultaneously righteous and sinful.

- (15) Last year, the World Council of Churches, in its 2013 Assembly in Busan, called us into a Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace. Dr. Emily Welty wrote in the study guide for the WCC Assembly that "the prevailing globalized culture seems to accept and legitimize social, economic and ecological injustice—so much so that human ecological abuse, exclusion, and impoverishment of the vulnerable and the denial of the rights and dignity of many, particularly people with disabilities, women, children and people with HIV/AIDS, are increasingly seen as inevitable fallout in a world gripped by the logic of dominion, growth, and greed. This institutionalization of injustice is an outstanding mark of our present civilization posing very serious challenges to the moral and spiritual integrity of our generation. Injustice has always been a part of human history; but the injustice of our generation to the earth and to our own brothers and sisters does not seem to have parallels." The global Body of Christ—of which our Communion is a part—is called to again to work for justice, rooted in the living waters of Holy Baptism.
- (16) Baptism and pilgrimage come together in the newest church building in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, constructed at the Baptismal Site of Jesus at Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan. I invite each of you and the members of your churches to make pilgrimage to this remarkable site to renew your baptismal identity as a child of God in the very place where Jesus' own identity was confirmed. This church, built with the help of a loan from the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA on land gifted by His Majesty, King Abdullah II, is a gift to our Global Communion and our commitment to seeking God's will for the sake of the world. There, in the midst of the desert, I can hear the voices of the water of the River Jordan. I can understand the pilgrimages of Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. In such pilgrimage, they met the living water and were commissioned to become witnesses of the living God.
- (17) Today, many people find themselves not only in a theological pilgrimage, but in a pilgrimage to revive the covenant of their baptism. They walk to Cathedrals or mountains or Holy places. I believe that humans are in need of deeper spirituality in a time of materialism, secularism, and globalization. I believe that the pilgrimage for Christians is the way between Baptism and Resurrection. They constantly need to take leave to take refuge in Christ's alien righteousness. In this manner, the Spirit, who knows only Christ's alien righteousness, is constantly struggling against the flesh, which wants to hold on to its own life as an appropriation, its non-righteousness. In the resurrection, the Christian should be completely Spirit and the Spirit shall no longer struggle against the flesh. But on the way of pilgrimage between Baptism and Resurrection, the Christian Pilgrim is both Spirit and flesh.
- (18) As a communion of churches, we are nurtured every day by the waters of baptism. We renew our covenant of baptism and thus our Communion is led only by the Holy Spirit, who leads us, comforts us, guides us, nourishes us, and continues to deepen our *koinonia* by altar and pulpit fellowship. Thus, we are sent to the world freshly commissioned for holistic mission, including prophetic diakonia.

Let Justice Roll Down Like Streams

- (19) But our theme does not point to theological renewal alone. When considered in our present global context, this image from the first psalm demands that we consider questions of justice. Many of us have had experiences of streams of water that have been diverted by more powerful people so that trees downstream do not receive the same benefit. Many of us live in communities where the flowing water is polluted with chemicals, algae, or nuclear waste. In the psalms, streams of water are always images of hope proclaiming great abundance. In our time, water is rapidly becoming a symbol of injustice and inequality.
- (20) Human beings today are not seeking abstract religion. Our people—over 70 million Lutherans around the world—are looking for tangible, concrete faith. In our interconnected world, the church must return to its concrete call to work for justice. This quest for justice must not be in the realm of ideas alone, but in real justice that promotes human flourishing and life abundant. As the Amman Call of the World Council of Churches in 2007 said when it invited Christians worldwide to engage Israel and Palestine, “No more words without deeds. It is time for action.”
- (21) This tangible faith is found first and foremost in the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion. These are the sites where God has chosen to enter in to the most basic elements of our world, sanctifying our existence. But this tangible faith is also found in the concrete work of churches responding around the world to the concrete needs of persons who are poor and vulnerable.
- (22) The challenges of the world are intimidating. But in the sacraments we are given strength and confidence. We are even given, as Isaiah 2 says, “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” I invite you to consider today three concrete areas where we, as the global Lutheran communion, can work together toward tangible justice. The three areas I will discuss are environmental justice, Christian relations with Muslims and Islam, and the evangelical call for education.

The Sacramental Quest for Tangible Justice

- (23) Equality is one of the central insights of Christian ethics. *Coram deo*—before God, before the cross of Christ—every human is profoundly equal. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God’” (Rom. 3.9–11). When we consider human relations from a Christian theological perspective, no person is more deserving of benefits—tangible or spiritual—than any other. Because Christ has died once for all, the same Baptism is offered to all, as is the same sacrament of Holy Communion.
- (24) This fundamental awareness of human equality is challenged each and every moment by the profound inequalities that mark our fallen world. Injustice is increased when those inequalities are either ignored or exploited, often by those who already possess greater capacities.
- (25) As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we have chosen to focus on our Lutheran proclamation that we are liberated by God’s grace. This freedom we have in Christ Jesus binds us to our neighbors through service. This this

theological lens, we are called—individually and collectively—to recognize and work against threats to justice, including systemic inequalities. Equality alone does not guarantee justice, but justice cannot be achieved without greater equality.

- (26) We are gathered in Asia, the world’s largest continent. Here, one can find rich and affluent countries immediately next to countries that cannot adequately address the needs of their own people. One finds many countries exploited by multinational and trans-national corporations. You find countries with nuclear power and nuclear weapons but not enough food to feed their people. Disparities between countries are matched by growing inequality within them. In China especially, the wealth gap is growing more profound. One of the central reasons for these inequalities is the radical disparity between urban households and those in agricultural contexts.
- (27) In 2007, the *Economist* magazine observed that “income inequality in emerging Asia is heading towards Latin American levels.”¹ More recently, the *Wall Street Journal* echoed the International Monetary Fund’s observation that “inequality hurts growth in a number of ways. It reduces the education levels of poorer citizens, and saps their health, reducing the potential productivity of a workforce. It also can cause political instability due to anger over income disparities, which leads to a falloff in investment.”² Our world is dying for fresh streams of water that will transform inequality to equality, injustice to justice, egocentric economies to economies of equal opportunity. The church will be prophetic only when it is the voice of the poor, the ones suffering injustice, the occupied, oppressed, persecuted, and displaced.
- (28) Our Reformation themes, approved by the meeting of our Council, remind us that salvation is “not for sale.”³ No amount of accumulated wealth will bring any of us closer to God. The Body of Christ therefore works so “justice [will] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5.24).

Environmental Justice: Creation is Not for Sale

- (29) Another of our Reformation themes is that Creation is not for sale. As we have said, nature has to be fully respected and protected as God’s good creation, entrusted to human care. Therefore it cannot be subject to exploitative domination by humans nor can their resources be concentrated and exploited as commodities.... Policies must aim at sustainable development.⁴
- (30) Economic inequalities harm the ability of countries, communities, and individuals to respond to the crisis of climate change. For this reason, our work toward economic justice cannot be separated from the call we are now hearing from the churches to work toward environmental justice. I am proud to follow the lead of our youth delegates to the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP19), held last November in Warsaw, Poland. There, they initiated a fasting campaign⁵ to draw attention to the crisis. Both the General

¹ “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more,” *The Economist* (August 9, 2007).

² Tom Wright, “Growing Focus on Inequality Puts Asia in Spotlight,” *Wall Street Journal* (March 3, 2014).

³ Report from the LWF Special Committee “Luther 2017: 500 years of Reformation,” presented to the Meeting of the LWF Council (12–18 June 2013, Geneva).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See “LWF Presents Interfaith Call for Climate Justice,” LWF News (November 21, 2013), online at <http://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-presents-interfaith-call-climate-justice>.

Secretary and I have strongly endorsed this effort with its ongoing presence at this Council meeting.

- (31) Care for creation is a fundamental commitment growing out of the first article of the Nicene and Apostolic creeds. This is God's creation and human beings are to care for it; we are to tend to God's beautiful garden. There are times, however, when we can distract ourselves with theological language; it is time that the church speaks plainly about the looming crisis of climate change. Since last November, I have become even more convinced that the crisis of climate change is an area beckoning for church involvement in order to provoke societal response.
- (32) Professor Rosemary Radford Ruether recently shared that she was "puzzled" by what she described as "'passive resistance' to taking ecology seriously in theological education." Although scholars and educators acknowledge the crisis, "It seems as if taking ecology seriously as a theme in theological education would entail too radical a rethinking of the whole project. It seems to be easier to continue with 'business as usual.'"⁶
- (33) But the "business as usual" approach is rapidly not becoming a possibility. As Professor Margaret Swedish has observed, "We stand before a virtual revolution—not unlike the time of Copernicus—in how we perceive ourselves as human beings on this planet." Swedish's hope is grounded in the historical reality that people can indeed change: "people willingly undergo conversion. And we must change. It will be hardest in those societies that have the most to surrender in terms of consumer lifestyles, of power and control, and of identities based on things." But, "in the end, the longing for meaning seems a stronger motivation than selfish fear."⁷
- (34) The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, known as the IPCC, is coordinating the most comprehensive effort to comprehend both the science and the social context of climate change. This collection of government-based efforts organized through the United Nations is not only looking at the evidence demonstrating climate change and the best ways to minimize the effects of these changes, but is looking at how social structures might help or hinder human responses to this growing crisis.
- (35) When I visited the IPCC in Tromsø, Norway, earlier this year, they shared their high confidence that we will be seeing real climate effects directly attributable to human actions by the year 2030. It is possible that some of us in this room will not be present in 2030 to see these changes. But many here, along with our children and grandchildren, will certainly be living with these effects. For the churches, our responsibilities in the face of climate change are (at least) two-fold. First, we must now start preparing development and sustainability plans which take these momentous changes into account. I am grateful for all of the important work going on throughout the communion—especially in our Communion Office—to develop relationships with key policymakers. We must build on these efforts so our prophetic voice is heard on a global scale.

⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Reflections on Sustainable Theological Education: A Tribute to David Rhoads," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 73:2 (April 2010), 100.

⁷ Margaret Swedish, *Living Beyond the "End Of The World": A Spirituality of Hope* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), xiii–xiv.

- (36) The IPCC has been able to measure with high confidence that of the CO₂ emissions created by humans since the year 1750, half have occurred in the last 40 years. As one of the IPCC panels has stated, “Globally, economic and population growth continue to be the most important drivers of increases in CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion.” While contributions from population growth have remained the same, “the contribution of economic growth has risen sharply.”⁸
- (37) These contributions to greenhouse gas emissions “have caused impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and across the oceans.” The policy documents being produced by the IPCC focus on human effects. While it is difficult to quantify the specific effects of climate change, the risks are different for different human communities. As the IPCC has said, “Differences in vulnerability and exposure arise from non-climatic factors and from multidimensional inequalities often produced by uneven development processes. These differences shape differential risks from climate change.... Climate-related hazards exacerbate other stressors . . . especially for people living in poverty.” In other words, marginalized people will face greater risks in the face of climate change.⁹ It is at this point that the churches find the cause for raising our collective voice.
- (38) One tremendous gift of the IPCC is to present evidence-based perspectives to policymakers. One problem, however, is that policymakers often will not act effectively unless there is a groundswell of popular support. But the IPCC has gone beyond simply documenting scientific fact. By seeking to comprehend the effect of climate change on vulnerable populations, the IPCC has laid the groundwork for effective involvement in this issue by communities of faith. What else can we do but become involved when we are told plainly that “future vulnerability” is linked to many “interacting social, economic, and cultural factors” including “wealth and its distribution across society, demographics, migration, access to technology and information, employment patterns, the quality of adaptive responses, societal values, governance structures, and institutions to resolve conflicts”? If we are to take seriously our calling to respond to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, churches and other religious institutions have key roles to play in the formation of climate change policy.¹⁰
- (39) We are facing new realities in which renewable surface water and groundwater resources are increasingly limited and food access, utilization, and price stability are all affected by climate change. We are facing increased instances of diseases intensified by poverty and projected increases in displaced populations. As the IPCC said this year, “Climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts in the form of civil war and inter-group violence by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks.”¹¹
- (40) While the situation is dire, we are still able to act. The IPCC is clear that “adaptation planning and implementation can be enhanced through complementary actions across levels, from individuals to governments.” Since “adaptation planning and implementation at all levels of governance are contingent on societal values,

⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, AR5, Working Group II, “Summary for Policymakers,” 7.

⁹ Ibid., 6, 7, 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

objectives, and risk perceptions,” religious communities have key roles to play among their people.

- (41) It is at this point, however, that religious traditions can hinder rather than help our ability to respond constructively to the challenges of climate change. Resistance to scientific knowledge is a key characteristic of some forms of religious commitment. Misguided resistance could lead toward disaster. The crisis of climate change provides an important new opportunity for our global communion to recommit to constructive engagement with scientific knowledge. These challenges provide an important opportunity for engagement and dialogue that will benefit people far beyond our own communities.
- (42) But if we are to take on the issue of climate change as robustly as I think we should, we will face resistance. The IPCC has been clear that “effective mitigation will not be achieved if individual agents advance their own interests independently.” Such cooperation is sometimes very difficult to find in our fallen world. We are faced with the fact that “in globally cost-effective scenarios, the majority of mitigation efforts take place in countries with the highest future emissions.”¹² As a result, the economies bearing the most cost are the ones with the greatest economic stakes. When, with the IPCC, we recognize that “mitigation policy could devalue fossil fuel assets and reduce revenues for fossil fuel exporters,” we enter a new realm of needing to work with and possibly confront oil and gas companies. We know that these multi-national corporations will do their best to protect their revenues and their profits. The church, however, is called to work for the common good by challenging the tendency for individuals to solely advance their own interests. There is something greater at stake. As we speak to our people and to their governments, it is here that our global communion can focus its messages on climate change.
- (43) If we are to be like trees planted by streams of living water, we must do our best to preserve the climate in which those waters flow. If we are to be deeply rooted, we must do our best to address the interlocking systems that could lead to much greater displacement patterns than we have already seen in climate-related disasters. Our calling is to be deeply rooted so we can follow God’s law, the law to serve the poor and to shelter the vulnerable.
- (44) Just as we have seen with economic growth alone, climate change will bring even greater inequalities. Countries in the Global North will become even more food secure, while the Global South will become more barren. How can the church start now to speak out for fairer food distribution? We cannot be content with the fact that the rich will become richer while the poor become poorer.

Justice through Improved Relations with our Muslim Neighbors

- (45) In various parts of the world, we are seeing growing complications in relations between Christian and Muslim communities, especially in Muslim-majority societies. My strong conviction is that these tensions cannot be attributed to theological disagreements between Christianity and Islam; nor can recent violence be attributed to characteristics inherent in either tradition. Rather, it is important to read these tensions within the context of a growing international power struggle. Yet again, political and economic struggles between Russia and Western powers are exploiting

¹² Ibid.

tensions between communities far beyond their own borders. While some scholars had predicted growing secularization throughout the world, we are instead seeing the resurgence of religious allegiance; too often, we are seeing a politicization of religious identity in the service of political and economic interests. Each church in this global communion has a responsibility to ensure that these trends are named and addressed in its own context.

- (46) Attempts to address growing difficulties between Muslims and Christians often lead to complicated conversations. Rather than imagine some abstracted form of Islam interacting with an equally abstracted form of Christianity, we must admit that these relationships take on different facets in different contexts. I will address these issues from two perspectives: first, from the perspective of Christians living within Muslim-majority societies; second, from the broader perspective of our global communion.
- (47) Those of us living in Muslim-majority societies are facing a crisis of immense proportions. We are experiencing more and more instances of violent encounter with extremist Muslims. Incited in some cases by extremists in our own communities, Christians have retaliated against Muslim neighbors with violence of their own. This cycle of recrimination and suffering is harming all of God's children, obscuring the face of God among both Christians and Muslims.
- (48) Those of us living in Muslim-majority societies must ask a series of interrelated questions. First, we must begin the process of analyzing changes within global Islam and asking how these changes affect Christian communities. We must also ask what roles we, as numerical minorities, can play in those societies. In this time of great political upheaval, how do we work toward the establishment of preferred political structures that will allow our communities to thrive, living peaceably with Muslim neighbors?
- (49) That last point is probably the most important. Most of us, as Christians living in Muslim-majority contexts, are convinced through experience and conviction that we can indeed live with Muslim neighbors. Many of our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world have not been convinced of this possibility. Therefore, those of us who live with Muslim neighbors can best introduce Islam and Muslims to our Christian friends in other parts of the world. When we do that, we will together learn that challenges to religious freedom are not found in the Muslim world alone. It will be important for Christian friends to listen to Muslim concerns about religious freedom in the supposedly free societies of the West, where, in Switzerland for example, citizens have voted to limit public expressions of Islamic faith. It is important that this dialogue begin so we can together face the present crisis.
- (50) I must add, however, that there are signs of hope for healthy Muslim-Christian relations. In Egypt, there is a strong and growing relationship between Al Azhar University and Coptic Christians—Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical—in which each community comes to the other's defense. After the Second Revolution in July 2013, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church, and Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmed El-Tayyeb, announced at a press conference the creation of the Al-Azhar Document for Basic Freedoms. This document acknowledges the basic plurality of Egyptian society and notes that, "there should be acceptance of the legitimacy of plurality, maintenance of the right to difference, and the obligation that every citizen should consider the feelings of others and that equality should prevail among all citizens on the firm basis of citizenship, partnership, and equal opportunities in terms

of all rights and duties.” Even though some Churches in Egypt believe that the Al-Azhar Document does not go far enough in affirming a pluralistic society, it represents a crucial stride toward resolving sectarian tension in Egypt.

- (51) In May of this year, a high-level interreligious dialogue meeting convened by the Lutheran World Federation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, and Mission Eine Welt and with different Muslim institutions, signed a joint interreligious declaration, peacebuilding, democracy and development. This statement was issued even following attacks on Christian communities in Zanzibar, Tanzania. They discussed such issues as national constitutions and the freedom of religion in sub-Saharan Africa, current complex developments in Christian-Muslim relations in Africa, the contribution of religious leaders to political democracy, and good governance and poverty alleviation. The participants affirmed their solidarity with one another in the process of building peace, promoting democracy and ensuring sustainable development in their region in the full awareness that as Dr. Johnson Mbillah of the Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) said, “Building peace is a long process, taking many years that can be destroyed in a second.” Mbillah underlined that traditional African societies had always been religiously plural and warned of the politicization of religion. We should encourage such initiatives and give them our full support.
- (52) We know that the vast majority of Muslims around the world are not militant Islamists. In everyday life, Muslims and Christians live together around the world. One of the clear challenges for those of us who live side-by-side with Muslims is to share those good relationships with Christian sisters and brother throughout the world.
- (53) What, then, is the role for us as a Communion of Churches facing these challenges? During the time LWF leaders had with Pope Francis, we discussed the need for an ecumenism of *martyria*. Since that meeting, I have often wondered what our common witness might be in relation to Islam? How can our communion be a living witness vis-à-vis the Muslim world?
- (54) The question of witness is quite different from the challenge of proselytizing. Indeed, we are called to living witness, not to create battlefields of religion. Our witness as a communion in the Muslim world is not an evangelism campaign. At the same time, if anybody wants to hear the message of the Gospel, they should not be denied; we stand ready to respond with specific Good News of the Cross. Instead, we are known as a communion working in many Muslim countries, seeking dignity and sustainable development for all. We are known as a communion of churches that respects the faiths of others. We promote the freedom of religion, commitments to interfaith engagement and dialogue. Specifically, we promote efforts that strengthen comprehension of Islam and relations with Muslims. Our witness, faithful to Christ, is one of hospitality and openness, not exclusion and controversy. Our presence in itself is a witness to the Gospel of Christ’s love.
- (55) From this foundation, we can faithfully and effectively engage in difficult conversations with Muslim neighbors. In Malaysia, for instance, where political and judicial leaders have sought to ban Christian use of the word “Allah” for God, Lutheran leaders have engaged critically but respectfully. From my perspective in the Arab world, I know that Christians used this word 600 years before the religion of Islam itself. We confidently use the word Allah to name our Triune God. We respect

freedom of religion when we do not deny others the ability to worship, sanctify their holy places, and name God in the way they want. From Indonesia, and in support of the Malay churches' basic human right to worship and name God as they desire, I call on all governing bodies within Malaysia, including the Parliament, to reaffirm the commitments of religious freedom. I call on each governing body to allow for the unimpeded distribution and use of Bibles where Allah is used in the local language.

- (56) At the same time, we are respectful but critical of well-meaning people in the Western world who seek to protect Christians from their Muslim neighbors. Just last month, a group of political and religious leaders met in Washington, DC, to promote the idea of a special US envoy to monitor abuses of religious freedom in the Muslim world. While we can appreciate that freedom of religion is not always respected, and that we should all be concerned by violence between Muslims and Christians, this approach is problematic because it separates Christians from their neighbors. Such an approach is short-sighted, setting up even more difficult problems in the future. We are fully participating members in our societies, not weak people needing outside protection.
- (57) In March of this year, I participated in a panel discussion with Minister Pär Stenbäck, former foreign minister for Finland and former general secretary for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva. He offered several statistics showing that
- the principle of religious freedom is a distant dream. 76% of the world's population lives in countries with high or very high levels of restrictions on religion. The level of abuse of religious minorities has increased sharply: In 2007 such abuse took place in 24% of the almost 200 countries examined, in 2012 the percentage had risen to 47%. The same tendency can be seen concerning violence or threat of violence to enforce religious norms as well as harassment of women over religious dress.*¹³
- (58) These characteristics are not restricted to Muslim countries. Attacks have been seen around the world, such as a "shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin [USA], killing of Jewish children in a school in France by an Islamist extremist or Tibetan monks attacking Muslims in the Chinese province of Gansu." One may also add "price tag" attacks on churches throughout Palestine, including Jerusalem. Minister Stenbäck raised a particular concern for Christians facing "the risk of extinction of ancient Christian and other religious communities" in the Middle East. Close to two million "Christians are said to have left the region, most of them in search of security."
- (59) With him, I offer two specific suggestions to address these concerns. First, I call on regional bodies such as the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic States, and the African Union to develop processes for upholding religious freedom. Second, governments around the world should "build relations with ... struggling communities and help them to avoid a diaspora, forced upon them, from their ancient homelands."
- (60) Professor Mohammad Alami Musa of Singapore's Nanyang Technological University observed recently that "the countries that have high levels of religious violence are primarily countries dominated by a single faith." While Rudyard Kipling once wrote that "East is east and West is west and never the twain shall meet," our "inter-connected, globalised world [is] characterised by unprecedented religious diversity."

¹³ Minister Pär Stenbäck, "Christianity in the Middle East," panel debate paper offered at the Hanaholmen Cultural Center (March 31, 2014).

The question, though, is whether or not this diversity will lead to conflict. Prof. Musa is convinced that, among our people, we should promote “learning about the religious other” to “further enrich their own spirituality and strengthen their beliefs by re-discovering their own religious traditions.” “By being dialogical,” he says, “one will better appreciate the religious other and other religions.”¹⁴

- (61) The quest for interreligious harmony comes in a political context. At this moment in history, some states are diminishing their religious identity while others are seeking to establish religion—whether it is Judaism, Hinduism, or Islam—as their sole foundation. As a global communion, we have a responsibility to seek what is best for all people in all contexts. We must strongly endorse the concept of equal citizenship with equal rights and responsibilities; equal rights for all religious groups, despite their numbers. All persons and groups must be equally defended by the democratic constitution of any given country. Sadly, in this time, when constitutions and basic laws are being rewritten, these points are often not the top priorities of religiously-identified political groups. For the LWF, however, we have made it clear that we not only love God, but that we love our neighbor who is different from us as well.
- (62) For me, as a Palestinian Christian, all of these conversations come back to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the challenge before the global community is to counter every exclusive political and religious claim with a word of inclusion, to overcome exclusion with embrace. The Jewish connection to the city is well known to each of us in this meeting. In April of this year, I attended a conference with 500 Muslim scholars on the importance of Jerusalem, where I have learned even more about how the Holy City is dear to them. During the visit Bishop Alex Malasusa and I had with King Abdullah in January, he asked our communion to raise its collective voice for the sake of Jerusalem. Christians, he said, must be stronger when it comes to the many issues centered there.
- (63) We must again reassert past LWF resolutions on Jerusalem, that it should be a city shared by three religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and two countries—the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel. I strongly ask the LWF Council to support the Code of Conduct on Holy Places Jerusalem being produced by the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land, making it a commitment of the community of nations. The profound imbalance of power between Israel, Palestine, and their respective allies has allowed the powerful side to maintain all of its interests. It is now time for the rest of the world to identify its interests in Jerusalem and defend them in the same way. Given our communion’s strong presence on the ground in the Holy Basin, we Lutherans should not be shy. It is not for our interest or benefit alone; peace in Jerusalem will bring greater peace to the whole world.
- (64) With the breakdown of US-led peace talks between Israel and Palestine, the political context for raising our collective voice has changed. It is clear that an enduring solution cannot be reached through local efforts alone; a true solution will need to be imposed from the outside. We must work to strengthen the efforts of the United Nations and its related institutions to ensure that a lasting arrangement is identified and implemented. While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not, at its core, a religious conflict, resolving this political issue will be one step toward crafting a new balance of interfaith relationships in the Middle East and throughout the world.

¹⁴ Mohammad Alami Musa, “Sustaining Religious Harmony: The Dialogue Way,” *Eurasia Review* (May 9, 2014).

Justice and the Evangelical Call for Education

- (65) The shooting of Malala Yousafzai in October 2012 and the global stature she was able to attain through 2013 galvanized the world's attention on education as a source of liberation. Our commitment to the principle of education—especially of our young women—has been rekindled by the kidnapping in Nigeria of over 200 girls by the extremist organization known as Boko Haram. Today, here in Indonesia, we declare that no education can be forbidden! No child must be denied their basic human right of education. As Malala said in her speech to the United Nations: “one child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education First.”
- (66) After the kidnapping in Nigeria, Malala said “When I heard about girls in Nigeria being abducted, I felt very sad, and I thought, ‘my sisters are imprisoned now.’” For her, this meant that “the girls in Nigeria are my sisters and it’s my responsibility that I speak up for my sisters.”
- (67) As our third Reformation theme says: “Human Beings—Not for Sale.” “Every human being is a unique person created at God’s own image, and therefore must be fully respected in its dignity and integrity.” Because each of these young women are made in God’s image, each one of them, no matter their religion, is our sister. They are our daughters.
- (68) If we gather here for the sake of the world, we gather here for them. It is often said, mistakenly, that concern for our youth is about the future. These young women show that even when we plan to improve the world for the benefit our children, we are talking not about the future, but today.
- (69) In the same way, the issues I have raised in this address are not about the future. Our communion’s need to speak prophetically about climate change and to foster healthier Muslim-Christian relations is not about the future. It is about today.
- (70) Today, it is vital that this communion recognize and promote the transformative power of education in each of their societies. This one priority of education encompasses climate change and life within and between Muslim and Christian communities. Extremists do not want education. They want you to believe blindly and not engage critically. The more you are educated—the more you read—you find that you are small and that there is a power in the world far greater than you alone. Education brings you into a community of critical engagement and lets you know that you are not alone in your ideas, that you can contribute to changing the world.
- (71) Education is the antidote to horrendous acts of violence like we saw just last month in Lahore, Pakistan with the public murder of Farzana Parveen. I agree with U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay who said, “I do not even wish to use the phrase ‘honour killing’: there is not the faintest vestige of honour in killing.” The U.N. estimates that 5000 women are murdered each year by family members; other groups claim that the number is as high as 20,000. We condemn this practice that hides behind interpretations of religion or culture but is really a way to harm women. Anything that harms women alone—from so-called honour killings, to breast ironing, to female genital mutilation—should be condemned. Education is the tool that build capacities for upholding the rights of all human beings.

- (72) Education for every human being can be the priority that changes the world. In a world that denies educational opportunities—especially in those places where women are disenfranchised—we can transform extremism into moderation. Thus, the broad commitment to education becomes not just a social call, but an evangelical call.
- (73) Excluding women and girls from educational possibilities blocks their full participation in social leadership. In many places, the lack of gender justice means that we, as a whole, are missing women’s contributions in society and decision-making processes. When a community puts half of its people in the background, that community is impoverished.
- (74) According to the promise God gave to us through the prophet Isaiah, “we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Peter 3.13). This is our future hope. But now—even today—we know that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28).
- (75) In Revelation 22, we are nourished by the promise of “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Both sides of this river are lined by the tree of life, “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (22.1–2). But this vision also is not for the future alone. In our Baptisms and in the Christian life, we too are “like trees planted by streams of living water.” We have been promised that our leaves will not wither and that in all we do, we shall prosper.
- (76) But we do not prosper, my sisters and brothers, until all of us prosper: men and women, north and south, east and west, old and young, rich and poor. We do not prosper if our neighbors do not prosper, no matter their religion, sect, ethnicity, or tribe. We will not prosper until we bear equally the burdens of economic justice, climate justice, and gender justice. We will not prosper until we enjoy reconciliation and peace. We find our strength in the strength of God, and the face of God we find in our neighbor.
- (77) In the free gift of Baptism, we are called to proclaim that salvation is not for sale. In all that God has made good, we are called to proclaim that Creation is not for sale. In the freedom we have to serve our sisters and brothers, we are called to proclaim that human beings are not for sale. These are more than just themes. They are the common ground of our Communion. These calls distill the essence of our living hope in justification by grace through faith. I pray that each of you will join me on the pilgrimage of renewing Baptismal hope so that all of us, as children of God, can be “like trees planted by streams of living water.”
- (78) May God bless you!