**Actions by the LWF Council, 18-22 June 2015, Geneva Switzerland**

1. **Public Statement - Advocacy and Action for Climate Justice**

“As those who live in the resurrection hope of renewal and restoration for all of God’s Creation, we believe we cannot stand by and ignore the impacts of Climate Change. Creation groans under the weight of human action and inaction (Rom 8:22). […] We believe that taking global action now can make a difference.”

By recalling these words from our 2014 Climate Justice statement, the Council of the Lutheran World Federation reaffirms our understanding that climate change is a defining issue of our time, that we urgently need to address and tackle it as people of faith, and that it is not too late for meaningful and effective action.

Background

From November 30 to December 11, 2015, the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will meet in Paris, France. It is crucial that an ambitious, fair and binding global climate agreement be adopted. This is a necessary milestone in the long-term international political process.

In the run up to Paris, we acknowledge the report presented by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) to the Convention in its June 2015 Bonn session, which qualifies the 2°C limit as “inadequate”, calls to see it as a “defence line that needs to be stringently defended”, and states that “Parties may wish to take a precautionary route by aiming for limiting global warming as far below 2°C as possible”.

The LWF will be represented in key moments in the 2015 climate advocacy calendar, among which are the Bonn session in October and COP21 in Paris.

Speaking Up as People of Faith

“*God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good*.” Genesis 1:10

As a Lutheran Communion, we understand that climate change is an issue that impacts on justice, peace, the care for creation, and protection for all peoples everywhere. We raise a special concern for the most vulnerable, in particular the poor, indigenous people, and the voiceless.

We re-commit ourselves and encourage others to commit to a profound change in our lifestyles and in the broader system of production and consumption. We must live as responsible and accountable citizens of this planet.

We will not stand by and ignore the impacts of climate change. We remain committed to raise our voices together with those of others to ensure positive actions by our leaders that will make possible a safe and peaceful existence for all now and in the future.

We welcome the encyclical of Pope Francis--“Laudato Si’ – On the Care of Our Common Home”--as an encouragement for all those struggling for climate justice. With Pope Francis, we believe in humankind’s capacity to act and in the expression of hope for the future.

Call for Commitment by the World Leaders at COP21

Based on our understanding of the climate issue as people of faith, and together with our ecumenical partner ACT Alliance, we call on world leaders to achieve a balanced global agreement at COP21 in Paris by considering the following elements:

● A post-2020 framework, enabling ambitious mitigation action in order to limit the mean global surface warming well below 2°C, both through nationally determined contributions and international initiatives.

● Commitment to ambitious pre-2020 mitigation action. We remind Parties of the decision from COP17 in Durban in 2011 for developed countries to take the lead up to 2020. This leadership must be demonstrated in the coming years.

● Inclusion of loss and damage, due to climate change, in a post-2020 agreement, ensuring that the needs of those people who can no longer adapt to the effects of climate change will be addressed both now and in the future.

● Means of implementation, including finance, to enable urgently needed climate action in developing countries. There is both need for a road map towards 2020, to ensure increased levels of climate finance that are predictable and transparent, and a long-term agreement about climate finance post-2020.

Investing in Our Common Future

In our 2014 Public Statement on Climate Justice, the LWF committed to play its part by becoming carbon neutral by 2050. As concrete steps to meet that goal, and as a contribution to the transformation towards a low-carbon economy, we announce that:

● the 2016-2017 Communion Office Operational Plan (COOP) integrates the development of a Climate Justice Policy; and

● it shall be the policy of the LWF not to invest in fossil fuels.

We acknowledge that some of our member churches, as well as the World Council of Churches, have preceded us in deciding not to invest in fossil fuels companies, and that we are joining a broad global movement which is backed by the UNFCCC.

Through this decision, we seek coherence and wish to send a strong moral signal that the world needs to make a transformational change towards a low-carbon economy, phasing out fossil fuels and phasing in renewable energies by the middle of this century.

Call for Commitment by the Member Churches

**The LWF Council calls on upon LWF member churches:**

**● To advocate with their respective governments, especially those in key countries, before the next inter-sessional UN climate negotiations in Bonn at the end of August. A draft advocacy letter for Council members and church representatives will be prepared.**

**● Not to invest in fossil fuels and to support energy efficiency and renewable energy companies, and to encourage their institutions and individual members to do likewise.**

**2. Public Statement - Protracted Conflicts and the Over-stretched Humanitarian Response**

The Council of the Lutheran World Federation is alarmed by the latest UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) report, released 18 June 2015. In our world today, nearly 60 million people are forcibly displaced as result of conflicts, persecution, and human rights violations. This is more than at any time since the Second World War. More people had to flee in 2014 than in any other year in UNHCR’s records—on average 42,500 people were forced to leave their homes every single day. More alarmingly, the report states that over half of the world’s refugees and displaced persons are defenceless children.

While Syria remains the largest single source of global forced displacement, other parts of the world have also seen a sharp increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Within just the past five years, 15 countries have witnessed fresh conflicts or relapsed into violence.[[1]](#footnote-1) As a consequence, there has been an unprecedented growth in the numbers of refugees seeking safety through dangerous sea journeys, including on the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, and in Southeast Asia.

The world’s humanitarian responders are over-stretched and unable to properly respond to the needs of those affected by these violent conflicts. The scale of suffering and the necessary response is overwhelming the system. We experience this also at the LWF, where LWF World Service is already working with victims of violence from, *inter alia*, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Central African Republic, Mali, DR Congo, Burundi, Myanmar, Colombia, and Central America.

The international community, and especially the United Nations Security Council, has failed to put a halt to a number of these protracted conflicts which have caused massive suffering among civilians. The most prominent example is Syria. This calls for a fundamental shift from business as usual in the way in which the Security Council functions.

**Therefore, the Lutheran World Federation Council calls upon the:**

**United Nations Security Council to:**

**● Suspend the use of the veto power by the Permanent Five members in matters related to preventing or ending genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.**

**● Protect civilians and ensure greater accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.**

**●Parties to the Conflicts to:**

**● Respect international humanitarian law and facilitate humanitarian access to all people in need without discrimination in the respective areas under their control.**

**● Protect and promote the safety, space and freedom of humanitarian personnel to carry out their work free of political pressure.**

**All governments, non-state armed groups and the private sector to:**

**● Refrain from the transfer and sale of arms to warring parties.**

**LWF Member Churches to:**

**● Open their doors to welcome the refugees and peoples in need as stipulated in the LWF 2013 and 2014 council statements on “Welcoming the Stranger”.**

**● Provide spiritual, moral, material and other types of support to churches and Christians under persecution in the Middle East region and elsewhere.**

**3. Public Statement - The Situation in Tanah Papua (Indonesia)**

The Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expresses its concern about the situation in Tanah Papua (Indonesia).

Since 1963, the people of West Papua have been under the rule of Indonesia. The transfer of power between the Dutch, the United Nations, and the Indonesian government effectively marginalized the voices of the indigenous community. Today, the indigenous people of West Papua face ongoing discrimination, rights abuses, and a culture of fear and violence. Despite the Indonesian government’s emphasis on development for the region, ad hoc programs and solutions have failed to meet the needs of local communities. Moreover, the indigenous people of West Papua feel as though the development process has failed to represent their concerns and in some cases has undermined their livelihoods.

We commend the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea and the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua and affirm their work based on trust and mutual understanding. We encourage the spirit of their agreement to foster greater cooperation in diakonia, relationship-building particularly with youth, and enhancing formal and informal education. We especially note and support the emphasis between the two churches on continuing a relationship of solidarity, and acceptance of diverse cultures, traditions and spiritual gifts.

We affirm the 2012 Statement of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches which:

1. Expressed its deep concern for the deteriorating situation regarding human rights violations in Tanah Papua.
2. Requested Indonesian authorities to take necessary steps to release political prisoners, to lift the ban on peaceful assembly of Papuans and to demilitarize Tanah Papua. In this regard, the LWF expresses appreciation for the Indonesian authorities’ recent decision to release five West Papuan political prisoners.
3. Urged the Indonesian government to initiate necessary steps to enter into dialogue with indigenous Papuan people and to take adequate measures to protect their rights and to provide them with their basic needs and rights as the original inhabitants of Tanah Papua;
4. Urged the Indonesian government to ensure that the Indonesian armed forces stop the killing and the causing of serious bodily or mental harm to the Papuan people and the abrogation of their human rights;
5. Commended the churches and ecumenical partners who are engaged in global advocacy for peace, security and human rights of the Papuans.

**We call on the LWF member churches, and especially those in the region, to:**

**● Listen to and learn about Tanah Papua, the situation of the indigenous people, their economic and social struggles, the inequities they face and the injustices they experience, and to stand in solidarity with them and raise them up in prayer.**

**● Acknowledge the Christian churches of Tanah Papua in their struggle for peace and justice, and the work of Christians throughout Indonesia, including Lutherans, to assist Papuan Christian communities.**

**● Pray for the people and churches of Tanah Papua as they continue to engage in their prophetic witness for peace, reconciliation and hope.**

**4. Public Statement - The Sin of Racism**

**We confess before God and community that racism exists in our member churches and communities. On June 18, 2015, as the LWF Council was meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, a young White man walked into a church in Charleston, South Carolina in the United States and shot and killed nine African American people. This most recent incident is a stark, raw manifestation of the sin of racism, and that denial and avoidance of the persistence of racism are deadly.**

**As a communion of churches, whenever we are confronted by sin and destruction, we draw first on God, but also on the wisdom and experience of one another. At the 1984 LWF Assembly in Budapest, in response and condemnation to the sin of racism manifested in apartheid, the assembly said, “All people are created in God‘s image.”[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**It is tempting to locate evil outside of the beloved community but in this case, this young man and alleged perpetrator is a member of one of our member churches. We know this is not the first time that the sins of racism and violence have been in our immediate community, particularly in the case of apartheid. Yet even so, no one is beyond the bounds of Christ’s reconciling and redeeming love.**

**As was proclaimed by the 1984 LWF Assembly:**

**“In Christ, the creation broken by sin is restored to fullness as people are reconciled to God and to one another. Through God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, the people of God’s church are empowered to live as one people celebrating the fullness of God’s creation. In Christ all divisions among people are broken down. The church is God’s instrument for reconciliation in the world also as it witnesses through its life to the new creation in Christ.”[[3]](#footnote-3)**

**In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for the reconciliation of all creation and the entire human community, and for his sake, God forgives us all our sins. In the gift of baptism, we are claimed by Christ. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. “For [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility,” Ephesians 2: 14.**

**We can and must confess that racism is a structural sin that exists in our churches and communities, and commit ourselves to difficult conversations about the sin of racism and advocacy to overcome it.**

**We can and must confess and address our individual actions that perpetuate racism, both things done and left undone, in church, society and relationships.**

**We pray for the intercession of the Holy Spirit to give us the courage and conviction to engage in difficult processes for public, communal acknowledgement, listening, witness, and forgiveness, reflective of the Truth and Reconciliation processes in South Africa and more recently, Canada. We abide in the promise of Christ’s death, resurrection and redemptive power— for this is the hope, the hope that does not disappoint.**

**5. Resolution - The Middle East**

The Council of the Lutheran World Federation, meeting in Geneva in June 2015, has turned its attention again to the grave situation in the Middle East. The Council is deeply concerned about the escalation of violence in the region, the vulnerability of religious and other minorities, and the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The current scale of violence and forced displacement in the region is unprecedented: nearly 12 million in Syria (half the population; 4 million are refugees, nearly 8 million internally displaced) and nearly 3 million in Iraq.  Other countries in the region, such as Libya and Yemen, have descended into violence. The region needs justice not more arms.

Neighboring countries have been extraordinarily generous.  Today, nearly 1.2 million people have been received as refugees by Lebanon, so that one out of every four people in Lebanon is now a refugee.  Jordan has received more than 600,000 refugees, so that now one out of every ten persons there is a refugee.  Turkey is hosting 1.7 million Syrian refugees. These host countries cannot keep up this level of welcome indefinitely.

Religion has been used to legitimize much of the region’s violence. Religious groups have been targeted. In this context, efforts to promote religiously-identified political moderation are struggling against the growth of extremism.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still unresolved, 67 years since the founding of the State of Israel and 48 years since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.  In the latest Gaza war last year, more than 2,000 people were killed, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian civilians; 490 of these civilians were children.  The latest round of peace talks was allowed to collapse.  Illegal Israeli settlements continue to be built in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Israeli prime minister has disavowed commitment to a two-state solution.  Violence from both sides continues to be perpetrated against civilians.

**Drawing on previous statements and commitments made, in particular the need to continue to engage in interfaith dialogue, the LWF Council calls for:**

**● Urgent international efforts to resolve the region’s conflicts through negotiation rather than further violence.**

**● The LWF member churches to advocate with their governments to ensure constructive engagement and to address the causes of human suffering rather than addressing their effects only.**

**● Respect for human dignity, equal citizenship, and freedom of religion for all people.**

**● Generous assistance for refugees, including safe and legal channels to flee. All commitments made to United Nations response efforts should be immediately met. Refugees should be received along the lines of the “Welcoming the Stranger” commitments promoted by UNHCR and affirmed by the LWF. All who have been obliged to leave their homes should be helped to return as soon as possible, in safety and dignity.**

**● Continued support for a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, along the 1967 borders, as the best way to ensure the security and well-being of both states. This call includes: a) a demand for the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories; b) a clear focus on the status of Jerusalem in all proposals to resolve the conflict, with special attention to the religious significance of the city; c) encouragement for member churches to confront religious movements, governments and corporations in their own contexts that directly and indirectly perpetuate the conflict; and d) support for Palestinian efforts to resolve disputes through peaceful means, including the use of United Nations bodies and other international institutions.**

**● All member churches to accompany strongly the efforts of our member church in the region, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, as it promotes regional ecumenical and interreligious engagement and local ministries of education, health, and prophetic diakonia.**

The LWF Council acknowledges with deep gratitude the support for LWF ministries in the region, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital, the Vocational Training Centers, and the humanitarian emergency programs, as well as the support for the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

**6. Resolution - Migrants**

On this year’s occasion of World Refugee Day, the Lutheran World Federation Council expresses its deep concern for the increased number of migrants who are forced to undertake dangerous journeys to flee violence, oppression, or economic or environmental hardship. We highlight the need for continued attention to people and communities who are being forced to leave their homes. The LWF, with its long history of caring for refugees and displaced persons, continues to lift up and care for these vulnerable individuals, promoting durable solutions and safety and dignity for all people and communities.

In particular, the LWF draws attention to these vulnerable people:

• Those who are risking their lives to reach Europe, either by land or across the Mediterranean, many of whom are fleeing from violence and oppression in Syria or Eritrea;

• In South and Central America: the indigenous peoples, the children and the other individuals who are fleeing violence and land grabbing, particularly from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua;

• In the Andaman Sea; the Rohingya and Bangladeshi people who are fleeing from oppression or from poverty;

• West Papuan people who have fled into Papua New Guinea from Indonesian political oppression about 20 years ago;

• The asylum seekers who have been imprisoned by Australia on the remote Pacific islands of Manus and Nauru;

• Those people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic who are suffering from statelessness or being threatened with expulsion.

**Given the tragically overwhelming numbers of individuals affected and the global scale of this crisis, the LWF Council calls upon and encourages member churches to:**

**● Raise a prophetic voice in their regions;**

**● Work with and advocate for migrants in their countries and within their communities;**

**● Lift up the best practices put forward in the “Welcoming the Stranger” document, welcoming migrants in their home communities;**

**● Look for opportunities to build bridges so that migrant people would have the opportunity to return home in safety and in dignity.**

**7. Resolution - From MDGs to SDGs: Putting Diaconal Participation into Practice**

In September 2000, world leaders came together at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Expressing their commitment to global partnership, a series of time-bound targets were designed to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. These eight targets became known as the “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The MDGs are now regarded by the UN as the “most successful global anti-poverty push in history.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Although not all countries or people are better off, the MDGs have made a profound difference in many people’s lives. For example:

● Global poverty has been halved five years ahead of the 2015 timeframe.[[6]](#footnote-6)

● Ninety percent of children in developing regions now enjoy primary education, and disparities between boys and girls in enrollment have narrowed.[[7]](#footnote-7)

● 3.3 million malaria deaths were prevented in the span of 12 years, and lifesaving medicines for HIV are more readily available.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As the MDGs come to a conclusion, the global community is entering the final stages of negotiations on the next set of universal goals, the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), to be a major part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The SDGs will guide global anti-poverty efforts through the year 2030. Generally, the SDGs are designed to have a broader focus than the MDGs and are designed to assess responsibility for both developing *and* developed countries to meet the targets once they are agreed upon. The Lutheran World Federation, a communion of churches spanning the globe, is especially well-placed to promote the SDGs from a diaconic perspective.

The LWF, a founding member of the ACT Alliance, acknowledges with appreciation the advocacy efforts of ACT and its members, including those from within the Lutheran communion, to encourage the adoption of a Post-2015 Development Agenda that leaves no one behind. The LWF affirms especially ACT’s strong support for the inclusion of several cross-sectoral themes in the post-2015 framework: good governance (promoting governmental transparency, accountability and anti-corruption initiatives), sustainable environment (progressive climate and other policies that contribute to sustainable development and justice for the poor), inequalities (advancing equal access to essential services, particularly for society’s most vulnerable), and conflict and fragility (supporting peace building and conflict resolution as key dimensions of holistic development policy-making).

**The LWF Council calls on the LWF member churches to:**

**● Stay informed about the final stages of the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, of which the SDGs are a significant part,**

**● Advocate in their national contexts for full funding and support for the SDGs, beginning in relation to the Third International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in July in Addis Ababa, and**

**● Encourage the inclusion, within the diaconal and theological work of the member churches and the LWF Communion, of story sharing, advocacy, and efforts toward implementation of the SDGs.**

**8. Resolution - Commending the People of Nigeria**

The Lutheran World Federation Council congratulates the people of Nigeria for conducting free and fair, democratic and peaceful elections on 28 March and 11 April 2015. In particular, we commend the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, for graciously abiding by the results of the elections, congratulating his opponent and urging his supporters to accept the results.

Elections in Africa have in many cases been the source of or catalyst for civil wars, instability and bloodshed, such as the current situation in Burundi. Despite the fact that many African countries have, in one form or another, institutionalized multiparty democracy and therefore regular elections, these elections have not changed the nature of politics in many countries away from the politics of ethnicity, exclusion and corruption.

Against this background the recent peaceful elections and transfer of power in Nigeria represent a leap forward for Africa in the direction of democracy and respect for the voice of the people.

**We therefore call upon:**

**● The African Union and its Regional Economic Communities to encourage necessary political reforms for free and fair, democratic and peaceful elections, as well as respect for the International Criminal Court and its procedures, in order to reduce election-related conflicts and bloodshed.**

**● The Government of Nigeria to continue making efforts for the immediate release of the abducted Chibok girls. We commend the current president, Muhammadu Buhari, for his initial steps of relocating the command centre for the fight against Boko Haram to Maiduguri.**

**● The LWF member churches to continue to pray for peace in Nigeria and improved inter-faith relations among Nigerians.**

Lastly, the LWF Council extends its appreciation to the LWF General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, for his solidarity visit to northern Nigeria and to the Rev. Dr. Alex Malasusa, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and Vice-President of the LWF, for his solidarity letter to the people of Nigeria on behalf of the Lutheran Council in Africa (LUCA).

1. Africa (Cote d’Ivoire, Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, north-eastern Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Burundi); Middle East (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen); Europe (Ukraine); Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Pakistan). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Racism in Church and Society.” LWF Report: Budapest 1984 Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly. February 1985. No. 19/20. p 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Background.” Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015. United Nations. 20 June 2015. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014.” End Poverty 2015 Millennium Campaign. UNMC. 20 June 2015. <http://www.endpoverty2015.org/en/2014/07/07/the-millennium-development-goals-report-2014/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014.” Research & Publications. United Nations Development Programme. 20 June 2015. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/themillennium-development-goals-report-2014.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “United Nations Millennium Campaign.” Facebook infographics. 20 June 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/mcampaign/photos/a.10152238025342496.1073741830.9053837495/10152236309257496/?type=3&theater>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)