

## Highlights

### Churches Called to Recognize Image of God in Dalit Women ...3

Participants in a workshop at the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in Bangkok, Thailand, highlighted the close connection between caste and patriarchy...

### Call for Lutheran Communion Solidarity with Communities Affected by Climate Change ...9

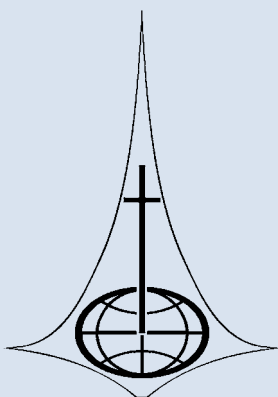
A group of theologians, ethicists, anthropologists and staff working on adaptation and mitigation measures related to climate change, are calling for the Lutheran communion's global solidarity with vulnerable communities that are acting to address the impact of climate change...

### Global Church Organizations Welcome Durban II Outcome, With Some Regrets..... 10

Two global church organizations have congratulated the United Nations Durban Review Conference against racism on the adoption of its outcome document, but regret that the latter makes no mention of the plight of hundreds of millions of people affected by caste-based discrimination...

### FEATURE: Just When I Needed It Most ..... 11

Mai can smile now, though most of her life has been no smiling matter...



## FEATURE: Ecumenical Solidarity on a Journey to Liberation



*Pachmali, Far Western Province, Nepal, November 2007: Gore Sunar, 55, a bonded Dalit laborer, has worked for 25 years with no salary, just to keep his four landlords happy so that they won't ask for repayment. A March 2009 LWF/WCC conference in Bangkok, Thailand, sought to generate churches' solidarity with the plight of Dalits worldwide. © Jakob Carlsen*

When Elske van Gorkum took up her first job in a Dalit community in India, her hosts could hardly believe what they heard when she said there were no castes in her native Netherlands. "For them, a society without castes is unthinkable," says van Gorkum, "but coming from an egalitarian society, I also had difficulty at first understanding 'untouchability'."

Van Gorkum, a development worker with the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation, a Dutch aid organization, shared her experience at an international ecumenical conference on justice for Dalits held in Bangkok, Thailand, in late March.

Jointly organized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC) the conference sought to generate solidarity and support within churches and ecumenical organizations worldwide by bringing into focus the plight of Dalits, who have suffered from caste-based discrimination for 3,500 years. There

are some 260 million Dalits worldwide, 200 million of them in India.

As part of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, van Gorkum lobbies her government and the European Union to put caste-based discrimination at the center of the political, economic and development relations with the countries where these human rights' violations occur.

"Learning about the suffering and atrocities Dalits have endured gives me dedication and commitment to stand beside them in solidarity," says van Gorkum, who has been working with Dalits since 2005.

### Accompaniment

Generating such commitment to stand beside the Dalits in their struggles is the essence of global ecumenical solidarity

*Continues on page 7*

## Contents

### Communio

#### Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits

- 3..... Churches Called to Recognize Image of God in Dalit Women
- 4..... Delegates Underline Need for Comprehensive Affirmative Action Policies
- 5..... UN Durban Review Conference a New Opportunity for Further Advocacy
- 1, 7..... FEATURE: Ecumenical Solidarity on a Journey to Liberation

#### 9..... Call for Lutheran Communion Solidarity with Communities Affected by Climate Change

### LWF Secretariat

#### 10..... Global Church Organizations Welcome Durban II Outcome, With Some Regrets

### Features & Themes

#### 11..... FEATURE: Just When I Needed It Most

### News in Brief

#### 2..... Namibian Premier Welcomes Anti-Racism Conference Outcome

#### 8..... Anniversary Celebrations Mark Lutheran Church Witness in Holy Land

#### 12..... Budget Reductions Impact ELCA Engagement Overseas

### Namibian Premier Welcomes Anti-Racism Conference Outcome

During a visit to the secretariat of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Angula said he was satisfied with the deliberations and outcome of the 20–24 April United Nations Durban Review conference against racism, which he attended in Geneva, Switzerland.

At the 22 April meeting with the press at the LWF Ecumenical Center offices, Angula said he considered the outcome document of the Durban Review conference as a “moral compass” whose moral authority would guide and inspire action by citizens and their respective governments and other institutions. *(See related story on page 10.)*

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko received the prime minister, who was accompanied by Dr Kaire Mbuende, Namibia’s ambassador to the UN in New York. Angula paid tribute to the LWF and other church organizations for their solidarity with Namibia during its independence struggle.

The premier said HIV and AIDS was one of the major social challenges for the country, noting the government had established a comprehensive program to mitigate against AIDS impact, promote prevention, provide treatment and care support, and enhance awareness, among other initiatives. He



*LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (right) and Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Angula, during the meeting at the LWF Geneva secretariat. © LWF/T. Rakoto*

underlined the role of partnerships with local and international organizations including churches in the fight against the pandemic. Namibia has an HIV prevalence rate of 15 percent.

In addition to other AIDS response initiatives, the three LWF member churches in Namibia are founding members of the Church Alliance for Orphans, comprising 11 church organizations promoting practical care and trauma healing for orphaned children.

#### The Lutheran World Federation

– A Communion of Churches  
150, route de Ferney  
P.O. Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2,  
Switzerland

**Telephone** +41/22-791 61 11  
**Fax** +41/22-791 66 30  
**E-mail:** info@lutheranworld.org  
www.lutheranworld.org

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Karin Achtelstetter  
ka@lutheranworld.org

#### English Editor

Pauline Mumia  
pmu@lutheranworld.org

#### German Editor

Dirk-Michael Gröttsch  
dmg@lutheranworld.org

#### Layout

Stéphane Gallay  
sga@lutheranworld.org

#### Circulation/subscription

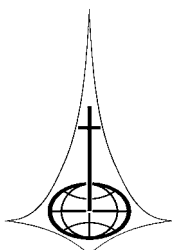
Colette Muanda  
cmu@lutheranworld.org

#### Lutheran World Information (LWI)

is the information service  
of the Lutheran World  
Federation (LWF).

Unless specifically noted,  
material presented does not  
represent positions or opinions  
of the LWF or of its various units.

Where the dateline of an article  
contains the notation (LWI),  
the material may be freely reproduced  
with acknowledgment.



# GLOBAL ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE ON JUSTICE FOR DALITS

21-24 March 2009, Bangkok, Thailand

## Churches Called to Recognize Image of God in Dalit Women

**BANGKOK/GENEVA (LWI)** – Participants in a workshop at the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in Bangkok, Thailand, highlighted the close connection between caste and patriarchy. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) organized the 21–24 March gathering, which was hosted by the Christian Conference of Asia.

Titled “Multiple Discriminations: Special Characteristics of the Situation of Dalit Women and Dalit Christians,” the workshop uncovered the additional layers of stigma and degrading treatment Dalit women face as a result of their sex.

“The moment [a body] is a Dalit, that body becomes ‘feminized’ and we need to seriously look into caste and patriarchy together,” challenged Rev. Dr Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, chairperson of the department of women’s studies at United Theological College in Bangalore, India, an ecumenical institution of the Arcot Lutheran Church.

Caste, class and gender combine to silence and subjugate Dalit women, said Mr Purbhu Satyani, advocacy officer for Thardeep Rural Develop-



Rev. Dr Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, chairperson, women's studies department, United Theological College in Bangalore, India, addresses the conference participants. © WCC/Maurice Malanes

ment Program in Pakistan’s Sindh province. “Dalit women are treated as third-class citizens in Pakistan.”

### Caste-Based Discrimination

According to Bishop Dr Vedanayagam Devasahayam of the Church of South India, Madras Diocese, caste-based discrimination often contributes to the feminization of poverty. In India, a majority of the

approximately 1.2 million Dalits forced to do degrading, unsanitary jobs for a pittance are women.

The women must “clean dry latrines with the help of minimum aids, usually a pair of tin scrapers and a wicker bucket or basket, remove and carry human excreta on their heads to the dumping sites,” reported Devasahayam.

Karuppaiah, a Dalit living in a slum in Chennai in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, commented, “I obviously know it is disgusting, but I have no option other than to do this work.”

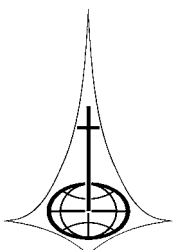
### Church-Based Initiatives

Church-based initiatives are taking steps to offer Dalit women alternatives to such debasing and impoverishing employment.

Through the Slum Women’s Advancement Program, the Women in Church and Society desk of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELCI) in India provides microloans to women in the slums of Chennai to help them establish new livelihoods.



Bishop Dr Vedanayagam Devasahayam, Church of South India. © LWF/P. Prove





Ms Indira Ghale, treasurer of the Nepali Feminist Dalit Organization, spoke about efforts by the LWF Department for World Service program in Nepal to empower Dalit women through advocacy, income generation and capacity building.

Workshop participants—drawn from churches, church-related and human rights organizations from all over the world—agreed that such initiatives towards Dalit women’s emancipation are a welcome sign but raised the question whether they could bear the desired result

in the face of widespread, deep-rooted prejudice present even in the churches.

## Family Level

“I have no issues sharing the Eucharist with a Dalit but I will never get her married to a boy who is a Dalit,” asserted a caste Christian from India, speaking about his daughter under condition of anonymity.

The participants called for the churches to recognize the current treatment of Dalit women as sinful

and dehumanizing. They urged the worldwide ecumenical community to affirm that women are also created in the image of God and that any form of abuse of women distorts the divine image in each human being.

Some 95 leaders and representatives of churches and human rights and development organizations worldwide attended the Bangkok ecumenical conference.

*(By UELCI communication officer, Timothy Melvyn)*

27 March 2009

## Delegates Underline Need for Comprehensive Affirmative Action Policies

**BANGKOK/GENEVA (LWI)** – Church representatives at the recent LWF and WCC ecumenical conference focusing on justice for Dalits in Bangkok, underlined the need for consistent implementation of comprehensive affirmative action policies in order to protect marginalized groups from discrimination.

The conference workshop “Affirmative Action and Advocacy in Affected Countries” determined that members of ostracized groups such as Dalits remained social, economic and political outcasts, even in countries with laws targeting prejudicial practices.

### Politicized Divide in India

In India, affirmative action policies exist to address specific issues such as bonded and child labor, manual scavenging and *jogini* (ritual prostitution). However, Mr Paul Divakar, a Dalit activist representing the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, noted that “Dalit reality in India is not a mark of national pride. It is in fact a shame.”

He indicated that despite the existence of different schemes and programs to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the poor and marginalized, the plight of the Dalits still remained largely unchanged. According to various reports, 80 percent of Dalits live in rural areas, 86 percent are landless, 60 percent are dependent on occasional employment and only 30 percent are literate.

As a Dalit social activist, Divakar said he felt the divide in the name of caste was politicized. When not enforced, he contended, constitutional laws in India—in particular those intended to integrate women and other marginalized groups—become a farce and mockery of the political structure, and cited the example of affirmative action “reservation policies.”

In theory such policies allocate a proportionate percentage of places

ment do not abide by the reservation policies.

Divakar emphasized that this discriminatory situation prevailed not only in education but also in employment and politics, with the tacit knowledge of the government. As a result, large numbers of Dalits are “simmering with resentment” about the opportunities they are denied.

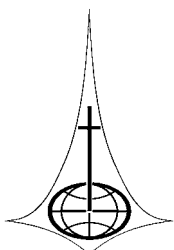
“What pains me,” lamented Divakar, “is that the few Dalits who



*Indian Dalit activist Mr Paul Divakar (left), representing the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, speaks during the workshop on affirmative action. On the right is LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran Paul Martin. © UELCI*

in education, employment and politics to the Dalit populace. Divakar however pointed out that many prestigious educational institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology or the Indian Institute of Manage-

are in the legislative assembly of the government, whom the Dalits count on to be their spokespersons to bring about changes in their lives, are under vested interests, hijacked to the power games of politics.”





Ms Indira Ghale, treasurer of the Nepali Feminist Dalit Organization advocated for Dalits' right to education, employment and political engagement. © Lance Woodruff

### Not a Uniquely Indian Problem

Participants heard about similar dynamics in other countries. While Nepal also has anti-discriminatory laws in place, Dalits there, comprising 20 percent of the population, share the same predicament as Dalits in India, according to Ms Indira Ghale of the Nepali Feminist Dalit Organization. "Though reservation policies [are in place] in Nepal, Dalits are deprived of their right to education, employment and politics. They, without other options, are pushed [into] menial jobs."

Other South Asian countries where caste is a defining reality, such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, have yet to enact affirmative action legislature. According to Rev. Vincent Manoharan, international advocacy secretary of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in Pakistan, all Pakistani Dalits, whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian, face discrimination from the government. "The Islamic state does not recognize the Dalit issue," he commented. Studies among Hindu

Dalits reveal that they are mostly bonded laborers, and Dalit Christians are doubly marginalized.

Manoharan pointed out that Dalits' primary form of employment in Bangladesh is as "sweepers" cleaning streets and collecting garbage.

In Sri Lanka, despite ethnic struggle having a stronger impact, caste-based thinking is prevalent even among Buddhists. Though not given the name "Dalit," people of Indian origin who are Sri Lankan citizens do not have the right to vote.

The workshop revealed the need for anti-discriminatory policies outside the region as well, even if the concept of "caste" is not expressed as such.

In the Philippines, for example, there is no caste system, according to Rev. David Tabo-oy, dean of the Episcopal Cathedral of the Resurrec-

tion in Baguio City. However, "the society is divided [into] majorities and minorities. The minorities are [the] indigenous people similar to the Aborigines of Australia." He noted that there was legislature in place to protect indigenous people, but at the same time other laws such as the Mining Act actually deprive indigenous people of their rights, in this case to land.

Countries such as the United States of America, Ireland and Malaysia have enacted affirmative action policies in order to protect excluded groups.

### Churches Called to Solidarity

The church representatives at the workshop called on the global ecumenical community to be more proactive in ensuring that their respective governments enact and implement policies targeting discrimination.

Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, and LWF vice president for the African



A human rights issue is at stake, said LWF vice president, Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta. © UELCI/Timothy Melvin

region, pointed out that a universal human rights issue was at stake and, as such, advocacy was not optional for the church. "Discrimination and oppression is a scandal on humanity. Our solidarity with Dalits is not a favor; it is our Christian calling and responsibility to be involved in the global Dalit solidarity process."

(By UELCI communication officer, Timothy Melvyn)

27 March 2009

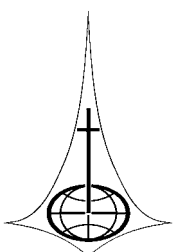
## UN Durban Review Conference a New Opportunity for Further Advocacy

**BANGKOK, Thailand/GENEVA (LWI)**

– Church leaders and human rights advocates seek to further internationalize the struggle to overcome caste-based discrimination, a 3,500-year old scourge

that affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide. The United Nations (UN) anti-racism review conference, late April in Geneva would be the first test of this strategy.

Caste-based discrimination severely affects some 260 million people worldwide, an estimated 200 million of them in India alone. In India, considered the biggest democ-



racy in the world, these discriminated people, once labeled and treated as “untouchable” due to Brahmanic ritual traditions viewing them as “polluted” or “polluting,” now call themselves Dalits (“oppressed, crushed”).

Caste-based discrimination is so deeply entrenched that churches and human rights groups in India and other caste-affected countries admit they can hardly solve the problem on their own. “We need your solidarity,” they appealed to participants at the four-day global ecumenical conference on justice for Dalits held in Bangkok, Thailand.

Delegates to the Bangkok conference recognized progress in addressing caste-based discrimination by UN bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the International Labour Organization.

They recalled the failure of the 2001 UN World Conference against racism held in Durban, South Africa, to address caste-based discrimination, but saw the 20-24 April Durban Review Conference in Geneva as a new opportunity to internationalize the issue.

In a statement titled the “Bangkok Declaration and Call,” conference participants called upon the international community “to offer a platform to those representing

Dalit communities” at the Durban Review Conference, and urged “all participating governments to accept the inclusion of caste-based discrimination in those discussions.”

## Moral Statement and Mission

But some Indian activists were not pinning too much hope on the Durban Review Conference. “The Indian government has ensured that caste-based discrimination would not be taken up in Geneva,” said Mr Vijaykumar Parmar of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in India.

Parmar appealed to the ecumenical family to make a “moral statement” and help churches around the world become aware of caste-based discrimination. Among the participants committing themselves to further advocacy within the churches globally was Rev. Dr Lesley Anderson, chairperson of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), who pledged to take up the concern with his Roman Catholic counterpart in the CCC.

Noting that Guatemala supported the cause of the Dalits at the 2001 Durban UN conference, Parmar suggested that enlisting the help of even small countries could advance the Dalit struggle for liberation.

Through the Bangkok Declaration, participants at the conference committed themselves to making Dalit



Mr Vijaykumar Parmar represented the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in India. © Private

liberation a central mission objective. The declaration calls upon churches in caste-affected countries to be “in full solidarity with the Dalit movements and to speak with a united voice in working toward Dalit liberation.”

## Monitor Caste Atrocities

According to the declaration, churches are expected to implement awareness-raising programs, empower Dalits, monitor and respond to caste atrocities. They would also encourage Dalits to express their culture in worship, liturgy and theology, and support Dalit women’s initiatives.

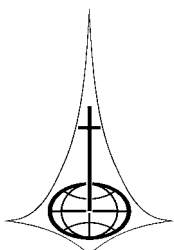
In addition the text appeals to the international community to campaign for an end to manual scavenging by the end of 2010. This degrading, caste-based task forced upon Dalits, entails removing human excrement barehanded from dry toilets and transporting it in baskets to dumping sites.

The declaration also calls upon churches in less or differently affected countries to provide resources for solidarity work in both their own and caste-affected countries, and to facilitate mutual exchange and exposure visits.

Churches in less affected countries are expected to lobby their governments and to urge private sector companies and banks investing in India to ensure that their investments



Mr Asbraf Tannous (left), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, chats with Bishop Devamani Bachu, Church of South India. © WCC/ Maurice Malanes





encourage equal job opportunities for Dalits.

**Global Watch on Violence against Dalits**

To sustain an international campaign against caste-based discrimination, the Bangkok Declaration calls upon global ecumenical bodies to develop their ongoing work on justice for

Dalits, particularly by initiating a global watch on violence against Dalits and communicating this to member churches and beyond.

The declaration also asks for the establishment of a task group to follow up on the Bangkok conference.

In the meantime, participants at the Bangkok conference pledged to help internationalize solidarity for the Dalits in their own countries.

“With Jesus’ love in my heart, I’ll carry and beat the drums for justice and freedom for the Dalits, the Africans and other oppressed peoples, including my own, because, as Christians, we have to carry each other’s burden with courage and without fear,” said Ashraf Tannous of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

*(A joint LWF/WCC press release)*

*2 April 2009*

**FEATURE: Ecumenical Solidarity on a Journey to Liberation**

*Continued from p. 1*

and one of the strategic goals of the Bangkok conference.

“It is up to us all to determine the outcome of this conference, but we should be guided by the principle of solidarity and accompaniment rather than mere compassion and charity for the Dalits,” stresses Rev. Dr Deenabandhu Manchala, who heads the WCC Just and Inclusive Communities Programme and is a Dalit himself.

Prof. Maake Masango of the University of Pretoria in South Africa agrees, saying, “Advocacy does not mean taking over the lives of people for whom we are advocating. It is instead helping empower them. So we have to join and journey with them in solidarity.”

**Awakening**

Many of the delegates to the Bangkok conference admitted they knew little



*Conference delegates Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos from India, (left) and Rev. Roxanne Jordan, South Africa, during a break session. © UELCI/Timothy Melvin*

about the story of the Dalits. The conference thus awakened them to do their part in helping spread the narratives they heard as living stories.

“Our churches are hardly aware of the situation of the Dalits, and they tend to dismiss the caste system as part of the freedom of religion,” says Mr Dennis Frado of the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations in New York. “After listening to the stories of the Dalits in this conference, we have to tell these to our people, especially the issues related to human rights.”

Conference participants learnt about discrimination and atrocities such as those that occurred in the Indian state of Orissa in 2008, where a Roman Catholic nun was gang-raped, nearly 50 people were killed, 15,000 people displaced, and property of Dalit and tribal Christians was destroyed or

damaged during a wave of violence unleashed by Hindu fundamentalists.

Affirming his commitment to helping revitalize the Dalit movement in the United States through his church network, Frado said he would help facilitate meetings between Dalit communities and the US government, and seek to bring cases of human rights’ violations to the UN.

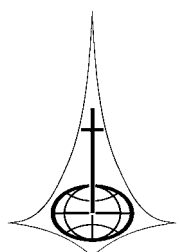
**Children of Global Solidarity**

Other participants who had experienced discrimination and abuse themselves, could easily empathize with the Dalits.

“We leave this conference with a sense of urgency to become a voice for the voiceless Dalits,” said Rev. Roxanne Jordan of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa,



*Prof. Maake Masango, University of Pretoria, South Africa, speaks at one of the conference workshops. © UELCI*



who related the Dalits' plight with experiences of discrimination and exclusion under the apartheid white minority rule in her country.

For Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, accompanying the Dalits and other victims of oppression in their journey toward liberation is his church's way of saying "thank you" to other people of the world who helped his country's liberation struggle.

"We, too, are children of global ecumenical solidarity. Without the many peoples who accompanied us in our journey toward freedom, we might have been obliterated," says Kameeta, who is LWF vice president for the African region. "So we are accompanying the Dalits not as a favor, but as a Christian duty," he adds.

*Freelance journalist Maurice Malanes from the Philippines wrote this feature article.*

More information about the Bangkok Dalit conference is available on the LWF Web site at:

[www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/Olahr/OIAHR-Dalit\\_Justice.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/Olahr/OIAHR-Dalit_Justice.html)

Learn more about WCC work in solidarity with Dalits:

[www.oikoumene.org/?id=3249](http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=3249)

15 April 2009

## Anniversary Celebrations Mark Lutheran Church Witness in Holy Land

"Living Witness – Creative Diakonia" was the theme of festive gatherings, worship, parades, dances, exhibitions and many other activities, marking three important anniversaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) from 16–17 May 2009.

ELCJHL Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan described the anniversary celebrations—50 years of the ELCJHL, 30 years of its Arabic bishopric, and 170 years of evangelical mission in the Holy Land—as a morale boost for church members and for Arab Palestinian Christianity.

"We were thankful that local and international society could appreciate the work of this church and tell us, 'Go forward in what you are doing.' We are thankful for those who worked before us and handed us what they have received," said Younan. "But at the same time, we want to ask our people to continue in this line of serving, because being loyal to our Christian witness, our Christian call and apostolic vocation is in continuity with Christ's call at the ascension, 'Go to the whole world.'"

In his congratulatory message, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) said the ELCJHL was an "integral part of the mother church in



*The Talitha Kumi School scout troupe leads a procession of clergy through Jerusalem's Old City into the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer sanctuary for a celebratory worship service on 17 May 2009. © ELCJHL*



*ELCJHL Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and other members of the clergy leave the sanctuary of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem, after the celebratory worship service. © ELCJHL*

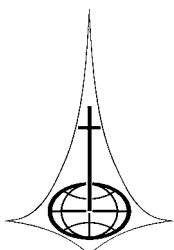
Jerusalem; part of an unbroken history of Christian witness and ministry in the Holy Land since the days of Christ's life on earth." He noted the anniversary was also an occasion to celebrate the church's commitment to interfaith dialogue and cooperation and the search for peace in the region and globally.

Younan, LWF vice president for the Asian region, noted the days around the celebration coincided with the visit of the head of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Benedict XVI to the region. "We are very happy, after the visit of the pope, to show that there is a witnessing evangelical Lutheran community that is an integral part of the Christian community in Palestine-Israel, Jordan and the Middle East," added the ELCJHL bishop.

The ELCJHL currently has some 3,000 members. It joined the LWF in 1974.

*(ELCJHL communication assistant, Allison K. Schmitt, contributed to this article.)*

More information about the ELCJHL's 2009 anniversary celebrations is available at: [www.elcjl.org/Anniversary\\_default.asp#news](http://www.elcjl.org/Anniversary_default.asp#news)





## Call for Lutheran Communion Solidarity with Communities Affected by Climate Change

India: LWF Group Witnesses Villagers' Effort to Secure "Our Daily Bread"

PURI, Orissa State, India/GENEVA (LWI)

– A group of theologians, ethicists, anthropologists and staff working on adaptation and mitigation measures related to climate change, are calling for the Lutheran communion's global solidarity with vulnerable communities that are acting to address the impact of climate change.

"To be in communion with creation, means to be in solidarity with those victimized by climate change, who inspire and motivate our commitment and actions to redress climate change," stated the 23 persons following a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) "Climate Change Encounter in India," 16–20 April, in Puri, in the northeastern state of Orissa.

The international event in disaster-prone Orissa was aimed at witnessing first hand the dramatic effects of climate change, and reflecting on the interconnections with other parts of the world. It was organized by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) in collaboration with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) and the Department for World Service (DWS) associate program, Lutheran World Service India (LWSI).

In addition to those from the UELCI and LWSI, participants came from LWF member churches in Australia, Denmark, Germany, India, Indonesia, Sweden and the USA, from DWS programs in Bangladesh and Tanzania, as well as other Christian denominations and faiths. The five-day event comprised visits to coastal fisher folk and farmer communities around the Bay of Bengal, analyses of climate change, Bible story and worship.

In the six rural communities visited, the participants heard testimonies from and interacted with a large number of persons, whose entire lives, meaning and future are deeply affected by climate change. The LWSI rural development project is working with such communities to educate,



*Fishermen going out to fish early morning on the Bay of Bengal, Puri, Orissa, India. LWF/K. Bloomquist*

empower people and support local initiatives such as self-help groups, disaster management and village development committees to counter the impact of climate change.

The initiatives to adapt and take preventive measures include efforts to continually plant more trees; educating children; promoting traditional food, well-being and health; and relying more on communal family systems, which can survive better amid climate change. Community members are also conscious of the need to build houses on safer ground or raise them off the ground; and to construct elevated tube wells that guard against salinization during flooding. Through cooperation with government authorities and various disaster alert mechanisms and groups, villagers receive and plant new seeds after floods.

The LWF communiqué titled, "Witnessing to Hope Amid Rising Waters," sums up what the event's participants witnessed, and also invites solidarity with the hopeful actions that the villagers are taking for their future.

As part of sharing the insights from the Puri communities with the wider Lutheran communion, the participants recommend that the process be broadened before and dur-

ing Pre-Assemblies leading up to the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany.

"Give Us Today Our Daily Bread" is the theme of the assembly, to be hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg.

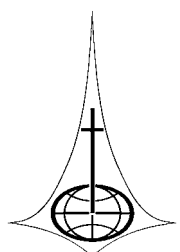
The Puri event participants expressed support for the various climate change-related advocacy positions of the LWF Council and member churches, and encouraged similar response from others. They urged a strategic presence and LWF message at the December 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark. To coincide with that meeting, they proposed that a time be designated and promoted globally for ringing church (and other) bells in order to emphasize the urgency of redressing climate change.

The full text of the communiqué from the LWF event in Puri is available at: [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

More information and further reflections about the LWF Eleventh Assembly theme are available at:

[www.lutheranworld.org/Assembly2010\\_theme.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/Assembly2010_theme.html)

7 May 2009



## Global Church Organizations Welcome Durban II Outcome, With Some Regrets

### No Mention of “Hundreds of Millions” Affected by Caste-Based Discrimination

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Two global church organizations have congratulated the United Nations Durban Review Conference against racism on the adoption of its outcome document, but regret that the latter makes no mention of the plight of hundreds of millions of people affected by caste-based discrimination.

In a 24 April joint oral intervention at the conference in Geneva, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC) welcomed the

ence had “failed to acknowledge the suffering of the more than 200 million people discriminated against on the basis of work and descent.” Formerly known as untouchables, the Dalits are “invisible” in the 21 April outcome document, despite their situation falling squarely under the definition of racial discrimination by UN standards.

In March, both organizations convened a conference in Bangkok, Thailand, at which representatives of churches and church-related or-

of humanity—the image of God in humankind. Racism desecrates God’s likeness in every person.”

Both organizations said they were satisfied that anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, along with a number of other groups and situations, had been explicitly addressed in the outcome document. But they expressed regret that “controversies over one single situation have so consumed the attention and energy of the Durban process, from 2001 until now.”

They welcomed the proposal made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to create an “observatory on discrimination,” which may help throw further light on the situation of the millions of victims of untouchability practices. There are some 260 million Dalits worldwide, 200 million of them in India alone.

Another welcome development was the exclusion of the concept of “defamation of religions” from the conference outcome document. By not allowing the concept to “inappropriately intrude into [the document’s] human rights framework,” the document instead “properly addresses itself to the ‘stigmatization of persons based on their religion or belief’,” stated the LWF and WCC.



*The outcome document of the Geneva Durban Review conference did not mention the plight of hundreds of millions of Dalits such as these village leaders in Thullanmedu, Cuddalore district, of India’s Tamilnadu state.*  
© The Lutheran/Linda Macqueen

reaffirmation of the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, as well as the international community’s commitment to overcome all forms of racism “in all parts of the world, including those ‘under foreign occupation.’”

However, the LWF and WCC stated their regret that the confer-

organizations from around the world expressed their solidarity with the Dalit struggle for justice.

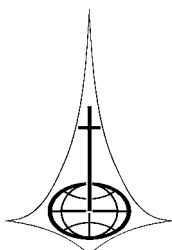
#### Controversies

The LWF/WCC intervention at the UN conference affirmed, “Racism is a sin because it destroys the very source

The full text of the LWF/WCC intervention at the Durban Review Conference is available at:

[www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/WCC-LWF\\_Statement\\_Durban\\_Review\\_Conference.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/WCC-LWF_Statement_Durban_Review_Conference.pdf)

24 April 2009



More LWI News at  
[www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html)

## FEATURE: Just When I Needed It Most

Thai Church Scholarships Help Needy Students Realize Their Dreams



*Thanks to scholarship support from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand, Ms Sirirat Rueangsri is confident about realizing her dream career.*  
© UELCI/Timothy Melvin

**BANGKOK, Thailand (LWI)** – Mai can smile now, though most of her life has been no smiling matter.

Twenty year-old Sirirat Rueangsri, known affectionately as Mai by her relatives and friends, lives in a small, congested two-room wooden house with her mother in Lad Prao, one of the areas in Bangkok that epitomizes the city's economic divide. Her mother is the sole bread winner in the family. With the meager wage earned as a domestic worker in other people's homes, she could barely pay Mai's tuition fees. "(Life) was indeed terrible and every moment of it is still etched in my memory which can never be erased," says Mai. After school she would help her mother with laundry work to supplement their income. The death of Mai's ailing grandmother left a huge debt which made life even more difficult for the two women.

As a single parent facing an increasingly difficult time making a living,

Mai's mother had to take some drastic steps. Unfortunately, it was Mai who had to face the brunt of her decisions. "My life came to a standstill when I was told that I [would] not be able to continue studies further," she recalls. She says she was despondent that she needed to sacrifice her passion for education. "Pursuing studies in the field of communication arts is my passion." Besides the studies, Mai found that just going to school exposed her to an open, friendly, accommodating milieu, a stark contrast to the situation at home. At school she was able to live her dream. But that dream seemed about to suddenly vanish into thin air—a not unusual scenario for people living in the lowest strata of society the world over.

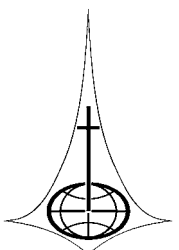
Mai knew the importance of education and desperately wanted to study so that she could have a career and break away from the fetters of poverty. "I did not know what to do,

where to go and whom to ask (for help)," she told this writer.

### Helping Families

It was at this juncture that the Lutheran Diakonia Department (LDD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT) offered her support through its Family Development Ministry program that helps families improve their living standards. The LDD staff had known the family through its ministry among elders, which assisted Mai's grandmother when she was ill. Mai, a Buddhist, was enlisted in their scholarship program. "Our goal is to share God's love with people in need," says deaconess Leena Helle, LDD director. The department helps people who are in dire need, irrespective of religion, social status or gender.

The LDD was established in 1987 as an ELCT department responsible





for the church's diaconal work. The diaconal ministries include work among children, youth, unmarried pregnant women, elderly people, families and people living with HIV.

Mai has been a beneficiary of the scholarship program since she was in Grade 9 (around 14 years old). She is now a third-year bachelor's degree student in communication arts at the Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok. When asked how she feels, she exclaims with a beaming smile, "My life has taken a total transformation." The scholarship came to her as a boon "just when I needed it most." However, she still needs to depend on her mother's

support because the college fees exceed the scholarship amount she receives.

Through the LDD diaconal work, Mai came in acquaintance with the local Lad Prao Lutheran congregation, an encounter that has turned her life around. She is now a baptized Christian. The conversion process took almost three years. She is an active member of the congregation and is a member of the ELCT youth committee. Her mother was also recently baptized.

### Fortunate and Optimistic

Mai is optimistic about her future. "After my studies I will surely get a

respectable job and I need not worry about my daily bread," she says. Her aim is to become an editor in a leading newspaper and, more importantly, she wants her mother to quit her job and stay home. "She (her mother) has toiled her entire life for my sake and it is my duty to take care of her when I earn. I am fortunate that I am able to continue my studies," adds the communication arts student.

Still, according to Helle, the ELCT is aware that there are many young people in that same area of Thailand who are deprived of an education. She affirms the LDD's commitment to continue to seek support for them, drawing inspiration from Jesus' words, "as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

*Timothy Melwyn, communication officer for the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, wrote this feature during a recent visit to Bangkok, Thailand.*

**\*The article is in the continuing LWI features' series focusing on the topic "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly, which will take place 20-27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.**

27 May 2009



Mai hopes to take better care of her mother, with whom she lives in the family home in Lad Prao, Bangkok, Thailand. © UELCI/Timothy Melvin

## Budget Reductions Impact ELCA Engagement Overseas

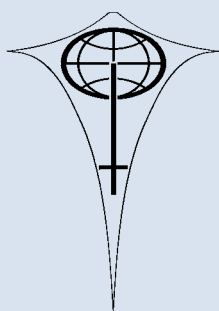
A significant decline in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) financial resources led to budget reductions for the churchwide organization, particularly for ELCA Global Mission. The reduction will affect the church's ministry overseas, including its support to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

ELCA Global Mission reduced its budget by USD 3.6 million or 11.4 percent. According to Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, ELCA Global Mission executive director, the reductions "will hit hard" companion churches and the LWF, already dealing

with the impact of the global financial crisis. The measures will also affect staff travel, services and support for the unit's various programs and functions.

The 4.7-million member ELCA joined the LWF in 1988. It is headed by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, also LWF president. *(ELCA News Service)*

The full story is available on the "News Releases" section of the ELCA web site at: [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)



Published and distributed by:  
The Lutheran World Federation  
150, route de Ferney  
P.O. Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
Tel. +41/22-791 61 11  
Fax +41/22-791 66 30  
E-mail [info@lutheranworld.org](mailto:info@lutheranworld.org)  
[www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)