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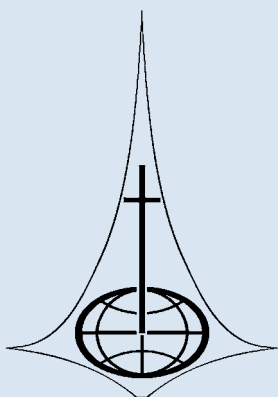
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LWF President Urges Churches to Remain Vibrant Witnesses



Through dance, young members of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia tell how people in the state of Sabah embraced Christianity. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

Gift of Unity in Diversity in Asian Lutheran Communion

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia/GENEVA (LWI) – Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, president of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), appealed to LWF member churches in Asia to continue to be “a vibrant and creative witness” in the world’s most populous region.

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), made this call when he addressed church representatives attending the LWF Asia Church Leadership Conference (ACLIC) held in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, 10-13 March.

In his keynote address, he pointed out that the 8.8 million Lutherans in Asia comprised many small churches in a region whose population nearly quadrupled during the 20th century. “Even [though] the growth in the churches does not keep up with population growth and LWF member churches make up only about one tenth of one percent of the

population, I appeal to you all to be a vibrant witness and a creative witness so that the mission of the church may continue,” said Younan.

The LWF president underlined that increasing secularization and great pressure from the global market “culture” had an impact on identity, cultures and values. Churches in Asia, he noted, were “at a critical moment” when they could be tempted to focus solely on their survival or become reflections of the interests of empire.

“The gift of our communion is that we have diversity in unity. And where better to see that than in this gathering of Lutheran churches in Asia—a communion of churches with a great diversity of languages and cultures, a diversity of gifts that brings us all to a more complete understanding of the gospel

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Like Living Stones – New LWF Publication

“Like Living Stones” *Lutheran Reflections on the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, is the latest publication in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Studies series. In the book, Lutheran scholars share insights into how faith in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church not only provides theological commonality among Lutherans but also helps realize the social aspects of the Christian faith. Some of the authors affirm that while valuing deeply the faith that unites churches, there are diverse and rich ways in which faith is lived out. Others point out that despite the affirmation of the oneness of the church, it is nevertheless lived out separately and sometimes even in contradiction. The publication also underlines Lutheran understanding of the second mark of the church—holiness—to be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, as flowing from God’s forgiveness, and embodied by the church.



The articles in the publication were first presented in 2010 at a consultation in Münster, Germany, organized by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) in cooperation with the Institute for Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Münster, Germany.

“Like Living Stones” *Lutheran Reflections on the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* is co-edited by Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga (LWF/DTS) and Rev. Dr Hans-Peter Grosshans (University of Münster).

Orders for the 206-page book can be placed with Lutheran University Press at, www.lutheranupress.org/catalog/-p-95.html. For further information please contact Ms Iris Benesch at, Benesch@lutheranworld.org, Tel: +41/22-791 61 63, Fax: +41/22-791 66 30.

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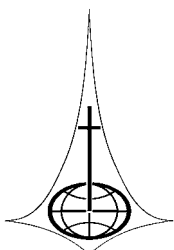
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Youth Welcome Opportunity to Experience Lutheran Communion

Enthusiasm for “LWF Together” as Scores Register

GENEVA (LWI) – Young Lutherans from around the globe continued to sign up for “LWF together – the earth needs you,” an innovative program of the youth desk of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Thirty days before the final registration deadline, 34 groups from all continents had registered with a total of 219 participants.

In “LWF together,” local Lutheran groups of young people aged 15 to 30 will team up with two other groups in different continents using the Internet to read relevant Bible passages together and develop an understanding of God’s creation and humanity’s responsibility toward it. They will then get active on environmental issues in their home context.

The program was developed in gatherings of young people around the LWF Eleventh Assembly held in July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany, and in a subsequent online international consultation of Lutheran youth.

Many joining the program underscore the opportunities it offers to bring youth together and broaden their horizons.

Jack Magoro, a 24-year-old theology student in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, said “LWF together”



Lutheran youth conclude their Eleventh Assembly presentation with a lively song.
© LWF/JELC/Angelious Michael

will renew youth ministry. “In our country, it is difficult to keep the youth together and most of us get excited by just being in a debate or project with someone from outside our country.”

Janine Jahn, 17, from Obing, Germany, added: “We want to be in direct contact with other young people in other parts of the world. It is so easy to have a limited view of the world. We really want to broaden it by having direct experiences and being active in our youth group.”

For Tirelo Collin Seabo, a 20-year-old from Otse, Botswana, “LWF

together” offers a platform for learning. “We hope to gain knowledge from ‘LWF together.’ It will help diversify our contribution and input in the community.”

Josephine Toffi, 22, from Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, India, stressed the learning opportunity “LWF together” provides. “There is so much that we can learn from people in other countries. We can learn about each other, how they live, about their faith.”

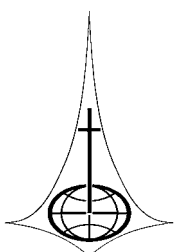
Fifteen-year-old Seth Phillips from Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, in the United States, welcomed the program as a great opportunity to connect with other teenagers around the world. “I love to be in contact with Christians from many different languages and cultures,” he said.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, said “LWF together” will help nurture a developing movement of young Lutherans worldwide. “In the LWF communion, Lutherans have come together to make a difference. I am glad to see that young Lutherans from around the world join hands using this completely new and innovative methodology.

“I am convinced that the interaction across contexts and cultures will



Young Lutherans in discussion at the July 2010 Pre-Assembly Youth Conference © LWF/Florian Hübner



be an enriching experience for the youth, their groups, and their congregations,” Junge concluded.

Lutheran youth groups have until 1 April 2011 to register for “LWF together.”

Watch an animation clip on LWF together at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ftcnssz-1zA

More information: www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/themes/lwf-together

3 March 2011

Carrying the Cross of Christ Together in Solidarity and Suffering

LWF Leaders Visit Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople

CONSTANTINOPLE, Istanbul/GENEVA (LWI) – The cross was one of the important points during a meeting in Constantinople between leaders of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of the 250 million Orthodox Christians around the world.

LWF President Bishop Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, on their first official visit with the Ecumenical Patriarch, 24 to 28 March, participated in the distinctive Orthodox liturgy for the third Sunday in Lent, which includes special veneration of the Holy Cross. Carried through the assembled worshippers in a procession, the cross is placed on a bed of flowers as a reminder that the cross of humiliation becomes at Easter a tree of life.

Bartholomew described the timing of the LWF visit as “very symbolic.” For centuries, he said, “we



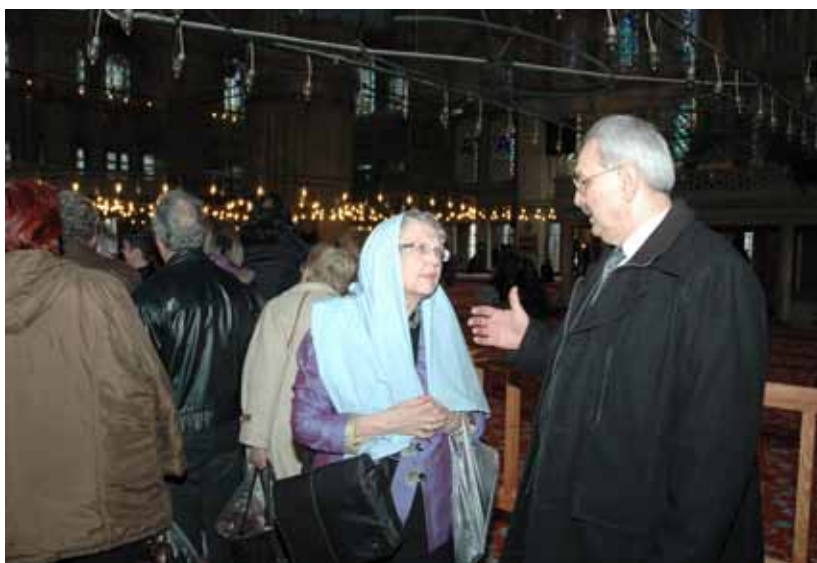
Left to right: LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan present Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew with a Liberian cross fashioned from spent bullet casings as a symbol of the concern for peace and justice shared by the two church communions. © LWF/K. Rieth

live by carrying the Cross of Passion through suffering, persecution and struggle for survival. Indeed the same Cross unites us in solidarity and suffering, particularly as you, Bishop

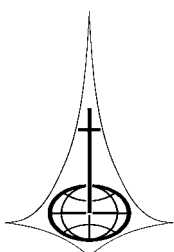
Younan, personally strive for human rights, justice and peace for your people. Yet, all of us still resist in the anticipation of Christ’s Resurrection, which is our daily spiritual hope.”

Junge took up similar themes as he presented the Patriarch with a Liberian cross made out of spent bullets from that country’s civil war. All around the world, he said, “there is violence and suffering. Yet in the cross we see that God, who in Christ endured even the cross, is present also today in such painful circumstances.”

In his greeting, Younan identified three ways in which Lutherans and Orthodox can be united in response to human need. These include a shared vision for a just peace for all the people of the Holy Land; advocacy for freedom of religion; and care for all creation. He also invited Orthodox leaders to seize the festivities surrounding the 500th anniversary of the Reformation



Dr. Kathryn L. Johnson, LWF assistant general secretary for ecumenical affairs, and Mr. Georges Lemopoulos, WCC deputy general secretary, visit the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul. © LWF/K. Rieth



in 2017 as an opportunity to promote reconciliation and unity.

Echoing the Patriarch's message to the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, Younan said "there can be no deviation" from the long path which will lead to unity at the table of the Eucharist.

The Lutheran delegation included Dr Kathryn Johnson, LWF assistant general secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, and Rev. Sven Oppgaard, assistant to the LWF president. Georges Lemopoulos, deputy general secretary

of the World Council of Churches, accompanied the delegation.

In discussion with members of the Synodical Commission on Inter-Christian Affairs, both Lutherans and Orthodox appreciated the achievements of 30 years of bilateral theological dialogue as "essential and irreversible." Both sides agreed that in the future the dialogue should address the major challenges facing the church with greater intensity.

At the beginning of his stay, the LWF president had the opportunity

to visit the Orthodox theological seminary on the island of Halki, which was closed by government authorities in 1971. The church is still awaiting authorization to reopen the school. Bishop Younan expressed his hope that the church in Turkey would soon be able once again to have theological formation for its leaders in its local setting.

In saying farewell, the Ecumenical Patriarch told the Lutherans to "Think of us as your friends."

31 March 2011

LWF-Supported Project in India Helps Rural Women Gain Jobs, Justice

100th Anniversary of International Women's Day

CHHINDWARA, India/GENEVA (LWI)

– As the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day (IWD) was marked globally on 8 March, women cooperative groups in India's central state of Madhya Pradesh demonstrated their collective strength and awareness thanks to a Lutheran-church supported project.

The women, who are struggling to find work and affirm human rights for their communities, participate in the Water Education and Social Action (WESA) project of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh supported by the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELICI) and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

WESA describes its motto as simple: to love and serve the people. It is active with women's federations in Betul and Chhindwara districts where the largely tribal population lives in rural or forested areas and the people are reliant on agricultural production and non-timber forest products. Through WESA women are educated about their right to information and government resources.

Much of the land the tribal people work is on steep slopes and exposed to damaging soil erosion. Production is for local consumption but still the communities struggle for

their livelihood. Local workers are forced to travel to other regions to earn cash and grain. While the government has established some public food distribution systems, these are not very effective. There is little remunerative activity and organized markets are almost non-existent.

WESA works in 40 villages through women federations. Abhilasha is one such federation, holding monthly meetings to raise awareness about various social issues and government schemes being carried out in almost all the villages under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

Employment Opportunities

Determined to secure employment for community members, Abhilasha recently conducted a social audit and shared its findings with the local NREGA office, responsible for creating jobs in the area. But the information they were seeking about work opportunities was not forthcoming, so the federation members approached the chief executive officer whom they could finally meet after a couple of days. They learned that application forms needed to be filled out and sent back to the government

office. The next step was to ask people in the village to apply for work, and 50 applications were submitted. In the end, the women managed to secure jobs for all the applicants. In the process they also learned that poor families in the districts were entitled to a government scheme that facilitates group marriages and gives gifts to newlywed couples.

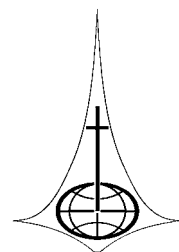
As a WESA representative summarized the women's lobbying, "The federation members showed their collective strength and awareness and got success in these matters."

She added: "Now, at least we can say that in the male-dominated community and society, women, through federations and women's forums, are now coming forward for their rights and creating space for themselves."

Gender Justice

The WESA project fits well with the approach of the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk, which stresses empowerment of women and gender justice, said WICAS secretary, Rev. Dr Elaine G. Neuenfeldt.

Reflecting on the United Nations IWD theme: "Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women," Neuenfeldt said the rigidity





A participant of a women's empowerment seminar organized by WESA in Betul district in India's Madhya Pradesh state. © ELC WESA

of the social and cultural models and of the gender roles assigned to women limit their access to power and place them in an underprivileged social status. "Therefore, women are discriminated in the access to decision-making bodies or to economic fields like access and use of land and resources," she explained.

The widely celebrated day upholds two goals: to reduce the gender gap in education; and to create oppor-

tunities for valuing women's work and giving it visibility. For WICAS, gender justice offers a cross-cutting perspective and an analytical tool to address disparities and injustices that affect both church and society.

The women's empowerment project in UELCI member churches "creates awareness among women in society that they are capable and that they have the right to work and participate in decision-making of

the church and society. Therefore this kind of project helps the church to realize the gender imbalance in the church and society," says Ranjita Borgoary, head of the UELCI women's desk.

The UELCI brings together the 11 LWF member churches in India.

Sanjay David, director of the WESA project in Pdhur district in Madhya Pradesh, said the church can learn a lot from the women's model of working through federations to advocate for communities' rights. "Most of the congregations are from the rural or tribal background, so the lifestyle is almost [the] same," he added.

Neuenfeldt pointed out that listening to how different groups respond to contextual issues on gender dimensions has direct implications on the Lutheran communion's theological understanding of what it means to be an inclusive body. "Gender justice is a theological tool which brings the notion of gender equality to our church level. It is this experience of being an inclusive communion as a space where women and men pray and act together the invocation: 'Give us today our daily bread,' the theme of the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly)" she added.

8 March 2011

Faith Groups Help Support Gender Equality, UN Panel Told

LWF Representative Underlines Women and Girls' Training in Science and Technology

NEW YORK, USA/GENEVA (LWI) – Faith groups have an important role to play in creating gender equality in science and technology education, said Rev. Dr Elaine G. Neuenfeldt, executive secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Women in Church and Society desk.

"Policy that advances the human rights of women and girls, enacted in conjunction with a faith grounded in justice, builds a foundation for equal partnerships between women and men," Neuenfeldt told a panel of the 55th session of the Commission on

the Status of Women (CSW) of the United Nations in New York, held 22 February – 4 March 2011.

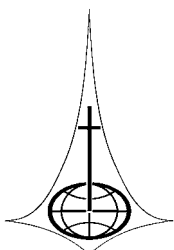
"Equal access to science and technology education and meaningful employment will not be guaranteed by the actions of the State alone. Faith institutions, as part of civil society, fill the gaps left in State-run education systems.

"Schools, universities and vocational training programs provided by both faith groups and the State can work in tandem to eradicate discrimination against girls and women,"

said Neuenfeldt, a pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

She spoke on behalf of Ecumenical Women at the UN, an international coalition of church denominations and ecumenical organizations which have status with the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations. The LWF is a member of the coalition.

In their intervention to the CSW session, Ecumenical Women pointed out that despite 16 years of national policies and international agreement



to advance women's rights, the goals of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remained unfulfilled because of unacknowledged systems of power.

The group noted that various follow-up processes had failed to address language bias used as a tool to disempower women: assaults or attacks against women in their homes were still referred to as "domestic violence" and not "criminal acts," they stated in their intervention.

The coalition, which includes several other church-related organizations, also pushed the UN to motivate men to become partners in the struggle to end violence and discrimination against women, calling for women's access to decent work in all communities, particularly in remote or rural areas.

Ecumenical Women asked governments to work to remove gender stereotypes from science textbooks and acknowledge and publish the contributions of women scientists and technologists.

"Education is an essential human right. It is a global portal to address cultural practices of gender-based violence. Education increases girls' and women's participation in society, impacts the welfares of their families and communities, and advances the

progress of the Millennium Development Goals in areas such as reducing maternal and child mortality," the coalition stated.

Women Technologists

Neuenfeldt highlighted collaboration programs between faith groups, the state and other organizations that help train women as scientists and technologists, including a project supported by the LWF Department for World Service program in Mauritania. In that project, four women were sent to the Barefoot College in

Tilonia, India, for six months training as solar engineers in 2008.

Because of the project, today women in remote villages in Mauritania can cook on improved stoves by solar lamp light; children are able to do homework in the evenings; lighting bills are more affordable; and women hold night meetings in good light.

"Lessons from this experience demonstrate that when institutional collaboration between the public sector and civil society is intentional, space is created for women and girls to access science and technology. This



Ecumenical Women worship at the 55th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
© ELCA/Christine Mangale



Lutheran participants at the 55th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women © ELCA/Christine Mangale

access not only empowers women and girls economically, it also has the power to transform existing gender roles, and promotes full citizenship," Neuenfeldt concluded.

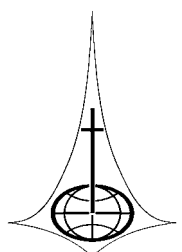
Watch the Webcast of the panel presentation:

[www.unmultimedia.org/
tv/webcast/2011/02/
55th-session-of-csw-panel-
1-original-language.html](http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/02/55th-session-of-csw-panel-1-original-language.html)

Read more about Ecumenical Women at the United Nations:

[http://ecumenicalwomen.
wordpress.com/](http://ecumenicalwomen.wordpress.com/)

8 March 2011



Indonesian Lutherans Share Commitment to Transparency and Accountability

LWF General Secretary Calls for Balance Between Listening and Serving

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI)

– The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge praised Indonesian Lutherans for making “transparency and accountability” part of their “beautiful witness for Christ.”

Junge, visiting with churches in the country 6-8 March, made his comments when he delivered the Sunday sermon at the Sidorame congregation of the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) in Medan, North Sumatra.

In his sermon based on Luke 10:38-42, Junge, reflecting on the life of Mary and Martha, highlighted the importance of “listening to the word of God and serving our neighbor.”

The LWF general secretary encouraged congregation members to balance listening and serving, which are important dimensions of Christian life in the same way that “faith and work belong together.”

He challenged those gathered for worship: “Are we listening enough to others? In our families, are we listen-

cal culture.” He affirmed the seminary’s commitment to developing “a gender friendly theology, which highlights the valuable role and leadership of women in helping build God’s kingdom.”

The seminary is showing renewed emphasis on “the Lutheran perspective” and at the same time sowing “seeds of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and understanding,” Lumbantobing noted.

He explained the institution was open also to Islamic clerics, “whom we invite to discuss their faith and practice here.”

Around 86 percent of Indonesia’s population of over 237 million people consists of Muslims. Christians are slightly over eight percent, including the 5.6 million members of the 12 LWF churches there.



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge (right) addresses seminary students and lecturers in Siantar, North Sumatra, Indonesia. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

Change and Transformation

The students raised questions with the LWF general secretary about how they might be agents of change and transformation in a fast changing world; how they might balance faith and social commitment or community service; and how they might be relevant both as Christians and as citizens.

They expressed concern about the relationship between language and faith. They noted that because they use Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, more often, the youth felt they have become less connected to traditional church worship, which is conducted in the indigenous Batak language.

The situation has become more challenging, they said, because charismatic or Pentecostal groups have been drawing many young people to worship through the use of the national language.

Responding, Junge said the students embodied the present and future concerns as well as hopes for their churches. He reminded them that theology continues to develop and change and

His visit, the first with churches in the region since he became LWF general secretary last November was in the context of the bi-annual gathering of the Lutheran Council in Asia and the Asia Church Leadership Conference, held 7-13 March in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

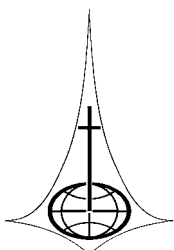
The general secretary expressed great appreciation for how the Sidorame congregation and GKPI leadership report each Sunday on the amount of money that had been raised and how it was being used.

“You are showing what it means to be the salt and light of the world by being transparent and accountable,” Junge said when he preached on 6 March.

ing enough to each other? Are we listening to the youth, the women, and to our neighbors? Are we listening to the cries and pains they face? Are we listening enough to the debates in our cities and communities? Are we listening enough in our lives?”

His visit included discussions with faculty lecturers and students of both the Nommensen University, which is affiliated with the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), and the Nommensen Theological Seminary in Pematangsiantar, some 130 km from Medan.

The seminary principal, Rev. Dr Darwin Lumbantobing, explained how the institution was teaching and building “a theology rooted in the area and lo-





A student participates in discussion during the general secretary's visit to Nommensen Theological Seminary.
© LWF/Maurice Malanes

In Chile—where Junge grew up and served as a pastor—and in other parts of the world, there were military dictatorships, and theology has developed in response. “So again the challenge then was how the churches could respond,” he told the students.

Asked how youth today could be guided as they seek change and direction for the future, the LWF general secretary encouraged the students to study Martin Luther again.

“Luther had said we must not get stuck [in a certain historical stage] but must continue to evolve if we are to reform and transform ourselves and our society,” Junge said. “Within the LWF communion, we’re actually rich in wonderful experiences and practices that are empowering.

“Your rich experiences as Christians in this multi-cultural and multi-lingual country are good examples,” he added.

10 March 2011

no longer comes from just one center. “Theology is being developed in specific places and continues to be enriched through exchange programs,” he said.

He cited how theology in Africa was responding to the challenge of

HIV and AIDS. “But before HIV and AIDS, there was apartheid,” he said. “So the challenge then was, ‘What does it mean to be a Christian amid a situation where separation was imposed on the basis of color?’”

Fear of Nuclear Threat Grips Japanese Fending off Tsunami and Quake Ravages

Lutheran Churches Join Ecumenical Relief Efforts, Urge Continued Prayers and Support

TOKYO, Japan/GENEVA (LWI) – Fear gripped many Japanese days after the country’s worst earthquake and tsunami, but the tragedy has brought together Lutherans and other Christians seeking ways to help victims ecumenically.

As snow began falling on the north-eastern part of Japan’s main island of Honshu on 3 March, people there and further south in Tokyo were fearfully anxious about a pending safety threat from nuclear reactors that provide energy for the energy-starved country.

The 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck on 11 March, spawning a vicious tsunami that obliterated towns on the coast and the city of Sendai. By 16 March the death toll had risen to 3,700 and authorities expected it to top 10,000.

Lutherans, including member churches of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), number about

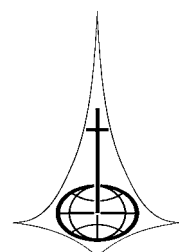
32,000 out of the country’s 127 million people. They joined people of all faiths and denominations in praying for the country and its people following the biggest disaster since the

Second World War and which some Japanese say is “the worst disaster in 1,000 years.”

“I just came to the devastation in this country on 14 March after an



Screening for radiation exposure at a public health center in Niigata, northern Japan.
© Reuters/Yuriko Nakao, courtesy Trust.org - AlertNet



LWF meeting in Malaysia,” Rev Sumiyuki Watanabe, president of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC), told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* from Tokyo’s Kamata area.

He had attended the 10-13 March LWF Asia Church Leadership Conference in Kuala Lumpur, where participants offered prayers for the churches and people of Japan.

Watanabe said JELC established a rescue service relief task force and immediately started to call for support in any possible way, as well as collecting information regarding the suffering people in the area. “The Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics all decided to work together along with other denominations.”

Access to the Area

Groups wishing to provide assistance in the region hit by the quake and the resulting tsunami cannot currently get access to the area, where the Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said that half a million people have been left homeless.

The 62-year-old Watanabe, who participated in relief efforts after the massive 6.8-magnitude earthquake in 1995 that claimed more than 6,000 lives mainly around the port city of Kobe, said, “Our problem at the moment in offering help stems from the nuclear radiation threat and the damaged infrastructure which prevents access.”

Only the Japan Self Defense Forces are allowed into the area where many of the roads, rail and airports were ripped up by the tsunami and where many of the ports no longer function.

JELC Vice President Rev. Isamu Aota heads the relief task force, which includes the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) and Japan Lutheran Church (JLC), that will assess the situation for needs. “The task force has been set up in Ichigaya [central Tokyo], and we are discussing how different churches can cooperate with one another,” he said.

“Hopefully we can send two or three people as early as next week to investigate how to implement what is needed,” Aota explained.

“In 1995 within half a year of activities in Kansai [where the Kobe earthquake took place], we could see that the region would eventually be able to stand on its own. This time will be longer because so much of the Tohoku [northeast] has been wiped out,” he added.

JELC has two congregations in Sendai served by one pastor. “Apart from praying and assessing, at the moment we just have to wait until we can move,” added Watanabe.



Searching for news of loved ones © ACT/CWS/Takeshi Komino

Solidarity

In letters to the LWF on 15 March, JELC, KELC and JLC appealed for prayers and support for disaster relief in the aftermath of the earthquake. “Our hearts ache to see the severe damage from the Tohoku Kanto earthquake. As we see the size of its devastation, there is nothing else we can do but pray to our Lord for His mercy,” wrote JLC president Rev. Yutaka Kumei.

“It would seem that the matter of the nuclear reactor in Fukushima Prefecture is worsening. And as for the actual damage from both the earthquake and the tsunami, this is wholly unprecedented here in Japan. (...) We do ask your continued prayer for us and for the victims of this very sad event,” wrote KELC president, Rev. Shigeo Sueoka.

In Geneva, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, who was visiting other countries in the Asia Pacific region when the disaster happened, told *LWI*, “It is hard to imagine what it means for the people and churches in Japan, as they deal with the difficult realities in which they find themselves since the earthquake and tsunami struck five days ago.

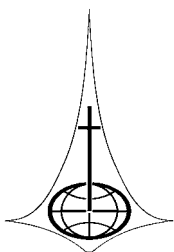
“Looking at the images and listening to the stories we are receiving, we recognize the enormous pastoral and diaconal challenges. We have conveyed to our member churches the prayers and solidarity that are being expressed throughout the commu-

nion, as well as our preparedness to join them in their actions to respond to these pastoral and diaconal challenges,” said Junge.

Through its Department for World Service, the LWF has seconded an emergency advisor to the joint emergency task force set up by the three Lutheran churches in Japan. The aim is to assist in the coordination of their response with civil society, local authorities, faith-based relief organizations and international non-governmental organizations.

ACT Alliance, the global church emergency and development organization to which the LWF belongs, is ready to assist if further needs arise and if requested by Japanese partners.

16 March 2011



LWF President Urges Churches to Remain Vibrant Witnesses

Continued from p. 1

for the 21st century, and for our witness and diakonia,” said Younan.

He reminded the LWF gathering of the understanding of mission as the very essence of the church, aimed at “transformation, reconciliation and empowerment, in and of the world.” The ACLC met under the theme “On Being an LWF Communion of Churches in Asian Context: Understanding and Implications.”

Younan called upon the Asian churches to promote greater interfaith dialogue, saying, “It is only through shared humanity that we will build a world that embraces pluralism, equality, democracy, human dignity and respect for other religions and civilizations, even those that are strange to us.”

He reiterated his support for the United Nations’ recognized World Interfaith Harmony Week, an initiative

from Jordan, held for the first time this year, 1-7 February, to promote interfaith harmony and good will. “There is no place in the world where Lutherans live on their own. Lutheran churches, rather, live with other religions—sometimes in a minority position, sometimes in a majority position, but never alone,” emphasized the ELCJHL bishop.

Younan urged Lutherans to recognize their “oneness in creation, sin and salvation” so they would be able “to act as one communion, where sex, race and class are irrelevant.”

He noted that while LWF member churches had taken different positions on the issue of women’s ordination, it remained an integral part of Lutheran identity because member churches had agreed to support it.

Asians had reason to celebrate the ordination in January of four women in the South Andhra Lutheran Church, the first for the Indian church founded

in 1865, he added. “We look at these women as gifts to the proclamation of the gospel, a witness for all people of Asia and a living sign of our vital communion.”

The LWF president emphasized that the Lutheran communion’s reach was felt beyond member churches in Asia. He cited Department for World Service programs, including micro-credit projects in Cambodia, and disaster relief efforts in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, among other countries.

“If our churches are concentrating their discussions and efforts on mission, then remember that the diakonia of the communion is the left hand of every Asian church for it is done on our behalf and for the sake of the poor,” Younan said.

On how the communion was dealing with ethical issues, the LWF president said that according to Lutheran understanding, “ethics is not a list of prescriptions,” but was developed in dialogue, allowing for people to “come to different results.” He appealed to the churches in Asia to “not shy away” from presenting their views to the global church on issues such as marriage, globalization and stem cell research.

“Do not hesitate and think, ‘We are only a small member church.’ This may be your gift to the whole communion. We must remember that our diversity may mean that we will not always agree on everything.”

The more than 70 participants in the ACLC included heads of churches, women and youth leaders, and theologians drawn from the 52 LWF member churches in the region.

15 March 2011



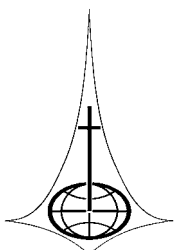
LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan addresses the Asia Church Leadership Conference.
© LWF/Maurice Malanes

LWF Leaders Hail Malaysia’s “Unity-in-Diversity” Initiative

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and local church leaders have hailed Malaysia’s sincere efforts to promote “unity in diversity” in the multi-religious and multi-ethnic Southeast Asian nation.

“We are happy about the welcoming and hospitable atmosphere here in Malaysia as all delegates to our conference here arrived without difficulty,” said LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan.

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, was speaking when LWF and Malaysian church leaders met with Dr. Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon,



the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department on 10 March.

The meeting was held in the context of the 7-9 March Lutheran Council in Asia (LUCAS) gathering and the Asia Church Leadership Conference (ACLC).

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge briefed Koh about how the LWF was established after World War II "to build bridges and understanding" among churches and countries, many of which had suffered and were traumatized after the war.

Junge said he was inspired by Malaysia's struggle and conviction to further "unity in diversity" by consciously promoting inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation through dialogue.

Responding, Koh said unity in diversity was "something we have been managing even before our independence (in 1957) through a continuing process of learning, adjustment and engagement" with all groups and sectors.

The minister noted that despite the government's efforts, tensions sometimes erupt. He cited recent protests over the use of the word "Allah" in locally-translated Bibles, confiscation of some Bahasa language Bibles, and the shortage of land to build churches.

Muslims constitute around 50 percent of Malaysia's 28 million people, with Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and other faiths comprising the rest of the population.

Koh pointed out that tension continues to be addressed through "continuing dialogue and engagement." The Malaysian government has established a national interfaith committee to facilitate "interfaith

consultations," which seek to foster "not only tolerance, but acceptance and mutual respect of diversity," he explained.

The minister emphasized that these spaces for dialogue had helped those concerned to understand better the context of their differences, adding that in many cases it had turned out that "religion is actually not the problem," but rather tension arose from its interpretation.

The LWF president expressed his appreciation for the discussions with the minister, saying, "In a globalized world, we learn from each other and there is much to adopt and learn from the Malaysian experience."

After the meeting, Younan offered prayers for Koh and the other government leaders, encouraging them to remain strong as they continue to help unite and serve their country.

The LWF delegation also included Bishop Phillip Lok (Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore – LCMS); Bishop Dr Solomon Rajah

(Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia – ELCM); Bishop Dr Lip Tet Thomas Tsen (Basel Christian Church of Malaysia – BCCM); Ms Eun-hae Kwon (Lutheran Church in Korea), elected Asia vice president in July 2010; Rev. Selma Chen (Lutheran Church of Taiwan [Republic of China]); and Rev. Dr Musa P. Filibus, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD).

The LWF has four member churches in Malaysia—the Protestant Church in Sabah, the BCCM, ELCM and LCMS—with a total of around 104,000 members.

DMD organised the LUCAS and ACLC meetings, which were jointly hosted by the ELCM and LCMS. Participants include heads of the 52 LWF member churches in the region, LWF Council members from Asia, regional coordinators of the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk and youth representatives, guests from the region and LWF staff.



LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan during the meeting with Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

Language, Communication Hinder Meaningful Participation of Women and Youth

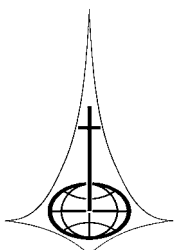
KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia/GENEVA (LWI) – Language and communication remain key challenges as women and youth leaders in Asia seek to participate fully in the life of the LWF, said Rev. Shu-Chen (Selma) Chen from Taiwan.

"Given Asia's multi-lingual context, language is a major challenge

that we have to address as we seek meaningful participation in the mission and life of the Lutheran communion," Chen said in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The pastor of the Lutheran Church of Taiwan (Republic of China) was attending the bi-annual gathering

of LUCAS and ACLC. She cited two LWF documents, which, she said, could help women and youth leaders if they were translated into local languages: *Churches Say 'No' to Violence against Women* and *It will not be so among you: A Faith Reflection on Gender and Power*.



“If they understand these documents and other basic Lutheran doctrines through their local languages, women and youth leaders can engage, participate and contribute more in national, regional and even international meetings,” said Chen.

Member churches could find ways to pay for the costs of translating and reproducing these documents and other important literature, she added.

Chen suggested that women and youth leaders in more technologically advanced areas could start an “online platform” or network through which they could exchange information and ideas about issues that concern them.

“So even before we gather in meetings like this [ACLC], we are well-prepared to participate and contribute to the various agenda on the table,” she said.

Women and youth leaders from areas with good internet connections could start an email list-serve or an online social network discussion group, she added. They could then find “creative ways” to relay summaries of important points to their colleagues in the grassroots with no internet links, she added.

Through this online network, Chen said that women and youth leaders in countries with better



Rev. Elizabeth Renuka Khondpan, JELC women's desk secretary, calls for better coordination among women to facilitate participation in LWF meetings. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

information technology—including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan—could take communication efforts a step further.

The online network could be an avenue through which youth and women leaders collaborate to help address diaconal concerns and issues such as the plight of abused women migrant workers, she said.

Chen cited Taiwan, where there are thousands of women migrant workers in various factories, similar to other Asian countries especially

Malaysia, particularly in the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

Coordinating women's initiatives related to mission work was also a challenge in India, said Rev. Elisabeth Renuka Khondpan from the northeastern district of Orissa.

“Laying out some mechanisms for systematic coordination of various women's programs is something we should look into if we are to participate better,” said the women's desk secretary of the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church.

To ensure better participation of women and youth, the LWF insists that attendance in all its meetings and consultations should include 40 percent women, 20 percent youth, and 40 percent men.

Indonesian youth leader Limantina Sihaloho, WICAS coordinator for the South East Asia Lutheran Communion (SEALUC), hailed the LWF for welcoming and supporting women and youth in church leadership.

But she exhorted member churches at the local and national level to give more spaces and time through which the youth and women could effectively participate. Only then can it be said that “we practice what we preach,” said Sihaloho.

21 March 2011

Lutheran Churches Encouraged to Proclaim Gospel in Multi-Religious Asia

Proclaiming the gospel in Asia, a multi-religious and multi-cultural society where Christians are a minority, should not be seen as a threat to other faiths, says Indonesian theologian Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga.

The study secretary for Theology and the Church at the LWF Department for Theology and Studies said he appreciated the vibrant growth of Christians in Asia, estimated at 300 million people, which he attributed to evangelization efforts.

Sinaga was speaking at a panel presentation on the interrelation between proclamation, diakonia (church social service) and advocacy, held in the context of the LWF Asia Church Leadership Conference.

Lutherans in Asia, he noted, should not let their own growth be a threat to other communions. The region's specific context, challenged churches to conduct holistic mission, stressed Sinaga.

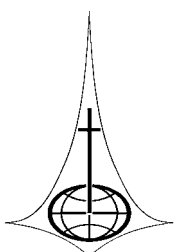
But he encouraged church leaders in Asia to continue to “affirm the spirituality of coexistence so that we could denounce a competitive, market-driven evangelism in which recruiting members or ‘customers’ has become the main goal.”

“For the LWF, mission is clearly understood and practiced in a holistic way, encompassing proclamation, service, and advocacy to the whole person and to all people,” Sinaga added.

Rev. Bob Lo, dean of the Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong, said his church had been balancing a ministry that “meets both spiritual and physical needs” not only of members but non-members.

Bishop Terry Buck Hwa Kee of the Lutheran Church in Singapore explained how his church had been proclaiming the gospel and doing diakonia and advocacy in emerging communities outside Singapore, including Cambodia.

In India, the churches are “trying to integrate their ministries and network with both government and nongovernment organizations for meaningful deliberations,” said Rev. A.G. Augustine Jeyakumar,



executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UECLI).

Reflecting on Luther's "two kingdom" perspective in relation to proclamation and diakonia, Ranjita Christie Borgoary, secretary for the UELCI Women in Church and Society desk, noted that the two "must go hand in hand in a dynamic and creative tension."

In India, where some people were being killed in the name of religion and some people were dying from hunger, "the ministries of the church [demand] both proclamation and dedicated action," she said.

Sinaga pointed out that 18 Asian governments restricted proselytizing and 14 states restricted building or repairing places of worship. These restrictions, he said, arose from the issue of conversion, which had been perceived as a threat to the majority's religious identity.

However, he added, most Asian countries promised some form of freedom of worship in their consti-



Rev. Martin Sinaga during the panel on proclamation, diakonia and advocacy. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

tutions. This, he said, gave churches at least a platform through which they could advocate for government accountability, justice and human rights.

"Your advocacy then will be about our common good," he said. "Through your diaconal ministry toward those in need, you are helping

all people and communities [regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, social status and gender] flourish in their lives and livelihoods."

Sinaga urged Asian church leaders to further their advocacy and diaconal engagement in order to help vulnerable people deal with the adverse impact of globalized free trade.

He cited a Lutheran church-led civil society coalition in Namibia that was lobbying government disbursement of a basic income grant which had been proven as a successful incentive in reducing poverty while increasing economic activity.

(All articles in this section were written by LWI correspondent Maurice Malanes)

The final message of the LWF Asia Church Leadership Conference can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/aclc-2011-final-message.html

Born Out of Tsunami

The Centre for Disaster Risk Management and Community Development Studies (CDRM-CDS), based at the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) Nommensen University was established in 2007 to help alleviate poverty by empowering vulnerable rural communities in West and North Sumatra.

It was born out of the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, triggered by a 9.15-magnitude earthquake off the Indonesian coast of Sumatra-Andaman Islands on 26 December 2004, and a

series of later earthquakes, including a strong one in Java in 2006. With 166,000 dead or missing, Aceh alone had borne the brunt of the tsunami six years earlier which struck 12 other countries.

Once empowered, these communities are expected to "manage and mitigate disasters" such as earthquakes and the tsunamis that they trigger, said CDRM-CDS deputy director Sherry Panggabean, when the center hosted visiting LWF general secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

The CDRM-CDS has identified disaster-prone areas, corresponding rescue efforts, and what communities can do when disasters strike. The CDRM-CDS plants trees, runs literacy programs, provides farmers and small businesses with micro-financing, and trains communities in disaster-preparedness, organic farming, health and sanitation, financial management and business development planning.

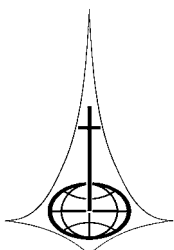
The CDRM-CDS also helps strengthen the diaconal work of the 12 Lutheran churches in Indonesia with training programs on disaster risk reduction and management that includes reflection on faith and the Bible.

It also links and coordinates churches' initiatives with those run by government, non-governmental groups and those of other faiths helping the vulnerable and the needy.

"Preparing for and responding to disasters such as the 2004 tsunami became a platform for dialogue and cooperation with our Muslim brothers and sisters," said Dr Jongkers Tampubolon, CDRM-CDS director. *(See also p. 17)*



CDRM-CDS deputy director Sherry Panggabean shares how the center is helping empower and prepare vulnerable communities to cope with and manage disasters. © LWF/Maurice Malanes



FEATURE: “Let Others Taste What We Have Tasted”

Basic Income Grant Transforms Desperate Namibian Village into a Place of Hope

WINDHOEK, Namibia /GENEVA (LWI)

– Bertha Hamases is a tall woman with a weathered face and a friendly sparkle in her eyes. A few years ago she was one of the many people circling the drain in Otjivero, a dead-end settlement 100 kilometers from Namibia’s capital Windhoek.

Here evicted farm workers gathered in misery. For Hamases, 32, a single parent with four children aged between nine and 16, life looked hopeless, until a coalition of civil society organizations picked Otjivero for a privately-funded pilot project to show that a universal basic income grant (BIG) could make all the difference.

She came to Otjivero eight years ago. Before that she had been living on a farm, but she fell out with her partner and had to leave, taking her four children along. “Life was hard, we were suffering. The children would go to school, but I didn’t have money for the school fees. Because they were hungry the children couldn’t concentrate on their homework and it showed in their studies. The school would keep asking for money,” she recalls.

Once a month Hamases would travel to Windhoek and beg money from relatives, which she would use to buy a little food for her children. “We lived in a small one-room ‘kambashu,’ an iron corrugated shack. I would do nothing all day, maybe visit some neighbors and see what they could spare for me.”

Life in Otjivero as a whole was tough. Every second day people arrived after being chased away from the neighboring farms. There was crime because people didn’t have money to buy food. Poaching from the farms was a big problem. There was prostitution, violence against women and a lot of alcoholism. The



*The BIG has created small-business opportunities in Otjivero, eastern Namibia.
© LWF/Dirk Haarmann*

small settlement had around five or six *shebeens* (informal bars).

500 Namibian Dollars

Then in 2008, the BIG project started. “Because there were five of us, the four children and I, all of a sudden, we received 500 Namibian dollars (around USD 73) a month,” she says.

The grant enabled Hamases to find a job. For two months she remained in Otjivero, saving up money. Then she used the BIG money to travel to Windhoek, where she placed an advertisement in the newspaper offering her services as a domestic worker. After two days she was offered a job, and now earns NAD 1,000 (USD 145) per month plus housing and food. She travels home to Otjivero twice a month.

“The BIG didn’t stop because I worked elsewhere. That’s to show that the grant can create opportunities. Everyone that originally qualified still receives the money,” Hamases remarks.

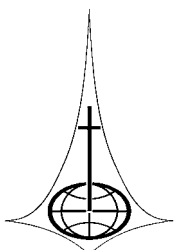
Although after the pilot project ended the grant was lowered to NAD 80 dollars (USD 12) per head, her total monthly income of NAD 1,400 (USD 204) makes it possible for her to pay school fees buy uniforms and other costs for children.

“The beautiful thing is that last year they all passed. I can also pay the bills at the clinic, so the nurses don’t have to confiscate my clinic card anymore. I also use the money to buy shoes, clothes and other goods in Windhoek and then sell them in Otjivero on the weekends. My profit is usually around NAD 400 (USD 56),” says Hamases.

She has extended the one-room shack into a three-roomed house “and God willing I will soon start a soup kitchen for the elderly and orphans,” she adds.

Many Changes

Hamases describes the many changes in Otjivero. “The children all buy school uniforms and parents pay the



school fees. People buy food and purchase TVs, DVD-players and stoves. Many have extended their houses. Where there were few shops before, now there are 10-12 little shops. The place is much cleaner because people don't mind cleaning when they are fed and not hungry. Crime has stopped totally, while alcoholism and the beating of women has become much less. There was prostitution because women were hungry, but that has stopped completely."

Facts Belie Criticism

According to the National Planning Commission, over 70 percent of Namibia's 1.8 million people live on less than USD 1.50 per day, in an economy dependent on abundant mineral resources, yet known to have one of the highest income inequality rates in the world.

It is against this background that a broad-based civil society coalition including churches was formed in April 2005 to advocate the implemen-



Thanks to the BIG, children in Otjivero, Namibia, are attending school once again with new pencils and books in hand. © LWF/Dirk Haarmann

She says the only problem is that the settlement has become an attractive place to which to migrate. "Even people from Windhoek are coming because they think there is money in Otjivero," Hamses adds.

She has something to say to politicians who criticize the project, saying the BIG would create laziness and dependence among Namibia's poor. "Well, I didn't use to work before the BIG, but now I am working. I used the money to advertise myself and found work. Other ladies in Otjivero also gave me money to place an advertisement in the newspaper for them and now they also work. I am really proud that I receive the basic income grant and it should be continued in the whole country, so we can stop poverty in Namibia. So that others can taste what we have tasted," Hamses concludes.

tation of a basic income grant for all Namibians below pensionable age. A government-appointed tax commission in 2002 had proposed such a grant.

Led by Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), the coalition lobbies government to implement such a grant, while leading by example. Its members raised funds to facilitate the grant payout in Otjivero. They also document the implications of income security for poverty reduction and economic development.

Between January 2008 and December 2009, the BIG coalition had paid out more than NAD 2.2 million (over USD 324,000) to the 930 inhabitants of Otjivero. The NAD 80 paid out per head as a bridging allowance for 14 months amounts

to more than NAD 1 million (over USD 151,000).

The BIG coalition provides facts that belie criticism about the viability of the basic income grant. Between 2008 and 2009 the unemployment rate in Otjivero dropped from 60 to 40 percent; food poverty dropped from 72 to 16 percent; self-employment increased by 300 percent; school dropout rates reduced from almost 40 percent to zero; child malnutrition dropped from 42 to 10 percent; and the health clinic reports four to six times more income because people can pay for the services.

Responding to a presentation this February in Windhoek by visiting Brazilian Senator Matarazzo Suplicy, the ELCRN bishop said the BIG coalition started the Otjivero pilot project "because words and debate have not succeeded," and because "the opponents always argued by saying: 'But it has never been done anywhere in world, how do you know that it is working?'"

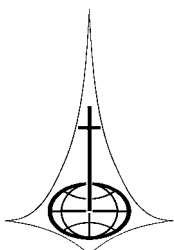
Kameeta pointed out that the Otjivero community has "shown the world how the BIG and the will of the people have transformed a poor, desolated, desperate village without hope into a place where people not only have enough to feed and clothe themselves and their children, but also to send them to school and pay their contribution, to go to the clinic and pay the modest fee."

They have taken this money and multiplied it within the community through small businesses and economic activities, turning Otjivero into "a place of confidence and hope not only for Namibia but for the whole world," added Kameeta.

The ELCRN is one of the three member churches of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Namibia. Kameeta is a member of the LWF Council.

The story about Bertha Hamses was adapted with permission from Inter Press Service (IPS) and Servaas van den Bosch. Additional information about BIG is from LWI sources.

8 March 2011



“Return to Libya? Not for all the money in the world!”

Help with Water Supply and Psychological Care

GENEVA (LWI) – Fleeing from Libya is a nightmare—and it leaves behind deep traces: many of those who have left so hastily do not want to return to their former workplaces even after peace has returned, Hermine Nikolaisen, coordinator of ACT Alliance for Libya, told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* on 17 March in Zarzis, Tunisia. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is in charge of this program.

Migrants from the Sub-Saharan region had complained about the use of force and plundering as they fled from the civil war in Libya, said Nikolaisen, former country representative of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) program in Rwanda.

“The migrants from Mali, Chad, Somalia and Sudan are very bitter; they have worked hard in Libya for years and now all their goods and belongings have been taken away from them,” said the ACT Alliance representative. “One migrant worker told me he would not return to Libya for all the money in the world,” she added.

The culprits were not always identifiable but they were thought to be criminal gangs.

Nikolaisen was visiting three large refugee camps with 18,000 people near the Tunisian coastal city of Zarzis. The camps lie about seven kilometers from the Libyan border. The migrants were fleeing from violence in the oil-rich country, where Colonel Muammar Gaddafi



With war in both Libya and their native Somalia, the Basheed family has nowhere else to go.
© ACT/NCA/Arne Grieg Riisnaes

is brutally putting down an uprising against his regime. Libya employs migrant workers in sectors like building, food service and energy.

According to Nikolaisen, the migrants told stories of poor payment and discrimination by Libyans, even before the unrest broke out.

She stated that anywhere from a few hundred to a thousand people fleeing Libya were arriving in Tunisia every day. They generally spent several days in the camps. ACT Alliance intended to provide water and psychological care for the refugees and migrant workers, she added. Nikolaisen said that people in the camps were adequately supplied with food and medicines.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration were organizing the flights home of people in chartered planes. The LWF is a founding member of ACT Alliance, a partner of the UNHCR in Tunisia.

In early March, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge appealed to Lutheran churches worldwide to support the people affected in Libya and North Africa.

(This article was written by Jan Dirk Herbermann and contains additional information from LWI.)

18 March 2011

FEATURE: Our Water Pipes

Indonesian Churches Work with Community Members to Improve Livelihoods

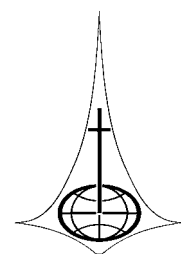
SIANTAR, Indonesia/GENVA – Under a tropical mid-morning sun, around 100 men and women gathered inside a village Lutheran chapel in Indonesia, anxiously waiting for their guests.

The guests included staff from the Pelpem Community Development Service, a diaconal program of the

Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS), and local church leaders.

The villagers from Simbou Baru were to update the Pelpem staff about a water project, which the GKPS program and the community had built together a year earlier.

The villagers thanked Pelpem for helping bring water to their homes. The water was drawn from a spring in Mount Simbolon, five kilometers away. Previously, the villagers had to spend anywhere from one hour to half-a-day fetching water from a deep well two kilometers from the village.



“With water right in our homes, we can now spend more hours on our farming and other livelihood activities,” said Mohlan Saragih, a community elder and a member of the local committee responsible for maintaining the project.

Some villagers blamed the Pelpem staff for technical problems after they failed to get water for a few days when pipes broke down. But Pelpem director Aliumri Purba stressed the collective responsibility for the project.

“Let us be responsible together,” Purba told the villagers. “If problems arise, let us solve these together.”

Purba pledged that GKPS technical staff would later help fix the problem. But he stressed that monitoring, maintaining and fixing the water system must be the community’s responsibility.

“Honest Conversation”

Among the guests was visiting LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, who thanked the villagers for “the honest conversation” then shared the story of how Jesus helped his worried disciples feed a multitude of people with just five loaves of bread and three fishes.

He expressed his appreciation to the community for organizing oversight of the project.

Junge discussed water projects he has visited in Latin America and Africa, and cited two similar



Women from Simbou Baru village at the meeting with the LWF general secretary and Pelpem staff to evaluate a community water project. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

church-assisted community projects in Bolivia just ten kilometers apart.

The first community thought that after the pipes were installed, the water would keep flowing into the various households. But after five years the project had been abandoned.

In contrast, the water project in the neighboring community worked perfectly. “The difference was the second community’s strong committee and strong commitment [to maintain and sustain the project],” said Junge.

He stressed that “human beings make the difference so the success of this project depends on your hu-

man power and the passion that you bring to it.

“I hope and pray that in five years, your system will still work because of the difference you made and the commitment you invested in it,” said Junge.

He was in Indonesia, 6-8 March, his first official visit to Asia as LWF general secretary, also in the context of the LWF Asia Church Leadership Conference in Kuala Lumpur, 10-13 March.

Fruit of Spirituality

Pelpem also helps communities improve their agricultural production by improving farming techniques.

Pelpem’s diakonia work was “actually the fruit of spirituality,” said GKPS Bishop Jaharianson Saragih. “A weak diakonia program reflects a weak spiritual life,” added the bishop.

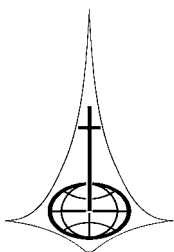
Saragih explained that since 2007, they had undergone a “participatory process of consultation” to name vision, mission and goals. The process has enabled the church “to become a blessing and caring church,” he stressed.

The relationship between proclamation, diakonia and advocacy was discussed when Junge met with leaders of the LWF National Committee chaired by Bishop Langsung M. Sitorus of the Indonesian Christian Church.

The issues that require the urgent attention of the 12 LWF member



Nommensen University rector Dr Jongkers Tampubolon in discussion with LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge © LWF/Maurice Malanes



churches in Indonesia, include illegal logging, HIV and AIDS, disasters, gender, and justice and peace.

Lina Pardede, LWF National Committee member, stressed the need for church leaders to tackle HIV and AIDS. "By talking about it from the pulpit, our church leaders are helping break the silence about HIV and AIDS and are helping free persons with the disease of the stigma attached to it," she said.

Breaking Their Silence

At the GKPS-run Women's Crisis Center, women church leaders have been helping other women break their silence concerning violence and abuse rarely spoken out, because of cultural taboos.

"Domestic violence and abuse are not only physical, but verbal, and according to Batak [north Sumatra's major ethnic group] culture, it is taboo and shameful to report abuses, including rape," said Rev. Darwita Purba, the center's coordinator.

Since 2008, the center has been offering pastoral counseling, litigation and medical aid, and skills training for abused women.

Meanwhile, within the churches, "achieving gender equality continues to be a struggle," said Rev. Enida Girsang, who in 1988 became the first woman pastor to be ordained by the GKPS. "When we women assert our leadership, some male pastors describe us as 'destroyers of order,'" she said.

Women pastors have been finding leadership roles at the parish level, "but not yet at the central or top level."

Junge encouraged the women leaders to continue their work. "We share your vision and you certainly are helping shape the future of the whole Lutheran communion," he said.

Creating Space for Youth

In meetings with young people, Junge heard how Indonesian church youth clamor to participate in shaping their churches' life.

"Many youth have no occasion or space to speak their mind in churches so they leave and join political parties instead," noted Tetty Sabrina Tambunan, a student of the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) Theological Seminary.

In an age of "instant tendencies," where youth seek jobs overseas without finishing high school, churches must offer young people "God-centered values so they won't be lured into gambling and unproductive vices such as billiards," said Dirgos Tobing, a youth leader of the Protestant Christian Church of Indonesia (GKPI).

"Buses can't go to my village because of poor roads but billiard tables can," he remarked, alluding to a common young adult pastime in the rural areas.

Other youth leaders proposed ways to improve church worship and to organize a movement to train youth for church leadership.

22 March 2011

FEATURE: Home at Rumah Hope

Malaysian Church Offers New Beginning for Neglected Children

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia/GENEVA (LWI)

—It is Saturday morning and more than 20 children are squatting on mats on a concrete floor, their eyes glued to a television cartoon show. In a corner, two girls are doing their school homework.

They are among a group of 60 residents of Rumah Hope (House of

Hope), a home for abused, neglected and underprivileged children aged five to 17, which is an outreach program of the Lutheran Good Hope Church located outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's bustling capital city.

Because it is a weekend, some children have gone home to visit

their families. Those remaining at the center are supported by five volunteers from the University of Malaya psychology and social work programs. One volunteer is helping the two girls with their homework. Some give the children bear hugs; others are answering their questions.

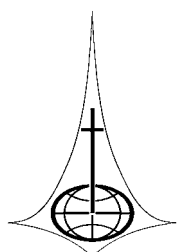
"Being with these children is a wonderful and very precious learning experience for me," says Nge Lay Cher, one of the volunteers. "[It] actually teaches me to get along with children. Through these children, I have learned to be patient."

The volunteers come to Rumah Hope three times a week and support the work of 12 full-time staff led by Ms Alice Paul, the shelter director. "A hug or a smile is important for these children, who have been separated from or abandoned by their parents," says Paul.

The Good Hope church program is part of the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM).



Rumah Hope near Kuala Lumpur ensures that neglected children receive an education. © LWF/Maurice Malanes



Education and Life Skills

Rumah Hope not only ensures that the children are fed and clothed, but that they are also sent to school.

During the week the home's two drivers ferry the children to government-run public schools.

Education in public schools—from the elementary to secondary level—is free in Malaysia, but there are special fees to pay for books and other items, says Paul.

Children at the home are also encouraged to play games and learn to paint and draw. They are taught to cook and make handicrafts, which can be sold to help support their needs.

The children are also learning to make prayer part of their lives. Each evening before they go to bed, they gather to pray for 30 minutes. "Prayer helps strengthen the character of these children as it helps to nurture their faith," says Paul.

Knocking at the Gate

Rumah Hope started in 1994, when a poor single mother knocked at the gate of Good Hope, pleading with the church to take care of her five children.

The church took in the children and accommodated them in a rented bungalow. In no time word spread about the church's services to poor and abandoned children and more children were referred to the church.

To deal with the growing need, in 1999 the church built a two-storey building within its compound in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, just outside Kuala Lumpur.

More children continued to be referred to Rumah Hope and the church built another structure, which opened in 2006. The first building is



Rumah Hope director Alice Paul is a driving force behind the center's programs offering abandoned and neglected children a new beginning. © LWF/Maurice Malanes

now occupied by boys and the new building, by girls.

Once they finish high school, children at Rumah Hope can be referred to other schools for higher learning, including a Lutheran church-run center in the Malaysian capital, where young girls learn sewing, computer programming and other technical skills.

After finishing high school, the boys are referred to similar training centers or to private universities and colleges, if they can acquire scholarships.

Poverty is the main reason why parents abandon or neglect their children, says Paul.

Some villagers from the provinces come to the city to seek better opportunities but because they lack education, they end up unemployed, or they are forced into undesirable activities such as sex work.

Out of desperation many turn to alcohol and drugs so they can forget their poverty. "But these [alcohol and drugs] only further complicate their problems," she notes.

"The victims of these tragedies," says the home's director, "are the children born out of relationships between these lonely, desperate and poor men and women."

Through the ELCM outreach program, these children are given opportunities to chart their future.

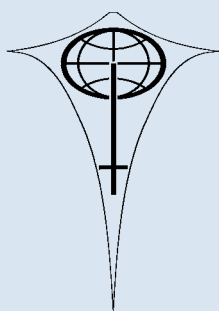
But providing the medical care, food, and transport that they need is expensive. It costs about RM 300 (USD 99) a month per child, a price which Paul calls "staggering."

Therefore Rumah Hope continues to appeal to corporate and public bodies to support and join its effort to create a new beginning for these neglected children.

(Written for LWI by Maurice Malanes)

21 April 2011

***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, held 20–27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.**



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