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Council 2011 adopts LWF Strategy 2012-2017 at the 9-14 June meeting in Geneva. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet

Council Authorizes Amendments on Substantive Issues

GENEVA (LWI) – At this year's meeting, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council adopted with one abstention, a strategic plan for the LWF for the years 2012 to 2017.

The vote on the LWF Strategy 2012-2017 took place on 11 June during the meeting of the communion's governing body, running through 14 June at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Switzerland. The Council met under the theme, "Discerning Our Common Journey."

Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien of the Church of Norway, chairperson of the Council's Ad Hoc Strategy Committee, presented amendments to Council members before the vote.

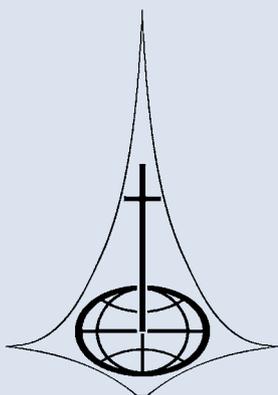
In its action, the Council affirmed the importance of the LWF Strategy "as a framework for governance; as a platform for building mutual understanding within the communion; as the basis for operational

planning for the communion office and as a resource for member churches."

The Council adopted the strategy with proposed amendments on substantive issues including a revised vision statement that now reads, "Liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world."

Other substantive issues highlighted are revision of the section on Lutheran identity to reflect more strongly the distinctiveness and theological basis of Lutheran identity; inclusion of biblical texts; reference to evangelism in the understanding of holistic mission; expanding the context section to include HIV and AIDS and other global health concerns; and inclusion of youth participation as a cross-cutting priority.

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English Editorial Team at the 2011 LWF Council Meeting

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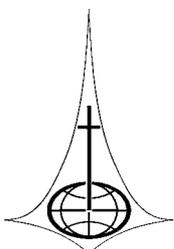
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Colette Muanda
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Lutheran World Information (LWI)
is the information service
of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

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LWF Council Adopts Strategy Plan

Council Authorizes Amendments on Substantive Issues

Continued from p. 1

The LWF governing body authorized the General Secretary with the President, to approve all further editorial changes based on proposals from Program Committees, providing these changes enhance the document without significantly changing the content or intention of the strategy.

It authorized the General Secretary to implement the LWF Strategy and report annually on implementation and progress.

Prior to the vote, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan prayed saying, "Now we are going to vote. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us in whatever we do. Come Holy Spirit lead us in the strategy plan as we pray in Jesus' name."

There were around 140 participants in this year's Council meeting, including LWF member church representatives, invited guests, interpreters, accredited media and LWF staff. The 50-member Council is the LWF's governing body in the

six-year period between Assemblies, and meets annually. The current Council was appointed at the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. It comprises the President and Treasurer as well as lay and ordained persons representing the seven LWF regions.

Read the Strategy Proposal at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/themes/lwf-strategic-planning-process

LWF President Younan Says "Farewell Discourse" in John's Gospel Has Strategy Signposts

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan said the challenges LWF leaders faced at their 9-14 June Council meeting were no smaller than those faced by the disciples of Jesus when they met for their final session together.

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), was speaking at the Council's opening worship service at the Ecumenical Center chapel in Geneva.

This was the first full annual session of the governing body appointed at the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. It met under the theme, "Discerning Our Common Journey."

Younan used as reference for his sermon John 14:1-14, which he noted is sometimes referred to as "Jesus' Farewell Discourse," but which he said may be misnamed as it is not the end but, "just the beginning."

While the meeting on the Thursday before Jesus is arrested is the end

of his "earthly ministry," said Younan, for the disciples the session marks "new beginnings, a transition from following Jesus as disciples, to charting their future as the church with Jesus' continued guidance through the Spirit whom the Father will send in Jesus' name."

The LWF president noted that for Lutherans, life is not simply for the future, "it begins now."

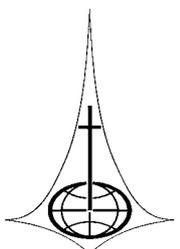
A key agenda item for this year's meeting was discussion and adoption of an LWF Strategy 2012-2017, outlining future directions and priorities for the communion's work. The proposed strategy is based on a broad, participatory consultation process that included input from member churches and their related organizations, as well as ecumenical bodies that collaborate with the LWF.

At the beginning of the service, worshippers greeted one another and each one was presented with a *krama* scarf, made by an LWF-supported women's group in Cambodia.

The LWF president noted that "If each of us remains insecure, individualistic, each one working separately we will discover many different ways,



Staff welcomed Council participants to the opening worship service with the presentation of krama scarves made by an LWF-supported women's group in Cambodia. © LWF/E. McHan



but not the way of Christ, the way of accompaniment, the way of communion as difficult as it is.”

Younan said that what the Council would accomplish in Geneva in its work “has important implications

on the way in which the churches of our communion will work with each other in engaging the world.”

Council Sunday Worship Focuses on Pentecost Experience

National Bishop Susan C. Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) called the church to a “period of spiritual renewal and a closer walk with the Lord.”

Johnson made this call when she preached at the Sunday eucharistic service for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council in the Chapel of the Ecumenical Center, 12 June. The ELCIC bishop asked congregants to ponder if “[we] are acting like pre- or post-Pentecost disciples,” hiding in the safety of own buildings and churches and talking only to each other, or going “out in the world trying to communicate with people who don’t speak the same language and who need and want to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

The LWF vice president for the North American region based her sermon on Acts 2:1-21—how the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus’ disciples took them out from behind locked doors into a public proclamation of God’s deeds of power. The Bible reading included enactment by youth Council members on the crowds’ bewilderment about the disciples’ speaking in different native languages. The bishop also drew from 1 Corinthians 12:3-13 and John 20: 9-23 for her message.

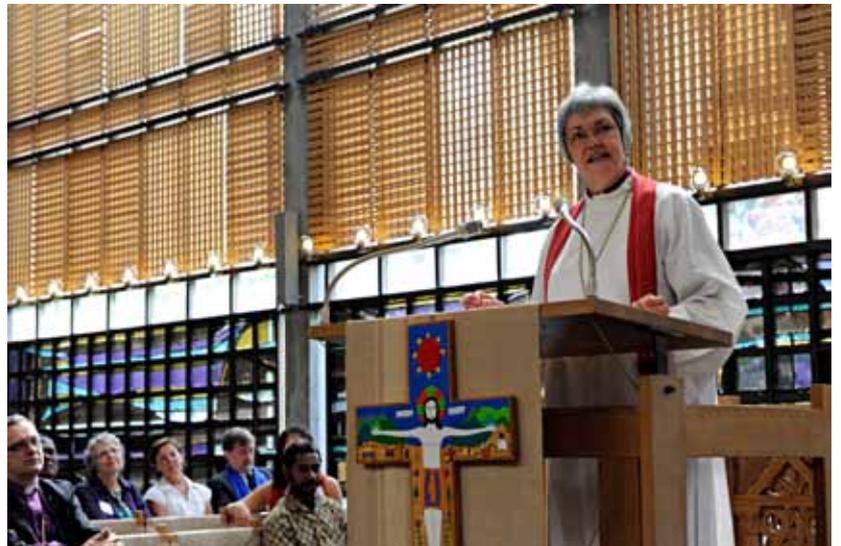
The truth is, “we have spent so much time locked behind closed doors, acting more like a club, and ignoring the crowds outside,” said Johnson, citing reasons why her own church, the ELCIC, was more like pre-Pentecost disciples.

Slow Drift towards ‘Christianity Lite’

She described this difficulty in reaching people as “[the] slow drift towards ‘Christianity Lite’—The drift towards a vague individual theology and away from living out our lives as disciples.”

For Johnson, the church is in a perpetual cycle of boldly advancing and then fearfully retreating, sometimes doing both at the same time. She challenged the congregation to spiritual renewal that includes daily prayer and reading of scripture, regular worship attendance, service in the community, annual participation in a study program and commitment to sharing the faith, beginning with family and friends.

several years, she asked if the Holy Spirit’s call was to proclamation and/or evangelism, diakonia or advocacy, and in what proportion. She pointed out that in the end “it is not a case of proclamation OR diakonia OR advocacy. Our Lord calls us to follow him in doing them all!” There were varieties of gifts, she remarked, and the balance might change depending on the church, region, contexts and charisms, but the Spirit was the same.



ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson challenges Council participants to live as “post-Pentecost” disciples and go out into the world to share the gospel. © LWF/E.McHan

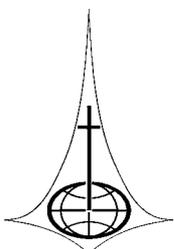
Renewal

She said such renewal was the only way Christians could equip themselves and live as post-Pentecost people, who have a passion for addressing the needs of people outside the church. Renewal was also necessary to learn new ways to engage those who do not understand “our theological words, our liturgies, our biblical stories,” Johnson noted, and to be truly committed to welcoming into their midst new and different people.

The ELCIC bishop also reflected on what the Holy Spirit was calling the church to do. Referring to the Council’s discussion on the LWF communion’s focus for the next

For Johnson, community and communion can sometimes be a challenging place to live, especially if one expects each member to have the same perception. This was part of the Spirit’s design, she stated, forcing “us to live and work with those who are different from ourselves in a spirit of openness, thankfulness and deep humility; a call that enables us to encounter one another; not as demanders, but as grateful recipients of the gifts of the Spirit that are being made manifest within each one of us.”

“We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let’s take seriously what it means to share that gift with the rest of this world,” she concluded.



Confront Justice Issues Head On, LWF President Urges

Lutherans must remain undaunted in their struggle for justice, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan urged in his first address as LWF president to the organization's Council on 9 June.

"We must never shy away, nor be intimidated by political pressure, from confronting issues of justice. Rather, we must address these issues head on, whether they be individual, societal, religious or political in nature," added Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

suffering humanity; and to cultivate life abundant," Younan stated.

"With Christ as our head, we are called to address injustice and oppression wherever it is perpetrated—not only for the sake of our sisters and brothers of the Lutheran Communion, but for the sake of all humanity and for the sake of creation."

Younan added: "Our justification in God is deeper than anything we could imagine. And our call to justice out of our justification is broader than anything we can see. For justice is an integral part of our missionality. To

Palestinian-Israeli conflict was one of the core problems facing the world today.

"Israeli and Palestinian children are now living in fear. And fear only brings more extremism—both political and religious. But justice has the power to bring freedom and reconciliation. This is the reason we hope that we can now enter a new state in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will bring peace rooted in justice, through which the Palestinian will see the image of God in the Israeli and the Israeli will see the image of God in the Palestinian."

Younan said the major task of the Council meeting was to adopt a strategic plan for the worldwide Lutheran Communion, describing the process as one of clarifying the global communion's common understanding of God's will.

He urged Lutherans around the world to recognize both the challenge and gift of their diversity and to continue to renew and re-shape the LWF into a body that breaks down barriers of gender, race, class and caste.

While in the past the Lutheran communion has been characterized by the churches of the North supporting the churches of the South, Younan said this kind of relationship no longer served the LWF. "If our Lutheran Communion is truly to be equal, this old perspective must be swept away in favor of a theology of mutual and undifferentiated accompaniment between all churches."

The churches of the South are flourishing, prompting calls for growth in mission and diakonia. This raised critical questions for the LWF, Younan said. "How can we have joint ventures of mission in the South and North to provide a common witness at a time in which people are looking for more spirituality, in a time when people are resorting to reason alone for all answers? How can we speak together on these issues? How can we learn to



LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan shares his vision of the LWF as a body that breaks down barriers of gender, race, class and caste. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet

In his address under the theme, "Discerning Our Common Journey," Younan, who was elected at the LWF Eleventh Assembly in July 2010, reminded delegates attending the week-long meeting that the call to justice was rooted in their biblical and theological heritage, including the concept of justification by grace through faith, which is central to Lutherans.

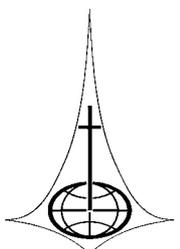
"Out of our justification in God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit we are called to work for justice; to build bridges across barriers of nations, ethnicity, gender and generations; to stand in solidarity with

work for justice is not political, rather it is biblical."

The ELCJHL bishop underscored a number of key issues to be tackled, including the rights of the child, exploitation of people in the modern slave trade, the rights of women, the rights of Dalits and the Roma, crushing illegitimate debt, the arms trade, freedom of expression and religion and ecological justice.

Freedom and Reconciliation

The LWF president said the failure to come to a just resolution of the



speak of and act out of accompaniment in which, whether North or South, such distinctions cease to matter?”

The LWF tackled such questions, not as another non-governmental organization, but as a communion of churches committed to walking the path of Christ, the president

stated. Just as the LWF’s founders were not daunted by the crises left by the Second World War, Lutherans today must rise to challenges such as hunger, poverty and diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

The LWF president called for continuing prophetic dialogue with other

churches and faiths to address the suffering of humanity. “All too often religion has been part of the problem, dividing rather than uniting humanity. Our dialogue must work to bring us together to deal with the problems. Religion must be the driving force toward the solution, not the problem.”

LWF President Rejects Violence as Solution in North Africa and the Middle East

Lutherans must not be afraid to speak up for freedom of religion during this tumultuous time of political uprisings in the Arab world, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan told church representatives and members of the media following his 9 June address to the organization’s Council meeting.

The head of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land responded to questions concerning recent movements for political reform in North Africa and the Middle East, and the church’s role in addressing related issues.

“If this awakening should bring any result for them, it should bring back human rights and freedom of religion,” Younan underlined.

“We should raise our voice and not be afraid to raise those voices,” he said. “It is the church’s job to challenge ‘the powers’ currently leading these countries,” he noted.

The church continued to monitor the situation and maintain contact with the churches in the region, the bishop pointed out, naming a World Council of Churches delegation to Egypt as an example.

Countering Extremism

In response to questions about the potential for religious extremism in the vacuum created by such political and social unrest, Younan called the issue “worrying.”

“We are against extremism [whether] it’s Christian or Muslim,” he noted, adding that a nonviolent approach to the clamor for change should be prioritized to avoid the escalation of extremism. This included promoting the rights of women, freedom of speech,

freedom of minorities and civil society, according to the LWF president.

Younan also discouraged any proposed violence against state leaders as a solution. With regard to the recent international intervention in Libya and the potential for similar outside action in Syria, he responded that uprisings were often best settled internally.

“Sometimes intervention from outside can be misinterpreted by the people who are looking for their own rights,” he commented.

Building Bridges

Other possibilities often existed to build bridges and work toward peace, Younan noted. He pointed to a large-scale project underway in the Holy Land to bridge the divide between Israelis and Palestinians by using primary and secondary school curricula to challenge long-held perceptions. The aim is to produce textbooks that move beyond set ideas of “the other.”

“Education is very essential,” Younan said.

Reformation of All Religions

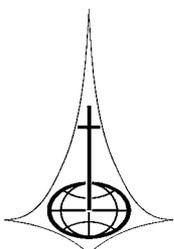
With regard to ecumenical dialogue and the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, the LWF president emphasized the need for a more far-reaching concept of renewal.

Younan said that it was not just Lutherans who needed to be reformed. “In 2017, we need a reformation of all religions—we need to work together,” he stated. Such a reformation should focus on emphasizing moderation to the younger generation, initiating dialogue and finding common values with other religions.

“It’s easy to love God who we don’t see,” Younan said. “The cries of today are to love the neighbor and not God only. As long as we don’t know how to live with our neighbor, we don’t reflect God in us.”



Rev. Naoki Asano, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, responds to the address of LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet



Reformation Is a Continuing Call, LWF General Secretary Junge Tells Council

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlined that the global nature of Lutheranism should shape commemorations for the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation to be held in 2017.

possible because of the constructive attitude of all involved.”

“It is my plea to this Council that this attitude be sustained throughout the meeting so that it becomes the midwife of a renewed LWF, which for so long already has

of dialogue and discussion on this subject, with the year 2012 as a time to review the process.

However, he said that the biblical story of the disciples journeying to Emmaus offered a model for the LWF in its journey as a communion of churches, urging that 2012 be a time of dialogue facilitated by the communion office.

“I suggest, therefore, that our process towards 2012 be undertaken in the spirit of this ‘Emmaus conversation,’ thus making clear that ours is a deeply spiritual discernment of our faith journey as a communion of churches,” said the general secretary.

The period since the Eleventh Assembly had been a time of “intense experience and learning” on the ecumenical front, he noted. The act of asking forgiveness from Mennonites for Lutheran historic persecution of Anabaptists, and its acceptance by Mennonites, had emboldened the



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlines the constructive attitude that marked the strategic planning process. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet.

The Lutheran Reformation “has traveled to remote countries and landscapes, has put down roots and has been incarnated in a great diversity of cultural, religious and political contexts,” Junge said in his first report as LWF general secretary to the organization’s Council meeting on 9 June.

The general secretary added that the anniversary offered an opportunity to reflect on the role of the church in society today. “Reformation is not just a thing of the past; it is our continuing call.”

This year’s was the first full session of the annual Council meeting since the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. The Assembly strengthened the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of churches, Junge said, adding that this Council meeting would have long-term implications.

On the proposed LWF Strategy 2012-2017 Junge said, “The fact that we have been able as a communion of churches to formulate the strategic plan as it stands now has been



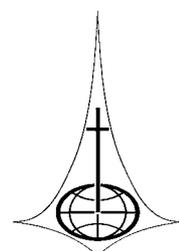
Council members applaud for LWF staff contribution to the communion’s work and to the strategic planning process. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

struggled to answer God’s call to heal the world.”

The general secretary noted that there remained a “wide variety of responses in member churches” on the document “Family, Marriage and Sexuality,” approved by the LWF Council at its 2007 meeting in Lund, Sweden. The document offers guidelines for respectful processes

Lutheran Communion to take ecumenical risks, Junge added.

In Africa and Asia, Junge said he had witnessed the results of decades of work that has created understanding among different faiths. However, he said that there was still tension and violence in some settings and he pledged the LWF’s support for churches facing this reality.



Climate change “is not a theoretical question,” said Junge, citing his recent visit to Ethiopia, where he noted that he came to understand how urgent this issue is for vulnerable populations. “For them it is a matter of being able to harvest their crops, and therefore a matter of being able to eat their ‘daily bread.’ For them it is a matter of life and death.” He added to this dimension the LWF secretariat’s reconfiguration of staff assignments to provide for a 50 percent position to deal specifically with climate change-related issues.

The LWF general secretary pointed to the response of the Lutheran communion to the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan as an example of concrete mission. “Seeing the suffering on one part of the body, the entire body reacted.”

Junge said the cry for freedom of citizens in the Middle East and North Africa offered a challenge to governments and churches around the world. “The dignity of human beings cannot be controlled or suppressed in a lasting way and their desire for participation and

acknowledgment as full citizens is irreducible,” he added.

The general secretary reported that as a result of the range of resolutions passed at the Eleventh Assembly, the Gender Advisory Group was working on a proposal for gender policy guidelines, while the LWF Secretariat was addressing the question of gender balance in staffing.

Junge noted that major progress had been made in developing the LWF *Communio Garden*, a Web space that will allow Lutherans around the world to network and share information.

Debt Question Concerns Europe As Well Says Junge

The question of illegitimate debt is not only one that concerns Africa, Asia and Latin America, but is also on the “doorstep of Europe,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said.

what sort of response was planned to the deal with the process relating to human sexuality that is scheduled for discussion in 2012 and is sometimes referred to as the “Lund Process.”



Bishop Melvin Jiménez (Lutheran Costa Rican Church) makes an intervention on illegitimate debt. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

Junge was speaking to Council participants after delivering his report.

Responding to a question about illegitimate debt by Bishop Melvin Jiménez of the Lutheran Costa Rican Church, the general secretary noted that Europe was on the cusp of “a big debt crisis” and that this was now being lived out in the region. He observed that in Iceland, in a referendum, private citizens rejected a government-approved plan to repay private debt with public funds.

In the same Council session in which Junge’s report was discussed, Oberkirchenrat Rainer Kiefer asked

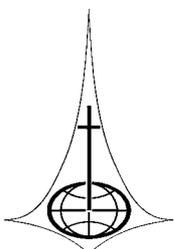
In his speech, the general secretary had noted there was a “wide variety of responses in member churches” on the document “Marriage, Family and Sexuality,” approved by the Council at its 2007 meeting in Lund, Sweden. The document offers guidelines for respectful processes of dialogue and discussion on this subject, with the year 2012 as a benchmark.

Junge said that it was important to be aware of the need in the process to listen and that it should not be carried alone by either the LWF Secretariat or the LWF’s governing bodies.

On the same topic, Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) said, “I don’t think that by 2012 we will be able to solve certain issues, particularly of marriage and human sexuality.”



Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, responds to the Report of the General Secretary. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet



He referred to the address of LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan who said, "So what is required for unity?"

Younan had said, "Article VII of the Augsburg Confession describes the church as the congregation of saints where 'the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.' Others might add the mutual recognition of ministries, common witness and service. Yet AC VII also mentions what is not required: 'It is not

necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere."

The ELCRN bishop reflected, "Maybe we should ask: how can we be reconciled in our diversity on the matter," while noting that it might be asked how far one could stretch "reconciled diversity."

Chairing the meeting, Younan thanked Kameeta for the advice, and said he had opened a way for bridging "the disconnect."

On the matter of human sexuality, Junge was asked in a press conference if the LWF was postponing discussion on the issue due to the fact that it could trigger divisiveness in the communion.

He replied that the LWF was not engaging in a postponing action but rather creating space in order to "have time for a conversation" so that Lutherans could respectfully connect with each other.

LWF Reserves Increase but Challenges Remain in Other Areas Says Treasurer

The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) governing body heard that while the communion's bottom line had improved, challenges remain, as the LWF strives for its goals of a sustainable operating structure and a balanced budget.

In her first report to the Council as LWF Treasurer, Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton gave an overview of the 2010 financial results and other matters that would come before the 9-14 June meeting.

The treasurer noted that the level of LWF income had been fairly steady for the last four years, with the 2010 receipts at USD 102 million compared with USD 103.4 million the previous year, a decrease of USD 1.4 million or 1.3 percent.

The total expenditure amounted to USD 100 million compared with 103.9 million in 2009, a reduction of USD 3.9 million or 3.8 percent. This included USD 84.4 million for the Departments for World Service (DWS); USD 11.7 million for Mission and Development; USD 0.9 million for Theology and Studies; and USD 3.2 million for the General Secretariat.

Some of the lower budgeted costs came primarily from lower staff and Council costs, Jackson-Skelton said, while noting that a decrease in membership income was of concern due to its importance in strategic planning.

Reserves

In 2010, LWF reserves increased from USD 21.9 million to USD 24

million, which is above its minimum target level of USD 15 million. However, only DWS reserves were at the proposed level; those of other units decreased in both 2009 and 2010, said Jackson-Skelton, who is also treasurer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"Reserves" refer to net assets freely available to support the organization's operations, without restrictions.

Membership Fees

At the same time, LWF membership contributions decreased over 2009 and 2010 to reach USD 3 million.

"Some member churches have experienced declines in income and had to reduce expenditures in order to balance

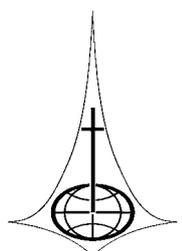
their budgets," said Jackson-Skelton. She underlined that "membership fee contributions are undesignated and provide stability for critical work other than programs and projects."

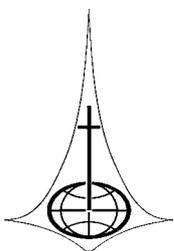
"The level of membership fee contributions continues to lag the total of fair membership fees. Growth in this area would help to provide support for areas that have been identified as high priority in the strategic planning process, such as theological and ecumenical work." LWF's fair membership fees are based on a formula indicating the relative wealth of the member church country compared with that of churches in other countries.

The treasurer said, "Overall, the financial results were positive, favor-



LWF Treasurer Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton reported favorable results overall for the communion's finances in 2010. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet





able compared to both budget and the prior fiscal year. Expenditures were well managed, including the 2010 assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, resulting in no negative impact on the LWF operating results.”

The LWF showed a positive operating net income from operations of USD 926,000 for the financial year ending 31 December 2010. The operating deficit for coordination in Geneva was USD 1.2 million, which was slightly favorable compared to the budgeted deficit of USD 1.4 million, and positive results of USD 2.1 million emanated from DWS filed coordination.

Pension Fund

Jackson-Skelton said that the Pension Fund Board had met recently and unanimously approved a proposal to merge the LWF Pension Fund with the Switzerland-based Abendrot Foundation as of 1 January 2012. She explained the Abendrot Foundation was established in 1984 and has 8,300 active members, 600 pensioners and assets of CHF 825 million.

The treasurer noted that the coverage ratio for Abendrot Foundation was 105.7 percent at the end of 2010, compared to LWF’s 100.1 percent. The benefits from the merger would include “greater efficiencies and in-

vestment options from a larger fund, and greater sustainability of long-term benefits.” She noted that the LWF demographic structure was not favorable as 38 percent of all members are pensioners. The Abendrot Foundation had, “socially responsible investment principles, which are very close to those of LWF,” she said.

While the Endowment Fund assets had recovered well following the 2008 downturn to reach a new high of CHF 12.2 million in 2010, additional efforts were still needed to achieve the goal of CHF 20 million by the year 2017, Jackson-Skelton added.

LWF Council Looks to Reverse Decrease in Membership Fees

The LWF Council is exploring ways to encourage increased financial ownership of the organization by its member churches in order to ensure stability in the future. In response to the financial report for 2010 from LWF Treasurer Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton, church delegates debated strategies to reverse a two-year trend of declining membership fee contributions.

“There needs to be an honest discussion on the subject,” said Bishop Susan C. Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. “We need to figure out a respectful way.” She stressed that fees needed to be paid and not considered as a donation.

Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke of the LWF German National Committee also expressed concern about decreased contributions by member churches that had been paying in the past.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge cautioned that “some member churches from the South have found difficulty to pay due to the reduction rate in their membership.” However, they had showed ownership by bringing their delegates to be a part of the Council.

Mr Pauli Rantanen, director of the LWF Office for Finance and Administration, explained the impact of the high exchange rate for the US dollar in 2010 when compared to the Euro. “This made a difference in the

decrease in the membership contribution by some churches,” he said.

tries and considers a possible waiver of part or all of the fee for member



Ms Danielle Dokman, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (middle), responds to the Report of the Treasurer. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

Rev. Dr. Augustine Jeyakumar, executive secretary for the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, emphasized that “the membership fee is mandatory and we [member churches] need to follow it strictly.” He stated that churches from the global South needed to give attention to increasing the stability of the communion.

Ms Jackson-Skelton said that the LWF was working on a strategy around the 1999 “fair membership fee” formula that indicates the relative wealth of the member church country compared with other coun-

tries facing financial difficulties.

Still, Ms Danielle Dokman of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname underlined that “the responsibility lies on the Council member to tell people that [the] LWF is not an office but a communion of member churches. We all have a role to play.”

Read the President’s address, as well as the reports of the General Secretary and the Treasurer at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/council-2011-documents.html

Council Members Stand in Solidarity with Liberian Member Refused Swiss Visa

The Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), meeting in Geneva, expressed solidarity for one of its members, Mr A. Elijah Zina, 29, layperson in the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL), who was refused an entry visa into Switzerland for the meeting.

In its first plenary action on 9 June, the Council, drawn from the 145 LWF member churches around the world, called upon Swiss authorities to grant a visa to Zina and to all persons invited to LWF meetings.

The Council, meeting under the theme, “Discerning Our Common Journey,” called on the LWF general secretary to pursue the matter so that Zina might attend future meetings as a duly-elected member of the Council. Its members expressed their solidarity and prayers with Zina, underlining that the governing body was “incomplete without his presence.”

The visa refusal “raises issues about the commitment of the Swiss authorities to continue to support the work



Council member A. Elijah Zina, Lutheran Church in Liberia © LWF/Peter Kenny

and presence of international organizations that are based in Switzerland and that have their international meetings there,” the resolution stated.

In a letter of solidarity to Zina preceding the action, the Council noted that the Liberian delegate’s inability to

attend the meeting deprived the LCL, the African churches he represents and the youth in particular from participating in global communion leadership and decision-making processes.

Council members expressed disappointment that Zina was refused entry into Switzerland despite travelling from Liberia to the Ivory Coast to obtain the necessary travel documents to attend the meeting in Geneva. In 2010 Zina made similar efforts but was refused an entry visa for Germany for the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart.

The Council said that Zina brought valuable gifts to the LWF as it worked to share God’s love with a vision for justice, peace and reconciliation in the world.

“We send you our words of encouragement and prayers that your strong commitment to the life and work of the LWF and its members around the world may be strengthened and nourished,” the Council’s letter to Zina stated.

UNHCR Representative Urges LWF to Continue Refugee Focus

The keynote address at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council meeting underlined the fundamental humanitarian values shared by the LWF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The refugee agency and the LWF share “a long history beyond the 60 years of its [UNHCR] induction,” noted the UNHCR’s director for the Division of International Protection, Dr Volker Türk, when he addressed participants in this year’s Council meeting.

Among many global concerns, the issue of refugees was seen to be a challenge that UNHCR and faith-based organizations such as the LWF continued to address, said Türk.

“The LWF has worked intensively after World War II among refugees,” he noted. “The LWF has been in the formative phase of the UNHCR’s mod-

ern refugee protection,” and was one of its largest global partners, through the Department for World Service.



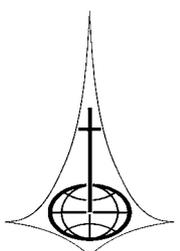
Dr Volker Türk, director of the UNHCR Division of International Protection, delivers the Council 2011 keynote address. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet

He expressed particular appreciation for the LWF’s collaborative manner of engaging host communities, and for advocating for people affected by civil conflict.

Offering Protection

“Asylum,” derived from the Greek word *asylia*, “is a place for the persecuted to flee to,” Türk remarked and emphasized the need to protect those seeking such refuge. He noted that not only the Bible but also the Koran, Jewish traditions and other religious scriptures articulated “a long standing concern for religious protection and fundamental humanitarian values.”

The UNHCR official said that many countries in the global South were acting in this spirit to offer refugees protection, citing the example of



Ghana and Guinea assisting those fleeing violence in neighboring Ivory Coast. Liberia, he noted, had even issued a presidential decree to provide help for the refugees.

With regard to migration, Türk pointed to the situation in North Africa. "It is quite striking how things have changed," he stated in reference to the crisis in Libya, where most of the 800,000 people fleeing the country were migrant workers.

Insufficient Protection by Europe

The UNHCR director criticized the insufficient protection offered by European government to these refugees. Of the 100,000 people who migrated

to Tunisia and Egypt from Libya, only one percent found refuge in Europe, with around 1,400 perishing in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Türk pointed out that while Europe took in more than 1 million refugees in the 1990s, its contribution in the current context "is too small." Fear and populist politics are defining action rather than rational discussion about the realities behind migration, he noted.

In addition to mitigation, prevention and adaptation, the dimension of human displacement also was being debated increasingly in climate change response, Türk said.

Expanding societal violence was a further factor in the displacement of people, he said, and mentioned

gang-related violence causing people to flee Colombia and Ecuador.

Global Responsibility

For Türk, resettlement should not be the main solution. "We need different types of social movements, building civil society [locally] and working globally."

In this regard, it was left to the international community and international actors to deal with this enormous challenge, and to assume global responsibility, he said.

"You will be a very strong voice given the values that you have displayed," Türk affirmed and urged the LWF governing body to "galvanize the dialogue and to address the dynamics of the issue."

LWF Delegates Underline Obligation to Assist Displaced People

The current global climate is a difficult one for refugees and internally displaced persons. This observation was shared by participants in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2011 Council meeting and Dr Volker Türk, director for the Division of International Protection at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Responding to questions on his keynote address on 9 June at the LWF governing body's meeting, Türk said in what he described as a personal remark that "Politics is not in sync with current realities...even mainstream politics seems to take into account more extreme views and take that into account in their policymaking." It seemed that a more moderate silent majority existed but didn't speak up, he added.

LWF Council members Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta (Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia) and Ms Maria Immonen (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland) responded to Türk's address, followed by plenary discussion.



Ms Maria Immonen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, brings a response to the keynote address.
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet

Africa," he said. Namibians were received in Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia, among others.

"These countries sacrificed a lot. Some were independent for only two to three years [before they received refugees]," he said. "They had to take care of us with the little resources they had." With independence, the UN agency's partnership in the Namibian capital, Windhoek, became to "return, resettle, and rehabilitate," or RRR.

"I want to congratulate UNHCR for its 60 years of saving lives," Kameeta said. "We pray for a world without refugees, but it seems it's getting worse. May God save the generations, yet unborn, from being refugees."

Media Rhetoric

UNHCR has conducted media analyses to study the terminology used for asylum seekers and the effect that repeated negative words or phrases can have on public opinion. Findings showed that media rhetoric clearly had an impact, he stated.

"It's sort of a bombardment of words that sinks in and stays," Türk said. "Then people tend to have these knee-jerk reactions."

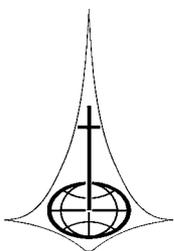
Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Immonen, director for development cooperation for the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, described today's social climate as a major concern for the future of refugees and a challenge to Christians. "The real question to us is...how do we go against the current flow?" she asked. "It's [a] rhetoric where individual greed and financial gain is promoted."

As LWF secretariat staff from 2003 to 2007, Immonen worked with

Namibian Experience

Kameeta reflected on Namibians' experiences as refugees in the 1960s. Before the UNHCR, "Many Namibians left the country, fleeing apartheid colonialism, and they settled in many countries all over, particularly



the Department for World Service on refugee issues in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and other countries, often in conjunction with UNHCR.

The most vulnerable refugees, including women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly, were unable to have the same opportunities as other refugees and often remained “stuck in the conflict,” she remarked. As the LWF had always focused on these vulnerable populations and had a large number of local staff worldwide, it was able to provide impressive access, she noted.

LWF Strategic Plan 2012-2017 Considered by Council

Theology, mutual accompaniment and service remain central to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as it approaches the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017, states the strategic plan that was brought to the Council for consideration.

The draft LWF Strategy 2012-2017 was considered by the global organization’s Council at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, following intensive consultation with member churches and partners.

“This global strategy of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) lays out a vision and pathway for our common spiritual journey as a communion of churches, and for our service to people and the world,” the document states.

Founded in 1947 as a federation of Lutheran churches, the LWF’s growing understanding of itself as a communion of churches with a deep sense of mutual accountability characterizes the proposed strategy.

The draft names three priorities:

- that the LWF be strengthened in worship and ongoing theological discernment, ecumenical dialogue and interfaith collaboration;
- that member churches grow in capacity for holistic mission and deepen their relationships with each other;
- that effective and empowering diakonia (church social ser-

Militarization of Aid

Continued concerns for the future of refugees included the militarization of aid, Immonen said, noting that today recipients often cannot discern between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the military, as the latter are taking on some aid activities. She also stressed that the economic crises and corresponding declining funds for refugee aid, as well as challenges emerging from climate change, would create an uphill battle for addressing refugee concerns.

Effect of Economic Crisis

Bishop Dr Frank July of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany) also raised concerns over the effect of the economic crisis on refugee policies.

“How do we make sure that taking refugees is not a luxury in good times but is a legal obligation of countries?” he asked. “I find it very important to make a moral appeal to speak about God’s grace to refugees, but it is just as important that this is a human right regardless of the societal or economic situation.”



Council members Ms Titi Malik [left] (Nigeria) and Ms Dagmar Magold [right] (Switzerland) follow discussion on the proposed LWF Strategy 2012-2017. © LWF/E.McHan

vice) address human suffering, injustice and emergencies.

The document notes that theological reflection, advocacy and public witness, and gender justice are critical to support the priorities, while effective communication and financial sustainability are important to building the LWF’s sustainability and effectiveness.

The LWF embarked on the strategic renewal as a communion of 145 member churches with 70 million members worldwide, rich in theological traditions and committed to a continuing reformation, according to the plan.

“To be Lutheran is to be freed by grace to love and serve the neighbor. Our service in the world, and our

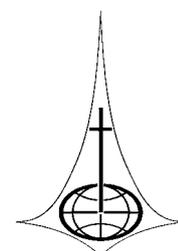
care for creation, are integral to our Lutheran identity.”

Lutherans serve in a world characterized by increased connectivity and interdependence but widening economic and technological gaps, the proposed strategy states.

“Because globalization is built on neo-liberal doctrines of individualism, idolatry of markets, and acquisition of wealth, it has led to a growing divide between rich and poor people.”

Migration, climate change and shifts in the religious landscape will also shape the work of the LWF, the draft strategy maintains.

Still, theology should remain a core activity for all levels of the global Lutheran Communion and it should be enriched by the understandings



gained from churches engaged with the suffering of the world.

“The anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 provides a powerful focal point for further formation as a communion and the reaffirmation of our ecumenical commitment,” the proposed strategy says.

It calls for member churches to work together, share resources, learn from each other and be accountable to one another as they meet the mission challenges in their various contexts.

The plan commits to developing the capacity of member churches, encouraging interchurch relationships and networks, and the cultivation of future leaders, including women and youth.

Diakonia continues to be an essential calling of the Lutheran Communion, the document adds, stating that alongside its ecumenical and interfaith partners the LWF must continue to work with communities to counter

injustice, exclusion and the ravages of conflict and natural disasters.

“Diakonia is central to what it means to be church. Christians are called by God to live out diakonia in their daily lives and in what they do.”

The strategic plan calls for member churches to be better equipped to respond to human suffering and for the LWF to be an effective voice for justice, peace and human rights. It urges that LWF’s global humanitarian and development programs focus on marginalized and vulnerable people.

It commits to supporting the role of member churches in their local diakonia efforts, further developing the LWF’s global humanitarian and development programs and partnerships with the World Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the ACT Alliance and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).

The LWF should remain well governed, supported by a communion

office that is financially sustainable, professional and accountable. The organization must have a clear mission and direction, adequate human and financial resources, strong leadership and adaptable communications.

“Balancing intentions with resources and institutional capacity will be key to being effective in a given year and to the LWF’s ongoing sustainability,” the plan states. It calls for quality governance structures that reflect the rich diversity of the communion.

The strategy urges increased visibility for the LWF and its work and for communication efforts to support communion relationships and fundraising, using technologies that help connect members to the communion.

Read the Strategy Proposal at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/themes/lwf-strategic-planning-process

Council Members’ Remarks on LWF Strategy

Before The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council adopted a strategic plan for the LWF, members of the organization’s governing body discussed a number of issues in plenary and in Program Committees.

Some committees identified a need to refer directly to evangelism as part of holistic mission in addition to proclamation, saying it was consid-

ered highly important for churches in some contexts and regions. Rev. Dr Samuel Dawai from the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon (EFLC) gave the example of how EFLC’s evangelism in a remote area of the country had brought in 1,000 new members. “But hundreds of them left the church after a couple of months because there is no frame-

work to support and sustain this important part of holistic mission.”

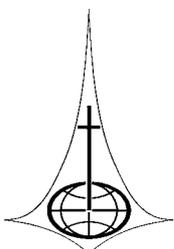
There was emphasis about the strategy as an important resource for interchurch relationships and action, and for planning by member churches in their respective countries and regions.

Speaking about the Central Eastern Europe region, Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, Northern District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, said the strategy would be useful for churches in a region that “was used to tactics rather than strategies.” In the former communist era, people were afraid to strategize. Then the 1990s political changes came too fast, and churches did not have time to reflect. “Now we have so many diaconal issues to deal with we need strategy for our community,” he noted.

Fabiny who heads the communication program committee added, “Strategy is also important for communication at all levels for the LWF, both inside and within the LWF, relating to staff and members, and also externally to all media. Having



Bishop Miloš Klátik (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic) makes a comment during the plenary discussion on the LWF strategy. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet



2017 as the deadline means it's a near enough timeframe."

HIV and AIDS

The global significance and impact of HIV and AIDS will be added to the context section of the strategy, similarly a reference to other global health concerns that have impacts on a major scale, including malaria, tuberculosis and mental illness.

Bishop Dr Ndanganane P. Phaswana of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa had raised concern that the issue of HIV and AIDS, which has a massive impact in his region, was missing.

Ms Colleen Cunningham of the Moravian Church in South Africa also spoke for its inclusion saying, "Maybe for some it is not important, but for us it [HIV and AIDS] is part of daily life."

LWF Council Approves Proposed Framework for Restructured Communion Office

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council approved a framework proposal for restructuring the Geneva Secretariat or Communion Office.

The "Framework Proposal for a Restructured LWF Secretariat" describes interim plans based on the LWF Strategy 2012-2017, which the Council had approved earlier.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge presented the proposal to Lutheran leaders from around the world meeting in Geneva under the theme "Discerning Our Common Journey."

Currently, the LWF Secretariat's work is divided among the Departments for Mission and Development, Theology and Studies, and World Service; and the General Secretariat which comprises the Offices for Communications Services, Ecumenical Affairs, Finance and Administration, International Affairs and Human Rights, Personnel, and Planning.

The proposal gives an outline on the structural implications of the LWF Strategy. A more detailed and fine-tuned paper on the proposed staffing configurations and organizational chart of the Communion Office will be presented to the Council later in the year.

Ms Jenny Skumsnes-Moe of the Church of Norway said that mental health was a key issue, and one that "Luther wrote a lot about", and that it should be incorporated in the LWF strategy on the health agenda.

Youth

The proposal to include youth as a cross-cutting priority will refer to the rapid pace of change in today's world and youth contribution in shaping church response; the critical role of youth in the future sustainability, life and work of the communion as leaders and participants; strong youth presence and active contribution to the 2017 anniversary; and the valuable role youth can play in building networks, communication and extending the reach of churches.

"Overall I am satisfied with the high level of this document. It will

need to lot of work to operationalize it," said Executive Committee member Bishop Susan C. Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada before the vote.

Mr V. Stephen Chandramohan, a member of the LWF Endowment Fund from India, said, "It is a wonderful move with a missionary manifesto where requested. It will need hard work to implement it in a true spirit." He congratulated those "who toiled" for bringing a tool for "LWF's functioning."

The LWF governing body authorized the General Secretary with the President, to approve all further editorial changes based on proposals from Program Committees, providing these changes enhance the document without significantly changing the content or intention of the strategy.



Ms Colleen Cunningham (Moravian Church in South Africa) comments on the proposed framework for a reconfigured Communion Office. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet

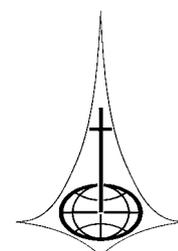
Considerations put forward include making a closer connection between the LWF's theology and ecumenical dialogue work; increasing the emphasis on holistic mission and the deepening of relationships among member churches; and refocusing diaconal action on emergency preparedness and climate change.

The Communion Office framework proposal suggests closer attention to advocacy work, including linking it with public witness in a

strong unit that collaborates closely with the Office of the General Secretary.

It describes communications as a strategic management tool that should have a stronger fundraising perspective, and a stronger interface with LWF programmatic work.

The proposal points out that an LWF Secretariat self-assessment had also shown the need to move beyond an administrative approach and adopt a resource management



approach which will be reflected in the final structural configuration.

Careful consideration needs to be paid to the LWF's overall fundraising efforts, the proposal adds. It concludes: "The Communion Office requires a structural configuration that serves the implementation of the Strategy, and this needs to be built on a sustainable basis, both in terms of financial resources and human resources."

Budget Frame

At this year's meeting, it would not be possible to present to the Council

a budget proposal that would take into consideration a new Communion Office structure and programs fully aligned with the Strategy. Therefore, the Council will at this stage discuss a budget frame only for 2012 with the same structure as the current one, reflecting information available as of 24 May 2011.

Council members consider a proposed 2012 budget frame amounting to EUR 80.97 million.

While the 2012 budget frame still shows a projected deficit of around EUR 345,000, the goal is to present to the Council later this year a balanced budget that is aligned to the

restructured secretariat and work. As of 2013, the plans and budgets will be prepared for the regular three-year planning cycle, with the first year requiring Council approval and the following years for information.

In the proposed budget frame, some of the programs have taken into consideration some elements of the new strategic plan; however, further attention will need to be given to assessing the relevance and effectiveness of the current work in light of the new strategy. This alignment of programs will be done during the following months.

LWF Council Alarmed by Use of Violence against Civilians in Sudan

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) strongly condemned the use of violence and ethnic cleansing, reportedly being utilized by Sudanese government forces against civilian populations. The Lutheran communion urged the international community to intervene in the crisis.

In a 14 June public statement issued by the Council, the LWF urged the international community, and in particular the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU), "to use all possible measures to stop hostilities, protect civilians, and allow humanitarian access to all parts of Sudan, and in particular South Kordofan."

Before voting to adopt the public statement, LWF Council participants heard reports that a major humanitarian catastrophe is in the making in the disputed South Kordofan region of Sudan just weeks before the scheduled 9 July independence for South Sudan.

"An estimated 300,000 people are besieged, cut off from relief aid and unable to escape fighting. Most of the population of Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan State, have had to flee," according to reports cited by the Council's Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights.

Eye-witness accounts from church sources indicated the Sudanese government forces were going house-to-house, pulling out suspected opposition sym-

pathizers and in some instances killing them on the spot. There were reports that civilians who had sought refuge at the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) "have been dragged from the mission and executed in front of UN staff," the committee stated in its report presented by the chairperson, Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia.

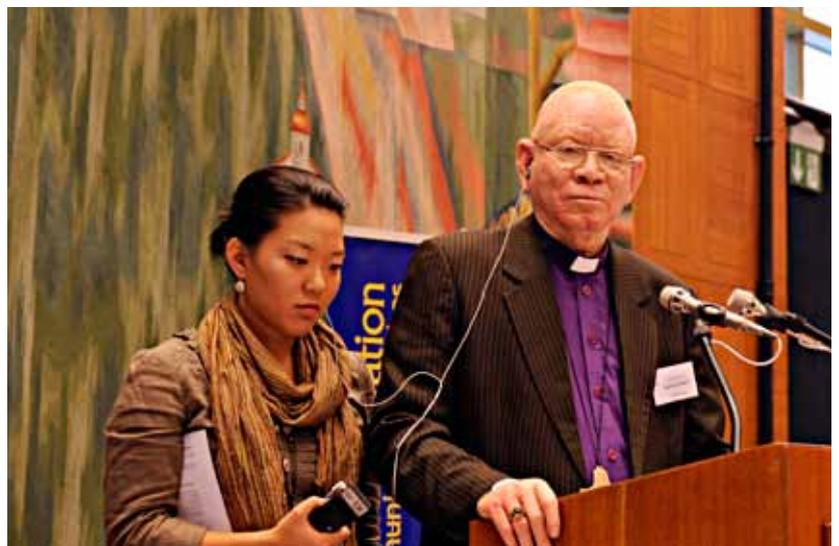
Ethnic Cleansing

"These reports all point to a new chapter of ethnic cleansing being carried out by the government of Sudan," the LWF committee told the Council meeting. The atrocities are taking place in an area just north of

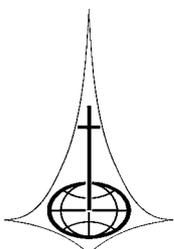
the South Sudan border, where many of the people support the South, the committee added.

The Council commended the long-standing service and witness of the LWF to the people of the Sudan, and expressed gratitude for the LWF's partnership with the Sudan Ecumenical Forum and the Sudan Council of Churches, urging a re-doubling of these efforts.

Expressing its ongoing prayers and solidarity for the people and churches of Sudan who are working for peace and justice, the Council requested LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge to send a pastoral letter to the churches in Sudan, offering concern and solidarity.



Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights member Ms Mikka McCracken (USA) and chairperson Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta (Namibia) during the presentation of the committee's report. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet



LWF Council Issues Public Statement on the Middle East

Political disputes should be resolved without resorting to violence, the LWF Council reiterated in a public statement on the Middle East on the final day of its 9-14 June meeting in Geneva, Switzerland.

God in each and every human being and the quest of every person for justice and for life abundant.”

Speaking to the Council earlier, Younan noted that the failure to come to a just resolution to the Palestinian-

Rights, which noted a number of key principles previously articulated by the LWF on the issue.

They included:

- solidarity with the ELCJHL;
- recognition of the Christian community in the Middle East as a bridge builder to peace
- nonviolence as the way to secure peace and justice;
- support for freedom of movement for Palestinians;
- prevention of the confiscation of Palestinian homes;
- the removal of any vestiges of anti-Semitism towards Jews;
- continued interfaith dialogue and rejection of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotypes;
- a two-state solution;
- Jerusalem as a city shared between the two peoples and three religions;
- immediate lifting of the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip;
- opposition to measures that work against the above principles, including Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, pressures on Christians to emigrate, the separation wall and house demolitions and eviction in East Jerusalem.

The Council reiterated encouragement of visits from church leaders and members from outside, and other acts of solidarity and witness for peace.



Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) contributes to discussion on the Middle East public statement; on the right is Mr Warime Gutu, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

The Council, called on all parties in disputes “to take concrete actions to protect and preserve internationally-recognized human rights.”

The LWF governing body expressed its appreciation to LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), who drew attention to the “Arab Awakening” and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in his address to the meeting. The Council offered prayers and solidarity with the churches and people of North Africa and the Middle East.

The Council called upon “LWF member churches and all people of good will to recognize the image of

Israeli conflict was one of the core problems of the world today, and one that would bring more extremism.

New Age

“This is the reason we hope that we can now enter a new age in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will bring peace rooted in justice, through which the Palestinian will see the image of God in the Israeli and the Israeli will see the image of God in the Palestinian,” Younan said.

The statement on the situation in the Middle East was brought to the Council by the Program Committee for International Affairs and Human

Wealthy Countries Could Be More Generous in Welcoming Refugees

Wealthy countries need to do more to welcome vulnerable people who have been forced to flee their homes, the LWF Council urged in a public statement on 14 June.

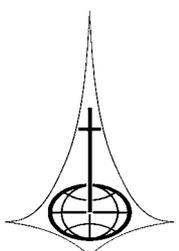
“This can be a matter of life and death, as is now seen with migrants drowning in the Mediterranean. In

the current circumstances in North Africa and the Middle East, the Council calls especially on countries in Europe to offer protection to those seeking asylum,” the statement said.

Acting on recommendations from the Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights,

the Council called on the LWF to continue to work with the international community to find ways to protect displaced persons who do not fit the definition of a refugee.

“These include internally displaced persons and persons who are forced to leave their homes because



of circumstances of natural disaster, climate change, and dire poverty,” the Council said.

It expressed gratitude to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other groups who provide protection and hospitality for refugees and other displaced persons, saying that, in Jesus’ words, they “welcome the stranger” (Matthew 25).

The LWF has collaborated with UNHCR for many years, and the Council thanked the UN refugee agency for this long-standing practical partnership in service.

“Through UNHCR, the God-given dignity of each human being

has been lifted up and millions of persons who had lost everything have been able to start new lives,” the program committee said.

Refugee work continues to be part of the core witness and work of LWF’s ministry, with the Department for World Service (DWS) operating major programs for refugees around the world, some of which include collaboration with UNHCR.

The committee emphasized that the partnership between the LWF and UNHCR “will go forward with new strength in response to the continuation of situations in which innocent men, women and children

are forced to flee. ... In this broken world there are millions of refugees, internally displaced persons, unaccompanied children, stateless persons, and forced migrants,” it added.

DWS was commended, alongside LWF member churches and related organizations and local congregations, for their efforts on behalf of vulnerable people and was urged to continue and enhance the work.

The full texts of the public statements are available at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/council-2011-documents.html

Summary of Actions Taken by the 2011 LWF Council

Ecumenical Affairs

At its meeting in Geneva, 9-14 June, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council approved plans for a three-way talks that will include Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Mennonites.

On the final day of its meeting, the Council, receiving recommendations from the Program Committees for Theology and Studies, and for Ecumenical Affairs that met jointly, accepted plans for a Trilateral Dialogue Commission composed of four representatives each from the LWF, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Mennonite World Conference.

The Council asked LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, in consultation with member churches, to identify and propose names of Lutheran members to the Commission, considering the importance of gender and regional representation and familiarity with the ecumenical partners and the issues to be discussed.

The general secretary was also asked to continue the process of preparing for a Lutheran-Pentecostal International Commission and report his progress to the next Council meeting.

The Council re-affirmed the strong commitment of the LWF to the work being conducted by the Institute for Ecumenical Research

in Strasbourg, France. The governing body thanked the institute for its substantial contributions to the bilateral dialogues, in particular to the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission and to the Lutheran-Pentecostal conversations, and for its continued support to the LWF Office for Ecumenical Affairs.

World Service

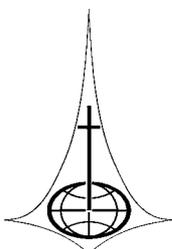
The Council received through the program Committee for World service, the report of the Standing Committee for World Service. The report had outlined the significant progress made in achieving program coherence and consistency across the Department for World Service (DWS) work in 37 countries, collaborating ecumenically, with the United Nations and government organizations.

The reported pointed out that, “The challenges DWS faces in Haiti are huge, and a timely and effective operation is hampered by many factors.”

Low funding had prompted the closing of DWS country programs in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Council heard. Plans for a fact-finding mission in Yemen in February 2011 were cancelled until the security situation there improves. In Tunisia and Libya, the DWS is working with the ACT Alliance to assist refugees. World Service



LWF Council members and staff during the joint session of the Ecumenical Affairs and Theology Program Committees. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet



helped Japanese Lutheran churches organize their response following the 11 March earthquake in Japan.

The Council endorsed the committee's recommendation that the LWF Treasurer continues to help the Council to understand membership fees and how the governing body members hold each other accountable for LWF's financial support.

International Affairs and Human Rights

Adopting a recommendation of the Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights, the Council encouraged LWF member churches to observe the first week of February every year as World Interfaith Harmony Week. The UN General Assembly proclaimed the Interfaith Harmony Week in October 2010 to promote better relations among religions, faiths and beliefs.

Other recommendations from this committee included the three public statements adopted by the Council on Sudan, the Middle East, and refugees and forced migration.

Communications

Considering a report from the Program Committee for Communication Services, the Council agreed to the in-

volvement of regional communication networks in defining an LWF communication strategy. It also endorsed a complementary survey on the status of communication in the regions.

Mission and Development

The Council agreed to a recommendation by the Program Committee for Mission and Development mandating the new Committee for Holistic Mission and Member Church Relations to make concrete proposals on how its work would continue in light of changes to the LWF Constitution.

Membership

On the basis of information received from the recently established North American Lutheran Church (NALC) which is seeking membership in the LWF, the Council asked the LWF general secretary to initiate a dialogue process with the applicant in order to receive more information on its legal and theological status, and to clarify various issues as outlined in the LWF Bylaws.

The general secretary would also initiate follow-up procedures upon the advice of the regional process to secure important documentation in

preparation for the application process. The application would then be presented to the next meeting of the Standing Committee for Membership and Constitution for consideration.

Finances

On finances, the Council received the LWF Budget Frame 2012 (add amount from TR report), and requested the general secretary to send the annual plans and budgets for 2012 to Council members, who would send their comments to their respective vice presidents for discussion at the November 2011 Meeting of Officers. The general secretary was requested to bring a 2012 proposal that reflects improved alignment to the LWF Strategy 2012-2017; is financially sustainable; and includes a balanced budget. It will be approved through a mail vote by the Council.

2012 Council Meeting

Next year's Council meeting will take place from 14-20 June in Geneva, Switzerland. Geneva is tentatively scheduled as the location, pending discussion with Swiss authorities on the denial of a visa for Liberian delegate Mr A. Elijah Zina. Other locations were also being considered if the discussions were unsatisfactory, Junge said.

New Council Committees Aligned to LWF Strategy

At its meeting in Geneva, the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) established Council Program Committees that are aligned to the new LWF Strategy 2012-2017.

The Council established four specified Program Committees for

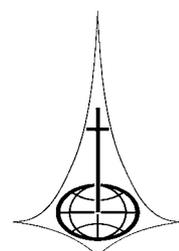
- Theology and Ecumenical Relations
- Holistic Mission and Member Church Relations
- World Service
- Advocacy and Public Voice

There will also be a Program Committee for Finance and Administration.

It also established two Standing Committees for: Communication and Fundraising; and Constitution and Membership. The Council observed that the previously separate membership and constitutional matters are closely related, thus the merger into one committee combining both issues. The membership of the standing committees is drawn from the other committees.

The new committees replace the previous Program Committees for Communication Services; Ecumenical Affairs; International Affairs and Human Rights; Mission and Development; Theology and Studies; and World Service.

The new Program Committee for World Service is a unified governance with the previous Standing Committee whose mandate included approval of new country programs, monitoring fundraising as well as personnel resources. It comprises persons drawn from the seven LWF geographical regions. The appointment of one Council member for World Service was deferred, pending further consultation. This committee will include ten Council members. It will not have advisers but instead will include additional members with sound knowledge and experience in professional humanitarian and development work



drawn from the related agencies and/or specialized development arms of member churches, who will have voice and vote in the committee.

In line with the amended LWF Constitution and Bylaws, chairpersons of the four specified Committees will complete the membership of the Meeting of Officers (currently Executive Committee), which comprises the President, Vice-Presidents, chairperson of the Finance Committee, and two members at large to ensure gender and generational representation. The new LWF Constitution comes into effect on 1 August 2011.

The Council also discussed the slate for the 21 advisers to serve on the Council committees, with three persons per LWF region. It appointed 12 persons in this category, with a complete slate for Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It directed the General Secretary to

at the next Council meeting scheduled for 14-20 June 2012 in Geneva.

The committees and their respective members are listed below:

Theology and Ecumenical Relations

Bishop Miloš Klátik (Slovak Republic) [chairperson]
 Rev. Dr Samuel Dawai (Cameroon)
 Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien (Norway)
 Bishop Antje Jackélen (Sweden)
 Bishop Susan C. Johnson (Canada)
 Bishop Frank O. July (Germany)
 Bishop [Oi-Peng] Philip Lok (Malaysia)
 Ms Dagmar Magold (Switzerland)
 Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer (Germany)
 Bishop Dr Ndanganane Petrus Phaswana (South Africa)
 Rev. Prof. Robin Steinke (USA)
 Ms Anna-Maria Tetzlaff (Germany)
 Bishop Janis Vanags (Latvia)



Rev. Prof. Robin J. Steinke reports on behalf of the ad-hoc Nominations Committee. © LWF/H.Putsman Penet

request from the respective regions nominations for the remaining nine advisers by 1 September 2011 for action in the November 2011 Meeting of Officers, after which the names will be submitted to the Council for a mail vote. Advisers bring specific expertise to the respective committees. They have voting rights in the committees but only voice in Council sessions.

The Council requested the Meeting of Officers (currently Executive Committee) to submit the Terms of Reference for these committees for approval

Advisers

Rev. Marcia Blasi (Brazil)
 Rev. Ireneusz Lukas (Poland)
 Rev. Dr Endor Modeste Rakoto (Madagascar)

Holistic Mission and Member Church Relations

Bishop Niels Henrik Arendt (Denmark) [chairperson]
 Ms Iwona Baraniec (Poland)
 Ms Colleen Elizabeth Cunningham (South Africa)

Ms Danielle Dokman (Suriname)
 Rev. Frauke Eiben (Germany)
 Bishop Alex Malasusa (Tanzania)
 Ms Mami Brunah Aro Sandanaina (Madagascar)
 Ms Christina Soren (India)
 Bishop Dr Mangisi Simorangkir (Indonesia)
 Ms Magnea Sverrisdottir (Iceland)
 Ms Rani Bormon Dipti (Bangladesh)
 Ms Eun-hae Kwon (Republic of Korea)

Advisers

Rev. Alan Eldrid (Argentina)
 Bishop em. Dr Ambrose Moyo (Zimbabwe)
 Rev. Dr Rafael Malpica-Padilla (USA)

World Service

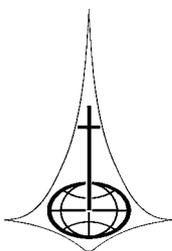
Rev. Dr A.G. Augustine Jeyakumar (India) [chairperson]
 Dr Carlos G. Bock (Brazil) [deputy chairperson]
 Rev. Naoki Asano (Japan)
 Rev. Dr Wakseyoum Idosa (Ethiopia)
 Ms Maria Immonen (Finland)
 Rev. Rainer Kiefer (Germany)
 Ms Danielle C. Leker (Netherlands)
 Ms Jenny Skumsnes-Moe (Norway)
 Mr A. Elijah Zina (Liberia)
 *One additional Council member to be appointed
 *One additional expert from the global South to be appointed

Advocacy and Public Voice

Bishop Melvin Jiménez (Costa Rica) [chairperson]
 Rev. Jenny Chan (Hong Kong, China)
 Bishop Tamás Fabiny (Hungary)
 Mr Warime Gutu (Papua New Guinea)
 Bishop Mark S. Hanson (USA)
 Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta (Namibia)
 Ms Titi Malik (Nigeria)
 Ms Mikka McCracken (USA)
 Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas (Chile)

Advisers:

Ms Hellen Javiera Rios Carrillo (Nicaragua)
 Bishop Cindy Halmarson (Canada)
 Rev. Klaus Rieth (Germany)



Finance and Administration

Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton (USA) [chairperson]
 Rev. Martina Berlich (Germany)
 Bishop Geza Erniša (Slovenia)
 Ms Pamela Akinyi Oyieyo (Kenya)
 Ms Jenette A. Purba (Indonesia)

Advisers:

Mr Olaf Mirgeler (Germany)
 Ms Phyllis Brewah (Sierra Leone)

Standing Committee for Communication and Fundraising

[Chairperson to be named by Meeting of Officers]

Bishop Tamás Fabiny (Hungary)
 Mr Warime Gutu (Papua New Guinea)
 Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton (USA)
 Rev. Rainer Kiefer (Germany)
 Ms Titi Malik (Nigeria)

Advisers

Rev. Klaus Rieth (Germany)

Standing Committee for Constitution and Membership

[Chairperson to be named by Meeting of Officers]

Bishop Niels H. Arendt (Denmark)
 Ms Iwona Baraniec (Poland)
 Rev. Martina Berlich (Germany)
 Rev. Dr Augustine Jeyakumar (India)
 Bishop Melvin Jiménez (Costa Rica)
 Rev. Prof. Robin Steinke (USA)
 Ms Magnea Sverrisdottir (Iceland)
 Mr A. Elijah Zina (Liberia)

Continue Common Journey, Ecumenical Leaders Tell LWF

Lutherans were praised for their commitment to the ecumenical movement in greetings brought to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from 9 to 14 June.

Speaking to church delegates attending the 2011 LWF Council meeting, representatives of international church organizations encouraged the LWF to continue to deepen dialogue and common witness with them.



LWF Council at its 2011 meeting on 9-14 June at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Switzerland, under the theme, "Discerning our common journey." © LWF/E.McHan

Board of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research

Bishop Frank O. July (Germany) [chairperson]
 Bishop [Oi-Peng] Philip Lok (Malaysia)
 Bishop Dr Ndanganane Petrus Phaswana (South Africa)

Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien [Nordic Countries]

Members at large

Ms Colleen Elizabeth Cunningham [Africa]
 Ms Anna-Maria Tetzlaff [Central Western Europe]

Meeting of Officers

President: Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan [Asia]

Vice-Presidents

Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas [Latin America and the Caribbean]
 Bishop Alex Malasusa [Africa]
 Ms Eun-hae Kwon [Asia]
 Bishop Susan C. Johnson [North America]
 Bishop Frank O. July [Central Western Europe]
 Bishop Tamás Fabiny [Central Eastern Europe]

Committee Chairpersons

Theology and Ecumenical Relations: Bishop Miloš Klátik [Central Eastern Europe]
Holistic Mission and Member Church Relations: Bishop Niels Henrik Arendt [Nordic Countries]
World Service: Rev. Dr A.G. Augustine Jeyakumar [Asia]
Advocacy and Public Voice: Bishop Melvin Jiménez [Latin America and the Caribbean]
Finance and Administration: Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton [North America]

"The Lutheran World Federation is a valued expression of communion in the life of the global church," said Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

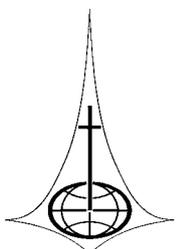
"The growth in communion among Lutheran churches over the past de-



Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

acades is a blessing to the wider ecumenical fellowship, helping to strengthen the relationship of Lutheran churches one to another and to deepen their relationship in Christ," the WCC leader said.

Tveit noted that Christian World Communions such as the LWF not only played a



significant role in preserving the Reformation, but also helped deepen the spiritual bonds the different churches share in Christ.

“This ‘thickness’ of relationship is a tremendous gift to the fellowship of WCC member churches, offering a model growing in Eucharist fellowship and visible unity in Christ,” Tveit added.

“As we embark on a second century of the modern ecumenical movement, the call to unity in Christ is as urgent as ever and we must find ways to renew our common vision,” Tveit said.

Roman Catholics

The pledge by the LWF governing body to give greater priority to the LWF’s theological foundation strengthened the Christian witness in the world, said Monsignor Dr Matthias Türk, representing the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU).

Referring to the present dialogue phase of the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and preparation for a common statement on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, Türk wondered what Lutherans and Catholics could say together today about the Reformation. “What can they learn from one another? What public Protestant-Catholic signs of reconciliation could be enacted, relat-



Msgr. Dr. Matthias Türk
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet



Rev. Dr. Larry Miller
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet

ing to our common history of guilt?” he asked.

God was calling Lutherans and Roman Catholics to dialogue with new energy, said the PCPCU representative. “We must not cease to engage with the fact that more binds us together in the depths than separates us on the sur-

face. I am convinced God wants us to set out with even greater determination on the path of unity.”

Mennonites

Outgoing general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Rev.

Dr Larry Miller said that Mennonites had “fallen in love” with Lutherans over the past two years as the LWF prepared for the July 2010 action of asking Mennonites’ forgiveness for persecution against their Anabaptist forebears. “You have moved our hearts and humbled our spirits.”

Miller said Mennonites anticipated “more moments of divine surprise and revelation with you” in the trilateral conversation that has brought them together with Lutherans and Roman Catholics to examine diverse views of baptism.



Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet



Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet

Reformed Churches

Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), called the discernment process leading to the Council’s adoption of the LWF Strategy 2012-2017 “inspirational.”

“We pray that you will see ways in which that common journey intersects with the journeys of others in the ecumenical movement. We in the Reformed family are confident that you see that common journey as including Reformed and Lutheran journeying together as well,” Nyomi said.

Pentecostals

Dr Jean-Daniel Plüss, Lutheran-Pentecostal Study Group, said that Lutherans and Pentecostals belonged together under God’s love. “We may have our wounded histories that we carry in our memories as well as the blessed accomplishments that we claim. But, most of all, we as God’s children, are part of the Body of Christ and as such we are awakened, bonded together and sustained by God’s love.”

Plüss called for dialogue, common worship and witness in the world between Lutherans and Pentecostals. “In this sense we can be confident and engage together in the motto of this Council meeting, namely to ‘Discern Our Common Journey,’” he added.

New LWF Strategy a Big Step Forward

The President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan underlined his concern about the entire Middle East region.

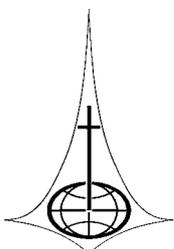
“First of all, I’m not only concerned for Christians, I am concerned for every human being whether they be Syrian, Lebanese, Chilean, Korean, Palestinian or Israeli,” said Younan at the closing

press conference of the LWF Council meeting in Geneva.

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, expressed his hope that Syria would soon have a civil society that “respects freedom of speech, human rights and respects the freedom of the press and the freedom of minorities.”

“Once it becomes a modern civil society that makes economic and political reforms then we do not have to worry about the Christians because every human being will be equal before the law,” he added.

On the Council’s outcome, Younan said that he was extremely pleased with the governing body’s



deliberations: “It was a good, constructive meeting,” he asserted.

The adoption of the LWF Strategy 2012-2017 had been the most important matter, the president explained. The Council members had reached agreement on the four strategic priorities of theology, mission, diakonia and advocacy, and that was a big step forward, he said.

“We have a prophetic ministry in this world and that is why we get involved,” the Palestinian bishop added. He also highlighted the Council’s public statements on new atrocities in Sudan; on refugees and forced migration; and on the situation in the Middle East.

With a view to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, Younan talked about the first stage of intensive talks with the Vatican about marking the occasion together. In this context he mentioned the topic of eucharistic hospitality: “It is not our table to which we invite people at the Eucharist, it is Christ’s table.”

LWF General Secretary Junge Underlines Urgent Priorities

The increasing conflicts within and between the nations was one of the topics raised by The Lutheran World Foundation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, at the closing press conference of the LWF Council meeting in Geneva.

People are increasingly trying to resolve such conflicts with military force, he said. The outcome was then usually tragic, and also highly dangerous for a common future. It was a major, common task of the LWF Communion to show how people could stay together and live side by side despite great differences. “We are called to come together in reconciled diversity,” said Junge, an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile.

Advocacy

Junge made clear that the chief priority of the LWF would continue to be standing up for the marginalized. The LWF must give a voice to the voiceless, or help those who had to live in social



Left to right: LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and Asian region Vice President Ms Eun-hae Kwon at the closing press conference. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

With respect to interreligious dialogue, the LWF president recalled that the LWF had a long history and much experience in the field of *di-apraxis* (the practical reality of living and working together).

Addressing the Council earlier, Younan had emphasized that “All

too often religion has been part of the problem, dividing rather than uniting humanity.” He pointed out, “Our dialogue must work to bring us together to deal with the problems. Religion must be the driving force toward the solution, not the problem.”

isolation because they were infected and affected by HIV, he stated.

Looking back over the Council meeting, Junge referred to the keynote presentation by Dr Volker Türk, director for the Division of International Protection for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He underlined Türk’s view that receiving asylum seekers and refugees was not “an act of mercy alone but something that concerns and commits us all.”

The general secretary particularly stressed the precarious situation around the Nuba Mountains region in Sudan’s South Kordofan state, where more than 100,000 people have reportedly fled their homes as government troops target pro-South sympathizers. A major humanitarian catastrophe is in the making in the region, noted Junge, citing reports of ethnic cleansing.

Reformation Anniversary 2017

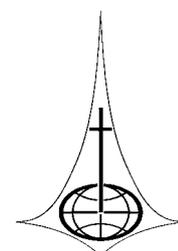
Referring to the Reformation anniversary year 2017, Junge stated that the

aim was for the 500th commemoration planning to be an ecumenical effort.

“We want to approach the Lutheran Reformation as a global citizen. The Lutheran Reformation has gone to all corners of the world,” said the general secretary. “It is no more exclusively northern European. It is going to be a global commemoration.”

The LWF would engage its ecumenical partners in the process for it to be “ecumenically accountable,” Junge emphasized. He pointed out that LWF did not want to “overwrite” the progress made with Roman Catholics in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, or with the Mennonites in the action asking forgiveness for Anabaptists’ persecutions, he said. “We want to build on this and to speak on it anew. We want to talk to churches in the Reformation and not of the Reformation.”

Junge also mentioned that another LWF dialogue partner, the Orthodox, would hold a symposium on the Reformation in 2016.



Visa Refusal

The general secretary noted with concern that the Swiss authorities had refused a visa to a Council member from Liberia. "If that becomes the rule," he said, "we will no longer be able to operate. We are a reliable partner and have made that clear in the 64 years since the LWF was founded."

This refusal of a visa was also taken up by LWF Vice President for the Asian region Ms Eun-hae Kwon. The other youth delegates would have liked to get to know their Liberian colleague, who had already been

refused a visa before the Stuttgart assembly in 2010, she said.

"Unfortunately, today and during the 2010 LWF Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, we, the youth participants, are and were not whole," she underlined.

Role of Youth

A student herself, Kwon underlined the strong role of youth in the LWF. In a rapidly changing time it was important to listen to the voice of young people, she emphasized.

Kwon pointed out that with their knowledge of new media and social

networks, youth could play a valuable role in improving connections between individual member churches.

She noted that at present 11 of the 50 Council members were under 30 years of age. "We come from the seven regions of the communion, from different walks of life. Some are students, some are working professionals, some are artists [but] we are all Lutherans."

According to LWF policy, at least 20 percent of representatives in its decision-making bodies are youth.

LWF Prayers and Solidarity for Churches in Sudan

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) offered prayers and solidarity for the people and churches of Sudan in the midst of "shocking" reports of violence and ethnic cleansing by Sudanese government forces against civilians in the South Kordofan state.

In a 16 June joint pastoral letter to the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and its member churches, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge reminded the SCC and its churches that, "Together with churches around the world, we pray for peace, justice, security, and reconciliation. You will not be forgotten, and you are not alone."

At its 9-14 June meeting, the LWF Council requested the president and general secretary to write a pastoral letter to churches in Sudan expressing concern and solidarity, as outlined in a public statement on new atrocities in Sudan.

The LWF leaders said, "These are times of hope and of despair for

your country." On the one hand, the "free, fair, and peaceful" referendum for independence last January offered prospects for a just peace in Sudan after decades of suffering and war, and "the birth of a new country on 9 July only a few days from now." But, they noted, despair had set in, because the atrocities taking place, especially in South Kordofan and Abyei, have cost so many lives, "caused so much suffering, and threaten to plunge Sudan back into war."

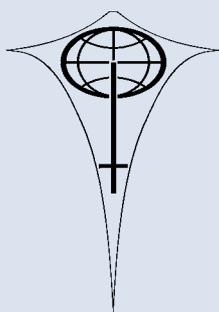
Younan and Junge said it was shocking that people were being targeted because of their Christian faith or Nuba ethnicity, and that Christian churches have been destroyed. They also expressed concern about other violent developments in several areas of South Sudan that "threaten the unity of the nation that is soon to be born."

In the pastoral letter, the Lutheran leaders affirmed the LWF's long-standing accompaniment of the people of Sudan in their struggle for peace, justice and reconcilia-

tion. This includes working through the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, and through various other partnerships involving LWF member churches and congregations in the country and with Sudanese living in exile. They underlined that LWF World Service, the organization's humanitarian arm, would continue to support the people and churches in efforts "to develop the country and to protect those in need especially refugees and displaced persons," Younan and Junge wrote.

The president and general secretary noted that in the Moravian tradition, the biblical watchword for 13 June was from Isaiah 60:18: "Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise."

This passage was written at a time when the Hebrew people had been in distress and exile and yet it contained a message of hope. "It will be no less true for you," the Lutheran leaders concluded.



Published and distributed by:
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