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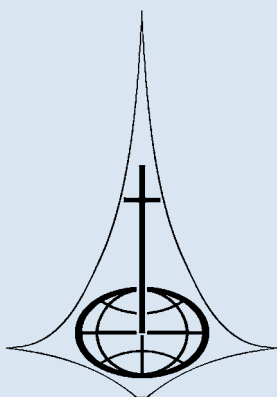
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FEATURE: Free from Bonded Labor



Raghu Ram Mahar, the son of a bonded farm laborer is a free man today, thanks to his own determination and support from a community-based organization assisted by the LWF Department for World Service program in Nepal. © LWF/DWS Nepal

LWF Program Marks 25 Years of Service in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – Raghu Ram Mahar was born into slavery.

The eldest son of 75 year-old Hajari Ram Mahar, of Nagarjun in Baitadi district, far-west Nepal, Raghu inherited his father's status, but not his submissive nature.

Today he is a free man, thanks to his own determination and the work of a community-based organization (CBO) supported by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Nepal.

The elder Mahar was a Haliya or bonded farm laborer, tied to the land of his master. He borrowed 7,000 Nepali

rupees many years ago. This debt was sold to others, and he borrowed more, such that when his working days ended, he still owed money to his master.

Raghu automatically became a Haliya because his father was one, and consequently, a slave to Hajari's owner. Quarrels between owners caused more problems for father and son. They were treated very badly.

However, Raghu decided to fight against this slavery through membership

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Polish Church Leader Defends Position on Women's Ordination

A leader of Poland's Lutheran church has rejected accusations from an international conference of theologians that the church's refusal to ordain women as pastors amounts to "structural violence."

According to *Ecumenical News International (ENI)*, Jerzy Sojka, spokesperson for the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, said the matter of women clergy was not excluded from discussion but added, "Our situation is not conditioned by theological considerations alone but also by economic, social and cultural questions, as well as by ecumenical relations. Although a debate on this issue is taking place, it also needs quiet reflection."

The lay Lutheran was responding to a conference declaration by 30 women theologians from Poland, Germany, Russia, Latvia and Brazil that Lutheran churches in Poland and Latvia were being unjust in excluding women from their ordained ministry.

More than two-thirds of the 140 member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) ordain women. The 75,000-member Polish church joined the LWF in 1947.

In their declaration at the end of the 9 to 13 September conference at Mikolajki, northeastern Poland, the female theologians said that qualified Lutheran women in Poland were still waiting to "live their vocation to the full," while colleagues in Latvia had been admitted to the ordained ministry in 1975 but were debarred again in 1992.

The statement added that Lutheran women in Poland and Latvia were victims of the "structural violence experienced for centuries by women in the church," which was "often invisible, silent and systemic," and "exercised through unjust social and ecclesiastical structures." The declaration called on leaders of both churches to comply with European standards by ensuring a "just partnership for women and men."

(Ecumenical News International)

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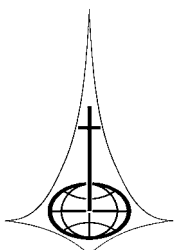
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Includes Assembly Update No. 2



Latin America: Foreign Debt Has Inflicted Great Economic Hardship

Brazilian Church Leader Altmann Says Living Conditions Have Worsened

LIMA, Peru/GENEVA (LWI) – The foreign debts of Latin American countries have inflicted great economic hardship, says Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann, president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB). As a result of the debt burden, living conditions for the majority of people in these countries have worsened.

Speaking at this year's regional leadership conference for LWF member churches in Latin America, Altmann, said it was absolutely necessary to investigate the origin of foreign debts and to determine whether they were legitimate. He reiterated that many countries in the region had contracted huge debts while under military dictatorships, not to mention the important role played by corruption.

The IECLB leader pointed out that as a result many countries were still obliged to service debts to which they had not subscribed. The system that generates foreign debts is based on injustice, Altman stated. Changing that is not only the task of economists, but also that of churches, he told the regional conference held in Lima, Peru.

The meeting focused also on the LWF renewal process, reports on



IECLB President Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann (second from right) during a group discussion at the LWF Latin American and Caribbean region church leadership conference. © LWF/DMD

LWF program activities in the region and the understanding of diakonia in the churches. Representatives of the 14 LWF Latin American member churches attended the 11 to 15 May conference hosted by the Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church. Other participants included ecumenical guests, representatives of the Latin American Council of Churches and from the global Lutheran communion.

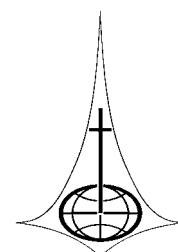
Altmann said he considered the LWF Latin American churches' advocacy program on illegitimate debt as a significant process. Initiated in 2004, the program aims at taking stock of foreign debts and submitting them for audit by an international tribunal.

The program, supported by the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and coordinated locally, seeks to raise awareness about illegitimate foreign debt at various church levels in both developing and industrialized countries. Moreover, it strives to influence the political decision-making process in order to tackle cases of illegitimate debt in the international arena.

For Rev. Ángel F. Furlan of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, Argentina, the issue of foreign debt has been made "invisible" in everyday life on the continent. This is why advocacy is necessary and why Latin American churches have become involved in this process. Foreign debts arising from usury and profit-seeking, says Furlan, need to be examined from a "legal perspective."



At the regional meeting, Costa Rican Bishop Melvin Jiménez (middle) emphasized the need for a holistic approach to mission, incorporating both proclamation and action. © LWF/DMD



Bishop Melvin Jiménez of the Lutheran Costa Rican Church said at the Lima conference that poor people in Latin American countries find themselves in permanent crises, alluding to the current global financial and economic crisis. The measures for solving problems have not attained their goal, he noted.

For the Lutheran communion in Latin America, holistic mission does not mean merely proclaiming the word, but together with other men and women, forming a living reflection of the Good News in action. “We do

not separate proclamation and action or diakonia,” Jiménez insisted. The combination of the two determined the direction that must be taken.

“Neoliberalism had virtually become a religion and its advocates claimed the market would regulate itself. In the present financial crisis, the same proponents insist on the need for state intervention in the economy. We, the churches, are now being vindicated in our outlook that the market cannot be left to define society. The state has a fundamental obligation to promote the well-being of its citizens

and most importantly, those who are most disadvantaged,” stressed the Costa Rican church leader.

The LWF Latin America and Caribbean region stretches from Mexico in the north to Chile and Argentina in the south. It comprises 16 member churches—14 in Latin America and two in the Caribbean, as well as nine LWF recognized churches and congregations, representing altogether around 838,000 Lutherans.

(Source: ALC—Agencia Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Comunicación)

20 October 2009

Christian and Muslim Theologians Seek Common Understanding on Freedom and Responsibility

LWF Joint Theological Study for Constructive Interfaith Relations

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Christian and Muslim scholars participating in a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation in Indonesia’s south-central region of Java deliberated perspectives on the understanding of freedom and responsibility for theology, faith identity and mutual relations for common good in society.

“There is a long history of argument about the relationship between human freedom and responsibility, on the one hand, and God’s creative agency and sovereignty, on the other—both within the Christian tradition and within the Islamic tradition, but occasionally spilling over into Christian-Muslim discussions,” said Prof. Mark Swanson of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA.

Swanson was among the 23 theologians attending the 15-20 June dialogue meeting organized by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) in cooperation with the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) and the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) at the University Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta.

“We struggle as Christians and Muslims to live out our faith so that freedom will be exerted and meet the challenge posed by our time,” said Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga,

DTS study secretary for Theology and the Church. He introduced the international dialogue on the topic “Freedom and Responsibility in Society: Joint Theological Explorations by Christians and Muslims.”

Faith Perspectives

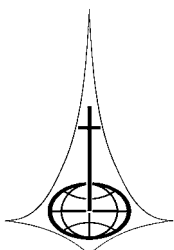
Freedom is perceived as a God-given gift in Islam. A guest lecturer at the ICRS Dr Amina Wadud (USA) spoke about the Qur’an’s emphasis on “the need and mandate for freedom

from oppression.” Prof. Osman Tassan, teaching at Ankara University, Turkey, explained the Qur’an was the principal source of Islamic law, primarily underlining the right to life, equality, solidarity and justice.

The Bible speaks about “freedom from” as a liberating act—from sin, the law, the past and its binding force—said Dr Hans-Peter Grosshans, professor of systematic theology at Muenster University, Germany. However, there is a corresponding creative act of “freedom to”—come to God, love and take on



From left to right: ICRS guest lecturer Dr Amina Wadud (USA), ELCJHL pastor Rev. Saliba Rishmawi, Tanzanian theologian Rev. Thomas Kangeizi, and Rev. Deborah Sinaga, the first woman superintendent in the Protestant Christian Batak Church (Indonesia), during a plenary session of the LWF consultation in Java, Indonesia. © ICRS/Ellis Zuliati





The LWF consultation participants visited the Pondok Pabelan Islamic boarding school. In this photo, (from left to right) Prof. Osman Tastan from the Ankara University in Turkey, the school vice chairperson Dr K. H. Ahmad Najib Amin and a student exchange views. © ICRS/Ellis Zuliati

responsibility, hope, and contribute to shaping the future.

Pastor Saliba Rishmawi from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) explained how ELCJHL's educational and social institutions further freedom and responsibility in society and strengthen interfaith relations.

In his presentation on the culture of "shame" and "guilt," ICRS director Prof. Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, argued that shame as a dominant factor in social interaction for Christians, Muslims and others in Indonesia, affected perception and reaction to moral challenges such as corruption or sexual behavior. In contrast, the guilt notion internalizes moral norms and is thus driven by an individual sense to choose right or wrong.

Challenges

ICRS associate director Dr Siti Syamsiyatun presented a paper on a

recent "silent revolution" by Indonesian women to reclaim their freedom in religious communities and society. "Entering higher training or education in theology or Islamic studies has been a pivotal point for women to argue for formal social recognition and authority to speak about religion in their own right," she said.

Rev. Deborah Sinaga, the first woman superintendent in Indonesia's Protestant Christian Batak Church, pleaded for male and female collaboration in transforming unjust gender relations.

Participants heard about the constitutional challenges for religious freedom in Ethiopia and Indonesia at individual and community level. It was noted that conflicts within one faith can be even more divisive than disagreements between different faiths.

Tanzanian Lutheran pastor Dr Thomas Kangeizi, teaching Islam and interfaith relations at the Lu-

theran Theological College in Ruhija, explained how Christians and Muslims collaborate in caring for people affected by HIV and AIDS in the country's northwestern region.

Interreligious Dialogue

Sociologist Dr Ignas Kleden from the Indonesian Community for Democracy highlighted the importance of formal democratic structures and an actively engaged civil society in creating space for freedom and responsibility. "In both education and religious life, the maturity of a person is measured against the extent to which one has been released from total dependence on external authority."

In a final, joint Christian-Muslim paper, ICRS professors J. B. Banawiratma and Fatimah Husein argued for collaboration between people of different faiths not only in academic circles, but also in religious communities and society at large. Accepting the other's freedom, does not imply that the different perspectives would remain isolated. "Interreligious dialogue is the way to perform freedom and responsibility," they stated.

"This consultation in itself gave an example of how to live out freedom and responsibility together with others," remarked former DTS theological associate Rev. Simone Sinn, citing the candid and constructive interaction throughout the consultation.

Read more about DTS "Theology and the Church" initiatives at:

www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/Dts/Programs/DTS-Theology-Church.html

6 August 2009

Lutherans' Reconciliation with Mennonites Would Be an Occasion for Healing

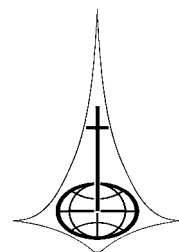
Mennonite World Body Hears Study Commission Results and Proposed Lutheran Action

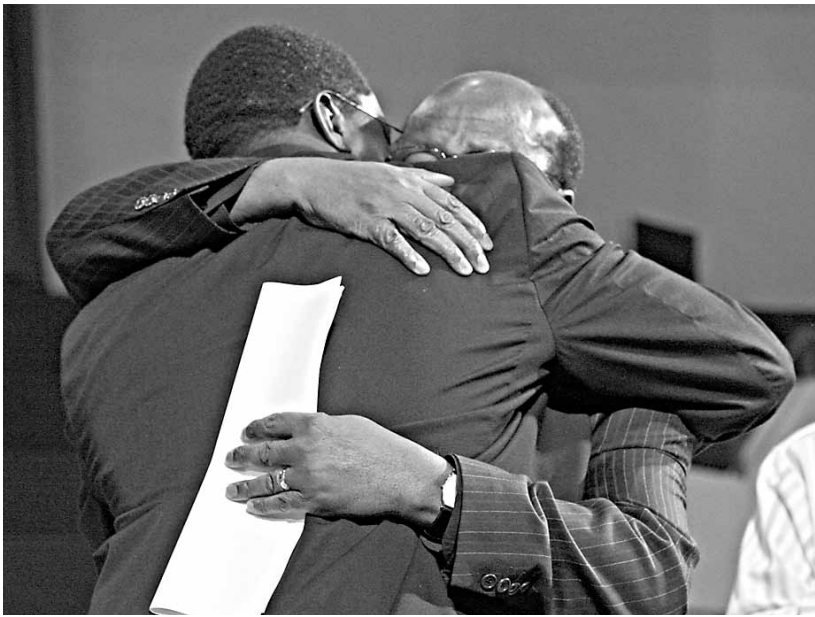
ASUNCIÓN, Paraguay/GENEVA (LWI)

– Despite the painful history of Lutheran condemnations of Anabaptists,

collaboration with Mennonites around the world has helped move Lutherans to seek reconciliation with

them, said Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).





MWC President Rev. Danisa Ndlovu and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko embrace following Noko's address to the July 2009 Mennonite Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay. © Lowell Brown

"We have come to desire this new level of reconciliation as we have come to know you better," Noko told over 5,000 delegates attending the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly on 15 July in Asunción, Paraguay. "In many places around the world, we are already living out the unity which has been given to us 'in Christ'."

The LWF general secretary's presence at the MWC assembly was prompted by recommendations from the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, whose research was completed this year. Building on the work of earlier dialogues in France, Germany and the United States, the Commission examined the historical impact of 16th century Lutheran anathemas, which contributed to the justification of violent persecution against Anabaptists, including death.

"This legacy is on our side alone: you did not retaliate with condemnations or executions," Noko emphasized.

"The pain of our separations is borne not only by us but also by the whole Body of Christ. So it will be healing also for the whole Church if our two bodies make a path together toward reconciliation," he noted.

Noko's address prompted a welcoming response: "We are witnessing walls coming down," said Rev. Danisa Ndlovu, incoming MWC

president, who pledged "we will walk with you" as Lutherans address the troubled history.

500 Years of Reformation

The LWF general secretary linked Lutheran desire to address this painful past to the upcoming anniversary, "Luther 2017: 500 Years of Reformation." While celebrating the fresh insights into the gospel which had come from the 16th century renewal of the Church, Lutherans also want "a spirit of honesty and repentance, a commitment to the continuing reformation of our tradition and of the whole Church," he said.

The October 2009 Council meeting will propose a statement that will, on behalf of the LWF, ask for forgiveness for Lutheran persecutions of Anabaptists. The LWF Eleventh Assembly in July 2010 will be asked to take appropriate action on this statement. "We hope [this] will put us in a new relation to the anathemas in our confessional writings and will express our deep regret and repentance for the use of these writings in justification of violence that cannot be justified," Noko told the MWC assembly. His remarks received a sustained standing ovation.

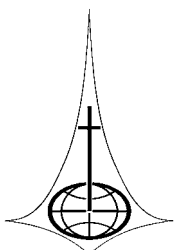
Noko and Prof. Kathryn Johnson, LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs, also joined Mennonite members of the Study Commission, to address an earlier session of the MWC Council. While noting that some of the condemnations addressed positions that were not representative of Anabaptist tradition or of teaching today, the Commission identified areas of continuing difference between the two Christian families, notably on issues of baptism and church-state relations.

New Generations

Noko noted the challenge that reconciliation with Mennonites still holds for the Lutheran family, explaining that the Augsburg Confession, which condemns Anabaptists, remains an authoritative document for Lutherans around the world. He said it was essential that new



Youth delegates at the 2009 MWC Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay © Marc Pasques



generations of Anabaptists and Lutherans should not continue to inherit the painfully divisive history.

Johnson stressed reconciliation as distinctive in this relationship as the Anabaptists did not reciprocate these anathemas and persecutions. The

legacy of this one-sided use of violence is a burden which it was now time for Lutherans to lay down, she noted.

At the conclusion of these remarks, the MWC Council officers surrounded Noko and Johnson, laid hands on them and offered prayers of

thanksgiving. Said Dr Nancy Heisey, outgoing MWC president, "We realize that you must find the language you will use in the resolution of your Assembly. But today we have heard the language of your hearts."

14 August 2009

ELCA Assembly Adopts Social Statement on Human Sexuality

LWF President Underscores Focus on Church Witness

MINNEAPOLIS, United States of America/ GENEVA (LWI) – The 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has adopted a social statement on human sexuality, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" with a vote of 676 (66.67 percent) to 338 (33.33 percent). Its adoption on 19 August required a two-thirds vote.

"Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" is the denomination's 10th social statement. Social statements assist Lutherans in their moral deliberation, govern the ELCA's institutional policies and guide the church's advocacy work. The statement addresses a spectrum of topics relevant to human sexuality from a Lutheran perspective.

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly was taking action on two separate documents. In addition to the social statement, a proposal on ministry policies could lead to policy changes allowing gay and lesbian pastors in committed, same gender relationships to officially serve on the roster of the 4.6 million member church.

Prior to the assembly vote, speakers opposed to the social statement said they believed endorsing the document would abandon the church's reliance on the Bible and separate the Lutheran denomination from the majority of Christendom. But those favoring the document insisted that a greater acceptance of gays and lesbians in the church and its ministry is consistent with the command to care for one's neighbor and to build trusting relationships.

Speaking earlier at a 17 August news conference as the ELCA opened



Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson sounds the bell to call the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to prayer.
© ELCA News Service

its eleventh biennial assembly, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson said a respectful discussion on sexuality by the church would demonstrate that while Lutherans may not be "of one mind," they can still be "united in faith and in our shared mission together."

Hanson is also president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), to which the ELCA belongs.

Opportunity

"We have an opportunity this week to bear witness in a culture that often wants to polarize and see all questions in their polar opposites," Hanson noted. The bishop said he was confident that the church could learn to live with its differences.

Questioned about his own preference on the sexuality issues facing the ELCA, Hanson said he believed

his call was to "shepherd this church" through the discussion and, as LWF president, represent Lutherans worldwide, including those who are strongly opposed to the changes being discussed by the ELCA.

Looking Ahead

The ELCA also voted on a proposal to establish full communion with the United Methodist Church, allowing for combined congregations and exchange of clergy and members, among other actions.

Addressing the assembly, Hanson asked "What shall be our witness this week?" He suggested 15 ways the church might answer the question over the next eight years. These included increased scriptural fluency, a fully implemented strategy on HIV and AIDS, a totally green assembly in 2013, a social statement on justice for women, and a commitment to mission by all congregations, among other points.

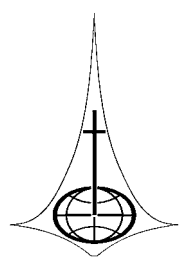
He invited listeners to "think ahead eight years ... looking back from 2017," the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, on "what ... we want our witness to have been."

"This assembly's discussions and decisions will shape our witness," Hanson said. "So, too, will responses that are made to our actions," he added.

(A compilation from ELCA News Service articles)

Information about the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly can be found at www.ELCA.org/assembly

20 August 2009



Lutheran Leader Urges Churches to Push for Reconciliation in Madagascar

Unresolved Political and Humanitarian Crises

GENEVA (LWI) – Amidst mediation talks aimed at resolving the crisis that began early this year in Madagascar, the country’s Lutheran church urges the faith community there to continue reaching out to all sides of the current political divide in order to achieve much-needed unity on the island.

Ecumenical gatherings have multiplied on the island to encourage people to come together and pray for lasting peace, said Rev. Dr Endor Modeste Rakoto, president of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

He emphasized the churches’ responsibility in pushing for reconciliation in a country with a significant number of Christians—45 percent in a population of 19 million. “The church in Madagascar has people in all the camps of the political leaders in the country. As such, it has to preach and work for the unity of all in Jesus Christ despite the diverse political positions. The Christian faith transcends all crises and calls for unity in diversity,” said Rakoto.

Madagascar fell into a political crisis in February when the mayor of the capital city of Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina assisted by the military, ousted President Marc Ravalomanana, accusing him of autocratic leadership. The ensuing violence led to more than 100 deaths and the exile of the constitutionally-elected president. An August meeting brokered by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Mozambique resulted in the composition of a new transitional government, but Ravalomanana has refused this pact, arguing he could



The Malagasy delegation to Geneva comprised (from left to right) Mr Andrianandrasana Noël, development program coordinator; Scouts’ representative, Ms Tatamo Voahanginirina; MLC President Rev. Dr Endor Rakoto Modeste; Fianarantsoa Theological Seminary lecturer Prof. Henriette N. Raoniarisoa; and the general secretary, Rev. Georges Samoela. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

not accept a coup leader as head of the interim government.

Recurring Cyclones, Drought

“The [political] leaders need to be more willing to bring their positions closer by expressing their love for the whole country and the generations to come,” said Rakoto. He called for the continued prayers of the Lutheran communion for a way forward in Madagascar, which in addition to the political standoff, is constantly coping with the impact of serious drought, cyclones and flooding, affecting millions of people. Three consecutive cyclones this year affected an estimated 20,500 people in the area of Menabe in the south.

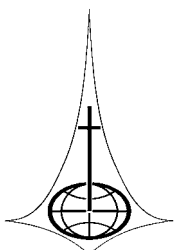
The FLM president commended the United Nations and SADC for their continuing efforts to bring back

peace to Madagascar. “My hope is that there will be peace for at least the next two generations after this, as conflicts have been too frequent in the past 20 years,” said Rakoto.

In August, Rakoto led an FLM delegation on a visit to the LWF Secretariat in Geneva, comprising also the general secretary, Rev. Georges Samoela and Mr Andrianandrasana Noël, national coordinator of the church’s development program. Discussions mainly with representatives of the Departments for Mission and Development and World Service focused on the current political crisis and on strategies to alleviate the impact of natural disasters in Madagascar.

(By FLM youth member Tsiry Rakoto, currently serving as an intern in the LWF Office for Communication Services)

9 September 2009



More LWI News at www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html

LWF Congratulates Newly Elected WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit

Noko Highlights Norwegian Lutheran’s Ecumenical Experience

GENEVA (LWI) – The general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko congratulated Norwegian Lutheran theologian Dr Olav Fykse Tveit on his election as the new general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on 27 August.

The 48 year-old will succeed Kenyan Methodist Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, who has served as the Council’s general secretary since January 2004. The new WCC leader was chosen during the organization’s Central Committee meeting here, 26 August – 2 September.

Tveit brings to his new position broad experience that prepares him to lead in all the aspects of WCC’s work, said Noko in his 27 August statement. The LWF general secretary noted that the newly elected WCC leader “has worked at every level of the church, from parish life and chaplaincy to national and international positions.”

Noko cited Tveit’s leadership in diakonia, advocacy, and in both ecumenical and interfaith relations. “He is a theologian and an administrator. And he is a person of deep faith, modest manner and forthright speech. All these experiences and gifts will serve him well as he leads the WCC,” noted the LWF general secretary. “We are especially pleased also that he already knows the WCC very well. As he moves to Geneva to take up his new duties, he will find himself quickly at home,” he said.

New Possibilities

In his statement, Noko pointed out that this was a crucial time in the life of this indispensable ecumenical body. “The WCC plays a unique and vital role in the ecumenical movement: if we did not have a WCC, we would need to invent one!” he stated. “We look to the Council as the global body where the churches of the world



WCC General Secretary-elect Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

may communicate and cooperate on the basis of a common faith in the Triune God, in the service of Christian unity and the well-being of humanity,” he added.

Noko said the coming years “can be a time of sowing and of harvest, a time when extraordinary things can be accomplished by ordinary means.” It would be the task of the incoming general secretary to lead the WCC to grasp the great opportunities that present themselves amid great challenges, he noted.

Noko expressed his hope for increased cooperation between the WCC and LWF, citing the newly created emergency and development work network, ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) as one such example for new forms of ecumenical collaboration. Even the challenges posed by the current worldwide financial crisis invite organizations to create new possibilities. “We pledge to work with the new general secretary in seeking imaginative and faithful ways to bear common witness,” he said.

“May God bless him with great energy and the gifts of discernment and generosity in his very important

calling in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

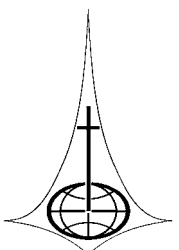
Tribute to Kobia

Noko praised the outgoing WCC general secretary for his service to “the ecumenical movement and the WCC with loving devotion. We will miss his gentle presence among us, and we extend our best wishes to him and to his family in all that they do.”

Kobia is scheduled to leave office at the end of this year.

The in-coming WCC leader Tveit is an ordained pastor in the Church of Norway. He has been general secretary of the church’s Council on Ecumenical and International Relations since 2002. He previously worked as secretary for the church’s Doctrinal Commission, 1999-2000, and Church-State Relations, 2001-2002. He served as a parish priest in Haram, Møre Diocese, 1988-91, and was an army chaplain during his 1987-88 compulsory year of national service.

Tveit is a member of the WCC Faith and Order Plenary Commission and co-chairperson of the WCC Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum core group. He is a member of the Christian Coun-



cil of Norway board of directors and executive committee, moderator of the Church of Norway–Islamic Council of Norway contact group and similarly for the Jewish Congregation contact group. He is a member of both the Inter-Faith Council of Norway and the Norwegian Church Aid board of trustees.

The Church of Norway has nearly 3.9 million members and joined the LWF in 1947.

Formally inaugurated in 1948 at its first Assembly in Amsterdam, Netherlands, the WCC is a Christian organization dedicated to the search for Christian unity. Its 349 member

churches represent some 560 million Christians. Today's member churches come from more than 110 countries on all continents and include Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, United and other churches. A majority of member churches now come from the South.

27 August 2009

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission Begins Discussion on "Baptism and Growth in Communion"

The fifth round of the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity held its first meeting, 19–24 July 2009 at the Christian Jensen Kolleg in Breklum, Germany. The commission's work will focus first on the ecumenical significance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and then on the topic "baptism and growth in communion."

The Commission began to plan for a "Text on the Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017," which it will commend to the churches common ecumenical commemorations for this anniversary. Participants in the meeting agreed that the next meeting will also receive from Commission members papers that will help shape future discussions on "baptism and growth in communion."

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) hosted this year's meeting. In addition to the dialogue group discussions, Com-

mission members were hosted at dinner by the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church office in Kiel, represented by Oberkirchenrat Wolfgang Vogelmann.

LWF Council member Bishop Maria Jepsen also attended, and gave a short overview of the church's activities and challenges.

This dialogue is conducted under the auspices of LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU).

It is co-chaired by Lutheran Bishop Dr Eero Huovinen of Helsinki, Finland, and Roman Catholic Bishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller of Regensburg, Germany.

The PCPCU will host the Commission's next meeting in Regensburg, Germany, from 22 to 29 October 2010.

WCC General Secretary-Elect Tveit Underlines Partnership with LWF

Upon his election as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) last August (*see page 9*), Norwegian Lutheran theologian Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit defined global solidarity among Christians, interfaith relations, a broader ecumenical landscape and justice-related issues as the four main thrusts of WCC's future activity.

The worldwide community of Christian churches must bear credible witness to the love of God in a broken world, said Tveit. He noted the quest for church unity could not be separated from churches' commitment to peace, justice and care for creation. The call to unity, he said, is by no means limited to WCC member churches, but concerns all Christians—Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, as well as evangelicals and charismatics.

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, Tveit emphasized Lutherans' significant contribution to the ecumenical movement, particularly with regard to the common understanding of the unity of the church as something given in word and sacrament. The gospel and the sacraments are core issues when it comes to being one as a church, he added.

The general secretary-elect cited opportunities for "strong and substantial cooperation" between the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in working for unity, justice, peace and care for creation. "We will find ways to share our resources, to share our knowledge, to have common projects." In that perspective, the LWF is a major partner for the WCC, he concluded.

Blog to Explore Questions of Gender, Justice and Daily Bread

A blog launched on 1 October by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Women in Church and Society desk takes a closer look at the intersection of gender and the LWF Eleventh Assembly theme, "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread."

"This blog is a practical platform to network and embrace people to come together to voice experiences and further reflection on this petition of the Lord's Prayer, interwoven with a gender justice approach," said WICAS secretary Rev. Dr Elaine Gleci Neuenfeldt.

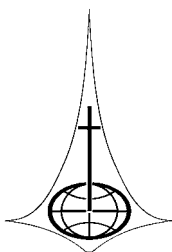
Neuenfeldt pointed to the LWF Women's Pre-Assembly 27–31 October 2009 in Bogis-Bossey, Switzerland, as

a particular focus of the blog. The intention is to highlight voices of women from around the world as they reflect on the implications of being in communion, and sharing daily bread and life, she noted.

Discussion will culminate at the LWF Eleventh Assembly 20–27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.

Those interested are invited to comment on blog posts and submit materials that explore the Assembly theme from a gender-based perspective.

<http://lwf2010women.wordpress.com>



FEATURE: Free from Bonded Labor

Continued from p. 1

in the Haliya Mukti Samaj group, which advocates for Haliyas' rights. Discovering that it was not just his own freedom that was at stake, he joined others in local and national campaigns to change things.

Eventually, Raghu saw the government free his community in 2008.

Right to Freedom

With his father's support and hopes of a better future for his own son, Raghu still fights for his community. No longer willing to remain poor, oppressed and marginalized, he joined a legal education course sponsored by the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) program in Nepal. Today, he teaches others about their right to freedom.

As DWS Nepal marks 25 years of service in the South Asian country on 26 August, the LWF representative there Mr Marceline P. Rozario says CBOs such as Haliya Mukti Samaj are celebrating alongside because of the many positive changes supported by the organization. He pays tribute to members of such groups and various donors "for their meaningful and spontaneous participation" in the program's work.



Mothers collect food items near a relief camp in Nepal's southeastern district of Sunsari, following flooding in the area. © LWF/DWS Nepal

"At this juncture, when we look back, we clearly see some of the remarkable achievements that our organization has made over the years which include abolition of the bonded labor system, women emancipation, reduced caste-based discrimination, and emergence of self-governed institutions of the poor and oppressed," notes Rozario.

One of DWS Nepal's notable achievements is the close involvement in resettling more than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan since 1991, and

cares for thousands of new arrivals from Tibet since 2005.

The LWF program currently works closely with 25 CBOs and nine federations comprising the poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups in the remote areas of Nepal. It has played a major role in many critical development and justice efforts in the country, guided by a rights-based approach that emphasizes empowerment of individuals and communities so that they can gain a sense of ownership of their grassroots organizations and work toward sustaining them.

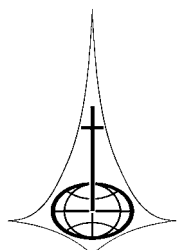
As part of the silver jubilee celebration, volunteers from DWS Nepal's various networks had planted more than 20,000 tree saplings by mid-2009.

Strengthening Civil Society

LWF/DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler underscores the organization's solidarity with the Nepali people "through some very turbulent, and at times revolutionary periods," and its vital contribution to building democratic institutions of governance. "We are convinced that



The LWF program work includes long-standing support to Bhutanese refugees living in southeastern Nepal. In this photo, a Bhutanese refugee woman works at weaving at the Sanishare camp. © LWF/DWS Nepal



a vigorous civil society has a vital continuing role to play to consolidate this democratic progress, by empowering Nepali communities to realize their rights and achieve a higher quality of life," he writes in a congratulatory letter to the program's staff on the jubilee anniversary.

Hitzler praises DWS Nepal for being "on the cutting edge of development thinking and practice over the years," including best practice examples in the region and globally. He however encourages the staff to see the silver jubilee as an opportunity to take the next steps of building the local capacity with the goal to localize the LWF program, which is part of the DWS global strategy.

"We encourage you to find ways to further develop your Nepali identity and a local governance structure, as a means to make LWF Nepal even more relevant and effective in its work," adds the DWS director.

Rozario points out that despite the significant efforts over the last 25 years, the campaign for rehabilitation and land rights for Haliyas and other initiatives continue. Nepal, he adds, remains one of the world's poorest countries, where hunger, malnutrition, discrimination, human rights violations, culture of impunity, and widening gap between the rich and poor continue unabated.

DWS Nepal is one of the field programs carrying out LWF's hu-

manitarian work in 36 countries throughout the world. It cooperates closely with Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, the Geneva-based churches' emergency network, of which the LWF is a founding member.

(Beena Kharel, DWS Nepal communication and documentation manager, contributed to this article.)

26 August 2009

***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.**

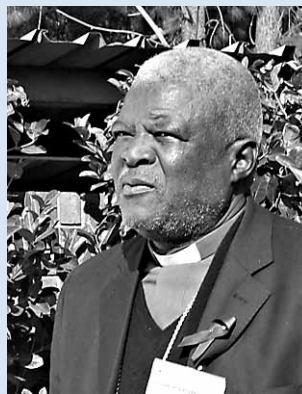
Lutheran Leaders "Deeply Troubled" by Proposals to Decriminalize Sex Trade in South Africa

Southern African Lutheran church leaders have expressed their opposition to proposals that would decriminalize sex work in South Africa. They argue there was no proof such legislation would reduce consequences such as violence against women or human trafficking.

South Africa's Sexual Offences Act of 1957 is currently under review. In its present status, it categorizes as criminal offences voluntary selling and buying of adult sex, and all related acts.

In an open letter addressed to South African President Jacob Zuma, the heads of churches in the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) expressed "grave concern" at the proposals to change the sex offences act. They urged their member churches and ecumenical partners throughout the world to join in opposing the decriminalization.

LUCSA is one of the three sub-regional bodies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Africa. It represents 17 Lutheran churches in 10 Southern African countries, including 13 LWF member churches. Its leaders wrote the letter to President Zuma during the organization's Theological Seminar and Council meeting from 6 to 10 July in Johannesburg.



LUCSA executive director
Bishop Dr. Johannes Ramashapa
© ALCINET/Daisy Dube

The open letter was provoked by a discussion paper on adult prostitution published on 6 May by the South Africa Law Reform Commission. This forms part of a larger commission formed in 1997 to review the decriminalization of the 1957 sex offences Act.

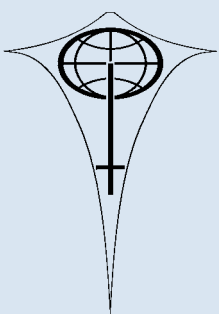
The church representatives said they had noted the various arguments advanced in favor of decriminalization of 'voluntary' adult prostitution "and remain deeply troubled by these proposals because they will have effects on society in South Africa and the wider region," especially in view of the country's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

"In many of these countries, violence against women involved in the sex trade remains high,

public health benefits have not necessarily been demonstrated, human trafficking continues, and organized crime is still deeply involved in the sex trade," the LUCSA leaders emphasized.

They urged the government to "focus more on alleviating unemployment and the root causes of poverty," which should never be allowed to "serve as an excuse for turning human beings into commodities to be bought and sold."

(Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network)



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