



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Office of the
General Secretary

lutheranworld.org

TO:
LWF World Service
Country Program Staff

19 August 2014

Re.: World Humanitarian Day

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings to you from the LWF Communion Office!

I want again to take the opportunity of the UN World Humanitarian Day to thank you for the amazing work that you are undertaking on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation – a communion of churches.

Your passion and your work towards upholding the rights of the poor and oppressed around the world is a great expression of the commitment of the LWF to be a communion “living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world”.

Your work is highly appreciated by the LWF member churches and by the LWF governing bodies because of your commitment and the quality of the programs and services you offer.

As in previous years, LWF country programs and associate programs have received distinctions, awards or certifications, which represent a great encouragement and are a reason for great joy. These achievements are not only recognitions for World Service programs and associate programs. They are a confirmation and acknowledgement of all staff that in one way or another have contributed towards them. We celebrate these important achievements and thank you for your strong commitment and hard work.

The World Humanitarian Day is a day to commemorate all people who have lost their lives in humanitarian service and to celebrate the spirit that inspires humanitarian work around the world. Eleven years ago, on 19 August 2003, 22 aid workers were killed in the bombing at the UN headquarters in Baghdad. Some of us knew and had worked with some of those who lost their lives that day.

The last months have once more shown the risks that your commitment often entails when you work and live in difficult places, where violence, displacement, hunger and lack of basic human rights prevail. In fact, none of those places at which you serve are safe places. Some of them, however, are particularly precarious when it comes to security issues. At several occasions and in several countries we had to temporarily evacuate staff for security reasons.

Some of our colleagues in South Sudan were witnesses to the targeted killing of aid workers. Hospitals, health facilities, doctors and nurses have been purposely bombed or attacked in several places, again in South Sudan, but also in Syria. In Gaza, despite being clearly marked as neutral UN or humanitarian facilities, some schools and hospitals were hit by rockets and artillery fire. It is inspiring that colleagues from the Augusta Victoria Hospital volunteered to go to Gaza and provided medical services under these dangerous conditions.

Just in the past weeks, about a dozen aid workers have been killed in Gaza and in South Sudan alone.

I am more concerned than ever before about your wellbeing and safety. In several violent conflicts, and this is often the environment in which you work, there seems to be a total absence of respect for international humanitarian law. While there is no such thing as a civilized war, it is not acceptable that aid workers become increasingly targets and victims in violent conflicts.

It is therefore not enough to observe a World Humanitarian Day once a year in memory and honour of aid workers who have lost their lives in humanitarian service and to thank you for your commitment to serve under very challenging conditions.

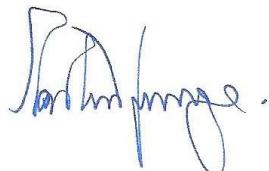
We are committed to speak out more clearly and loudly that it is simply unacceptable that any fighting force, and most of all official state military, targets civilians and aid workers. When the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Conventions are simply ignored, the international community needs to take decisive steps against the perpetrators.

On World Humanitarian Day let us unite and raise jointly our voices for the protection of innocent people in violent conflicts, for the respect of International Humanitarian Law and for the protection and respect for aid workers.

Ahead of us are new challenges: the LWF is attempting to respond to the very difficult conditions of many people in Northern Iraq, especially but not only Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities. The situation in South Sudan is dire—it might lead to a mega disaster with hunger affecting millions of people. I ask our colleagues in the region and in Geneva to prepare for the worst as we hope and pray for the best.

Thank you again for your work, which we appreciate, value and celebrate. Our prayers are with you for your own safety and that of your families. Our prayerful encouragement to continue upholding your vocation to serve the neighbour is with you as well.

God bless you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martin Junge".

Rev. Martin Junge
General Secretary