

Lutheran World Information

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Namibian churches' drought relief worker (second right) visiting Onangholo residents in northern Namibia. Photo: LWF/UCC Hartmut Diehl

Cash Payout Helps Households Prioritize Needs in Namibia

Food, Water and School Uniforms for Drought-Affected Families in Amperbo

AMPERBO, Namibia/GENEVA (LWI) – Sophia Fredrick, 40, says she will first use part of the 800 Namibian dollars (USD 80) she received recently to pay her contribution towards costs for the diesel pump that supplies fresh water in her village. Then she will buy food for the family, and if anything remains, she will purchase urgently needed school uniforms, so that her children can go back to school like the others.

Since 24 September, the mother of six sons, aged between 22 and three years, is among village residents in Amperbo, southern Namibia, who are receiving a monthly cash payout of 100 Namibian dollars (USD 10) per head to help families affected by the current

drought meet their basic food and other household needs.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supports the emergency response program coordinated by the three LWF member churches in Namibia. The goal is to ease suffering through immediate relief assistance and build resilience to cope with the disaster at household and community levels.

An estimated 800,000 Namibians out of a population of 2.1 million are severely affected by the worst drought in nearly 30 years. The majority face not only a shortage of daily food but also diminishing pastures for their livestock, and reduced



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Drowning of Migrants: LWF Expresses Its Shock and Distress

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed shock and distress at the tragic drowning of migrants seeking to reach the shores of Europe. In early October, more than 200 people lost their lives off the island of Lampedusa and another 13 people died off the shores of Sicily. Many more were reported to be missing at sea.

Nearly every day, a boat containing desperate migrants attempts to reach the southern shores of Europe. More than 30,000 people have landed in Italy during the first nine months of this year. Tragically, an unknown number of others have died at sea. The majority of these persons are fleeing the violence and oppression in Syria, Eritrea and Somalia.

In 2011, the LWF Council expressed its concern “that many countries, especially some that are wealthy, are not offering as generous a welcome as they could to vulnerable people who have been forced to flee from their homes. 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,” stated the LWF Council.

“It is a disgrace that what was said two years ago can be said again today,” said Junge, “A disgrace that vulnerable people must still desperately risk their lives to seek refuge.”

“In 2013 the LWF Council endorsed the interfaith document ‘Welcoming the Stranger’ which calls on all faith leaders to work for welcoming communities for those seeking refuge on their shores,” stated Junge. “The LWF stands by its commitment to welcome the stranger wherever in the world we are present. We call on European leaders and governments to do the same,” the general secretary said.

Junge gave thanks for the witness of Pope Francis, who chose Lampedusa for his first papal visit outside Rome. The general secretary also commended faith-based organizations that raise up this issue, noting especially the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, which has long spoken out about the terrible consequences of Europe closing its borders. “The call to love and serve our neighbor is a call we share with our sisters and brothers in all the Christian churches,” he said.

“In this time of tragedy and grief,” Junge concluded, “I call upon our member churches to join me in praying for the migrants, for the families and loved ones of those who have died, and for all those who are reaching out a hand of compassion to welcome the stranger.”

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availability of water for domestic use. The first phase of the cash relief program targets nearly 5,000 people, including the residents of Amperbo, some 300 kilometers from the capital Windhoek.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia are jointly coordinating the drought response program, for which a funding appeal has been issued through the ACT Alliance network.

The cash distribution to vulnerable families is supported by the Namibian postal services, NamPost. Experience with paying out cash for basic household needs has also been gained in the past few years through the ELCRN basic income grant (BIG) poverty alleviation project among marginalized rural communities.

The money paid out is stored on a chip card issued to the designated family member, and withdrawals can be made either at the nearest bank or post office. Sometimes the service provider makes a mobile cash dispenser accessible to the remote villages.

In the first phase, USD 150,000 will be distributed to the most vulnerable segments of the communities affected by the drought.

Unemployment

Fredrick and her husband do not currently have any gainful employment.

When the rains were still regular, he used to build fences for goat herds, guarded sheep or did odd jobs. Before the churches' intervention, the children would often go to bed hungry, because they did not have even the most urgent necessities and the price of staple foods has risen enormously.

Fredrick still remembers when the last rains fell in June 2012. And, she adds, it rained very little on that day 15 months ago. Today the area in and around Amperbo looks more like a desert than a flourishing community.

The cash payments are also intended to prevent many farming families from eating their own seeds, otherwise when the rains come again, they would not have enough to plant in their fields. Children, in particular are to be guaranteed a balanced diet as many of them suffer from malnutrition.

Early and Appropriate Response

When LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge recently visited Amperbo accompanied by other leaders from the Lutheran communion, he emphasized the need for early and appropriate response. "We have learned from the experiences in Dadaab in Kenya," he said, referring to the many people who lost their lives two years ago because of the late arrival of emergency aid following prolonged drought in the East and Horn of Africa regions.

"As a church communion we are very well informed by our sisters and brothers throughout the country, and

know what the suffering population most urgently needs. That's why we are helping now," he said during the September visit to communities affected by drought in Namibia and neighboring Angola.

Junge expressed appreciation for the ongoing huge response from the worldwide Lutheran communion, through which it had been possible to finance almost the whole of the first phase of the emergency relief for Namibia. He expressed his hope that through additional grants, the project could be extended to Angola too, which is severely affected by the calamity.

The current drought response by the LWF and Namibian churches' will be implemented until March 2014. The targeted population will also receive psychosocial support, gain knowledge about resilience in responding to future disasters, as well as capacity to advocate for their rights.

The implementing partners point out that unconditional cash interventions unlike in-kind distributions, allow the targeted population to make choices and prioritize spending as households do not have the same needs and priorities even when affected by the same disaster. The current response will be accompanied by an impact assessment to allow for lessons learned for the future.

[Read more about the LWF response to the drought in Angola and Namibia: www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-drought-angola-and-namibia](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-drought-angola-and-namibia)

General Secretary Junge Affirms Lutheran Communion Solidarity with Drought Affected Namibians

Leading a delegation of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to drought-affected regions in Namibia, General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge underlined the Lutheran communion's solidarity with communities struggling to deal with a disaster that has decimated grazing pastures, food crops and water sources.

"We are churches that live with people and look after people," Junge told Chief Hansen and other leaders of the Amperbo community in Hardap region, southern Namibia on 21 September. "We want to be the neighbors of those who suffer. As Christians we have received bread and wine from our Lord as signs of reconcilia-

tion and as food for body and soul. And we want to pass that on," he added.

The LWF delegation visited Namibia, 19-24 September, to assess the drought impact and affirm support for the response coordinated by the three LWF member churches there. The group included Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa

(Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania); Bishop Dr Frank July (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Germany); Ms Colleen Cunningham (Moravian Church in South Africa); Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service, and Rev. Dr Elieshi Mungure, area secretary for Africa at the Department for Mission and Development.

“We will assist you as long as is necessary in these difficult times,” Junge promised, saying the Lutheran communion would continue to provide further support to the suffering population. He said it was good to see that ecumenical cooperation in Amperbo village was such a natural thing, noting for example that the Lutheran delegation was also welcomed by Roman Catholic deacon Thomas Kühelwind, who likewise expressed his gratitude for the assistance provided.

During the visit to Amperbo village, Hitzler pointed out that after World War II,



LWF delegation to Namibia presenting a donation towards the churches' drought relief.
Photo: The Namibian

Namibia had helped Germans with dried fish, grain and flour. That was despite the fact that the Germans had inflicted great suffering on the country through colonialism. “Today we are the ones to be able to help and tomorrow it will perhaps be your turn again in Namibia!”

Conflicts over Scarce Resources

Chief Hansen explained to the LWF delegation that there were more and more conflicts with the surrounding villages over scarce grass for the animals due to the drought.

He thanked the Lutheran communion for its assistance, asserting that God had led the LWF to his village “The great drought has knocked us out for months. I didn’t know how I was going to look after my people. We have places here where there is grass and no water and, vice versa, there are places where there is enough water but no grass for the cattle, sheep and goats.”

(Written for LWI by Klaus Rieth, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wittenberg, Germany, who accompanied the LWF delegation to Namibia)



A young cattle herder, in the background, extremely weak cows looking for pasture. Photo: Dirk Haarmann

LWF Member Churches Working together to Alleviate Suffering

The prolonged dry spell in Namibia has led to a food and water crisis, with some areas facing the worst situation in 30 years. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) launched an appeal to alleviate the suffering of those affected. The LWF says the traditional food aid does not meet many of the humanitarian needs.

The Namibian government says almost 40 percent of the population is at risk of hunger or outright starvation in the six-month period until the next rainy season. The scarcely populated country is facing the consequences of the lowest seasonal rainfall recorded since 1981. The drought has affected

regions in both the north and the south, leaving subsistence farmers without crops to harvest and livestock without sufficient water and grazing.

“This drought has the potential to result in a major disaster unless an early and effective response is initiated immediately,” says Bishop Dr

Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN).

Working with the Lutheran churches in Namibia through the United Church Council of Namibia, the LWF, a founding member of the ACT Alliance, has identified needs together with local communities and government representatives.

Food Aid Less Effective

Recent assessments show that 30 percent of the affected households have had to cut back their meals to one a day. The immediate response to the drought focuses on securing food through cash grants, giving psychosocial support and teaching communities how to prepare for future emergencies.

Rev. Dr Claudia Haarmann and Rev. Dr Dirk Haarmann co-directors of the Windhoek-based Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa Theological Institute for Advocacy and Research in Africa (LUCSA-TARA), say traditional food aid requires a lot of logistic capacity and staffing, and gives no choice to the beneficiaries.

“Unconditional cash interventions allow beneficiaries to make choices that meet their dietary and other needs. And cash provided early can reduce the need for future and more costly interventions,” says Dirk Haarmann.

As in the case of Namibia, the market can provide enough food. However, most of the affected populations have lost their source of food and are in danger of losing their cattle and other livestock. A cash grant can give households faster access to the items they need, and cash retains its value.

“It is not uncommon for people to sell the government maize or non-food items provided by organizations just to be able to buy what they really need. And not seldom are people forced to sell at a reduced price,” says Claudia Haarmann.

The Haarmanns say people have different needs and priorities even when affected by the same event.

Monitored by Researchers

Cash is being given out on a per capita basis, rather than to households. This allows the cash to target the greatest needs. Bigger families will receive more due to the size of the family. Each caregiver will be given a bank card, which can be used to draw money from any cash point.

“We know from previous studies that money given to the female family head is more likely to benefit the whole family. But the husband will receive his share, so as to reduce any risk of intra-household conflict,” Claudia Haarmann says.

LUCSA-TARA is providing expertise and practical assistance for the

response, research, staff training and project reporting.

“We were part of the Basic Income Grant Scheme in 2008, when the church proved to the Namibian government that cash actually improves the situation for the vulnerable,” the couple says.

The pilot project showed that poverty dropped by 37 percent in one year, and malnutrition among children under the age of five decreased from 42 to 10 percent in only six months.

Photo Essay | Launch of the cash response in Namibia: www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-drought-angola-and-namibia



*An elderly woman looks at the wild spinach she gathered for a family meal.
Photo: Dirk Haarmann*

A Powerful Gathering of Women in Madagascar

Thousands Attend National Church Gathering

ANTSIRABE, Madagascar/GENEVA, (LWI) – Fifteen thousand women attended the 14th National Women’s Gathering of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) at the end of August in the central highlands city of Antsirabe, with some travelling three days by bus in order to worship and study together.

The theme of the meeting was “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1: 17).

The triennial gathering, 27 August - 1 September, included 112 women theologians, who led Bible study groups. While the FLM is currently not ordaining women, the women theologians have for a long time been instrumental in bringing the church’s attention to the issue.

During the national gathering, the women theologians reflected together on a number of critical issues and shared their strong commitment to build both an inclusive church and abundance for all God’s people.

“This was a powerful gathering of women,” said Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, secretary for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW), who participated in the gathering.

“Feeling the energy and the movement of so many women during five days was an amazing experience. The multitude of women gave testimony of their motivation to share the good news of the Gospel,” Neuenfeldt added.

No church building was big enough for the worship services during the meeting, so the women gathered together in a field, sitting on the grass, some arriving at seven in the morning in order to get a good place.

“The biblical image of a multitude following Jesus and sitting on the grass came to mind while being there,” Neuenfeldt said.



*Fifteen thousand women attended the gathering in Antsirabe, Madagascar.
Photo: LWF/E. Neuenfeldt*

“The women at this gathering were sitting outside in a camp, listening to the teaching and preaching, and confidently confirming their commitments and active participation in being a lively church in this context,” she noted.

Women form the backbone of the church and Malagasy society, and every congregation has a vital women’s group that meets weekly for Bible study and to share with one another. Two-thirds of the 3-million-member FLM consists of women.

At the national gathering, Ms Agatha Mukagacinya, women’s coordinator for the Lutheran Church of Rwanda and WICAS regional coordinator for the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa, made a presentation on the Christian mission of reconciliation. Neuenfeldt spoke about Christian

women responsibilities concerning climate change.

The FLM general secretary, Rev. Georges Samoela opened the gathering, while the national church president, Rev. Dr Endor Modeste Rakoto led the closing service.

“Personally, it was an experience that warmed my heart,” Neuenfeldt said of the five-day gathering.

“Women around the world are sharing similar struggles and pains, joys and achievements, and it is a gift to be in a communion where these particular contextual issues are shared and become affirmations to our journey together,” she concluded.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church joined the LWF in 1950, and Rev. Rakoto is an adviser to the LWF Council.

Deepening Anglican-Lutheran Relationship

New Committee Will Map Ongoing Cooperation

HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutherans and Anglicans have begun a new series of conversations designed to strengthen relations and cooperation between the two traditions and highlight ways to mark together the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Meeting in Helsinki, Finland, 19-25 September, the first meeting of the new three-year session of the Anglican-Lutheran International Coordinating Committee (ALICC) began monitoring existing relations between the two global communions and encouraging cooperation where formal agreements do not yet exist.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) hosted the meeting assisted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). It was co-chaired by Bishop Mauricio Andrade, Primate of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil, and Bishop Michael Pryse of the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The committee heard regional reports of cooperation and began mapping regional agreements between Lutherans and Anglicans. It will urge churches in both denominations to provide information to assist with the task.

The committee has also initiated a process promoting Anglican-Lutheran collaboration in the observance of the 2017 Reformation anniversary

and hopes to provide study materials based on the LWF's official theme for the commemoration, "Liberated by God's Grace."

The study materials, which will be geared to all age groups, will highlight the 16th century Reformation's relevance today while noting that the process of reformation is ongoing. The committee is centering its anniversary efforts and all its work under the theme "communion in the mission of God."

Bishop Matti Repo of the ELCF Diocese of Tampere invited committee members to the diocese for worship and conversation regarding initiatives taken alongside its partner, the Diocese of Manchester in the Church of England.

The two dioceses cooperate in preparing youngsters for confirmation and in exploring urban theology. Tampere hosts an English-speaking international congregation in one of its churches and provides clergy to assist the Anglican chaplaincy in Helsinki.

"We were encouraged by the exciting ecumenical work of the Church of Finland, as demonstrated by the Diocese of Tampere, especially their confirmation exchange program with the Church of England," noted Canon Dr Alyson Barnett-Cowan, Anglican co-secretary of the committee.

The ALICC was also welcomed to the home of Metropolitan Ambrosius, Orthodox Bishop of Helsinki, who updated members on the current events in the Orthodox Church of Finland and the work of the Sofia Center, where the committee met.

The committee also attended an Anglican worship service in the Old Church of Tampere, presided over by Rev. Tuomas Mäkipää, a Lutheran who was ordained an Anglican priest to the Chaplaincy of St Nicholas in Helsinki in 2010.

"The Anglican-Lutheran dialogues and cooperation have been one of the success stories of the ecumenical movement in recent decades. Several regional agreements have been signed between Anglican and Lutheran churches, with some of them, such as the Porvoo Common Statement and the Waterloo Declaration, having declared full communion between the respective churches," commented Rev. Anne Burghardt, LWF study secretary for ecumenical relations, who serves as ALICC Lutheran co-secretary.

"It was good to see that there is an interest on both sides to deepen this good relationship and to encourage more practical cooperation," added Burghardt.

"The fact that full communion has been reached in many regions enables us to concentrate on reflecting upon the question of how to express our Christian witness together, including cooperation on a grass roots level and in diakonia as well as among institutions of theological education and formation," she noted.

The Helsinki meetings were cordial and fruitful, the committee said. "As this was the first meeting of this group, what was impressive was how quickly people learned to work with each other and how everyone contributed to the plans for the work," said Barnett-Cowan.

The committee continues to meet annually until 2017.



ALICC members in front of the Bishop's house in Tampere, Finland. Photo: ELCF

Nigeria: Caring Hands

Lutheran Church Celebrates 100th Anniversary

DEMSEA, Nigeria/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) celebrated its 100th anniversary in a festive worship service attended by 5,000 people, including representatives from the global Lutheran communion.

Junge encouraged the crowds gathered to mark the 100th anniversary to keep to their baptismal vocation so that as individuals and as a community of believers they stay on the path to peace, justice and reconciliation.

not meet outside their traditional areas because of ancient enmity but when the LCCN began its annual conventions in 1925, various tribes took part in the church meetings.

“It was a huge step towards peaceful fellowship among the various ethnic groups because of the common faith in Christ,” Babba added.

The archbishop said the church has also pioneered programs supporting Christian-Muslim relations in the country as well as conflict management, conflict resolution and mediation efforts.

“The Church must be holistic,” Archbishop Babba said in a 6 October address. “The Church must increase its compassion to a dying world.”

The LCCN’s centennial journey began in January 1913 when pioneer medical missionaries arrived in Nigeria and established a mission at Numan on 5 October, which has ever since been known as Lutheran Day.

By 1955 the church was called the Lutheran Church of Christ in the Sudan but in 1965 it became independent. It has eight dioceses with members in 12 of Nigeria’s states.

Holistic Mission

In his address the LWF general secretary paid tribute to the “cloud of witnesses” who contributed to the church’s holistic mission, including the missionaries, catechists, deacons, council members, ushers, choir directors, singers and teachers.

“Remember also the countless women, who have taught Bible stories to their children, gathered faithfully for prayer and worship, served suffering neighbors in the name of Christ, and interceded for and stayed with the church in times of conflict and dispute.”

Junge expressed his joy at the privilege of celebrating LCCN’s 100



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Africa area secretary, Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure at the LCCN anniversary celebrations. Photo: Felix Samari LCCN/LWF

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed joy at the LCCN centennial, and urged the church’s leadership and other members to remain faithful to its holistic mission amid difficult times.

“Allow yourselves to be nurtured by Word and Sacrament, and remain open to the Holy Spirit’s action in your midst,” Junge told thousands of church members who traveled from across the country to mark the anniversary celebrations on 5 October.

“This is particularly important in times such as these, when there is so much violence, strain in communal relationships, alienation and despair,” added Junge.

The LCCN, which joined the LWF in 1961, has around 2 million members in 2,468 congregations. It marked its centennial with two days of celebrations at Demsa under the theme, “A Century of God’s Faithfulness.”

“Let your words and actions be inspired by that amazing love that has been revealed to humankind through Jesus Christ. Let your hearts continue to burn as you receive God’s presence in Word and Sacrament, equipping you for your holistic mission.

“Let your hands continue to be caring, serving and supporting those who suffer in your midst,” Junge said.

Reconciling Presence

This was a theme echoed in the address of the LCCN Archbishop Dr. Nemuel Abubakar Babba, who reminded church members they are called to be a reconciling presence in a world that is alienated from God. “An important task of the Church is to reconcile the world, which is hostile and lost to reunion and fellowship with our Creator,” Babba said.

He reminded the church members that 100 years ago local tribes could

years of holistic mission, welcoming it as an opportunity to remind church members of the deep connections they share through the LWF.

The centennial celebrations also marked the consecration of Rev. Dr Musa Panti Filibus as bishop of the Mayo Belwa Diocese in northeastern

Nigeria. Filibus, former director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development, becomes the first head of the new diocese.

People of Faith for People in Need

Christian – Muslim Humanitarian Partnership Workshop Endorses Closer Cooperation

AMMAN, Jordan/GENEVA, 10 October, (LWI)

– The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has affirmed its commitment to closer collaboration with Muslims partners in humanitarian response, saying working together “is of mutual benefit especially to people affected by disasters.”

Endorsing a joint statement from the workshop *Working Together: Christian-Muslim Humanitarian Partnerships*, co-hosted jointly by the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) and The Humanitarian Forum in Amman, Jordan, 5 - 8 October 2013, DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler emphasized the meeting had “confirmed that we all have much in common and want to work together people affected by disaster.”

Hitzler added that the exploration for closer cooperation between the LWF and Muslim humanitarian agencies has been successful, and was in line with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) “faith and protection” commitment.

In June this year, the LWF Council adopted a UNHCR-initiated declaration that calls on faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities to strengthen efforts to welcome and support displaced and stateless people across the world, and to stand united against xenophobia.

The “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders” declaration was the culmination of a UN High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Faith and Protection convened in December 2012. The recent workshop in Amman was one of the follow-up initiatives, and it discussed operational issues around

interfaith humanitarian partnerships. The 25 participants were drawn from UN agencies and from international Islamic and Christian non-governmental organizations.

“Partnership becomes a compelling duty on all of us, no one organization can work alone,” noted Dr Hany El Banna, President of The Humanitarian Forum. “We shouldn’t be afraid of building partnerships; fear is a mirage not a reality.”

In her presentation on the theoretical and theological framework for interfaith partnerships, Rev. Dr Simone Sinn from the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) said the major motivation for interfaith collaboration in a humanitarian context was “to establish more effective humanitarian assistance as people of faith for people in need and [to] empower them to fully exercise their rights and work towards justice and peace.”

Sinn added that such partnerships “help to counter animosity and

mistrust between religious communities and create space and visibility for the constructive role of religion in humanitarian work.”

At the workshop, participants discussed follow up activities, which will include joint pilot projects in the respective areas of operation.

The full text of the Joint Statement from the Amman workshop:

www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Jordan%20Workshop%20Joint%20Statement.pdf

Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders:

www.lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-president-endorses-faith-leaders%E2%80%99-historic-affirmations-%E2%80%9Cwelcome-stranger%E2%80%9D



Rev. Eberhard Hitzler (right) and Dr Hany El Banna. Photo: LWF/M. Brown

Emphasis on Protecting Civilians and Respect for International Humanitarian Law in Syrian Conflict

Danish Minister Christian Bach Urges More Aid for Refugees and Host Communities

ZA'ATRI CAMP, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI) – The Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Christian Friis Bach accompanied Crown Princess Mary on a visit in August to the Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan, where The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supports Syrians fleeing the conflict that started at home more than two and a half years ago.

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, Bach, who served the LWF on the Standing Committee for World Service from 2005 to 2011, shared his impressions on humanitarian organizations' work at Za'atri camp, home to more than 120,000 people by the end of September. Jordan hosts over 525,000 refugees from Syria.

LWI: *What was your impression of the quality of services provided at the camp? What challenges did refugees cite, and any suggestions in addressing some of them?*

It is my clear impression that the quality of services provided in the camp is very good indeed. Shelter, food, protection, schools, child-friendly spaces and health facilities seem to be well established and well run, contrary to the situation during my first visit to the camp a year ago.

Some of the main challenges in Jordan stem from the fact that up to 80 percent of the refugees live outside the camps—in rented rooms in cities. They compete with Jordanians for jobs and accommodation, and they pose an enormous challenge to the Jordanian service sector (education, health, water etc.).

In Lebanon, refugees and host communities experience all of the same challenges, but perhaps at an even greater scale. Hence, nowadays 20 percent of the population in the country consists of Syrian refugees. And the latest is that northern Iraq is finding itself in much the



Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Christian Friis Bach
Photo: Ulrik Jantzen

same situation with an influx of more than 60,000 refugees during the past three weeks [in August]. In order to assist these countries in addressing the huge challenges and in avoiding conflicts between local communities and refugees, the international community must provide more aid, not only to refugees but also to the host communities.

What do you see as the most critical role of government today in facilitating the work of international humanitarian organizations (NGOs) including faith-based non-governmental organizations such as the LWF?

The role of the government is twofold. First, we need to keep up the pressure on Syria and armed groups in Syria to protect civilians and respect international human rights and humanitarian law. This includes allowing humanitarian access for all humanitarian actors to all people in need. Secondly, we need to provide funding for assistance to reach everyone in need, i.e. conflict-affected communities and internally displaced in Syria, refugees outside of Syria and host communities where refugees have lived

for some time now and may have to stay for a long time still to come.

How can the partnership between governments, civil society and international organizations be strengthened in order to promote the human rights of all refugees?

Relief efforts must be well coordinated between all the actors on the ground, including governments, civil society organizations and international organizations. The cluster coordination system where a United Nations organization in collaboration with other humanitarian actors takes the lead in coordinating different relief efforts within different sectors (clusters) is very useful. It is my strong hope that all humanitarian actors participate in this coordination system in order to ensure timely prioritization and efficient allocation of available resources. Partnerships are also about sharing information efficiently, including with regard to humanitarian needs and human rights, in order to facilitate appropriate responses based on the comparative advantage of the different types of humanitarian actors.

Another important tool for helping to improve the human rights of vulnerable people is to ensure that humanitarian actors are able to live

up to the humanitarian principles and agreed minimum standards in their programs. We are, for the same reason, supporting ongoing efforts within the

non-governmental organization community to develop joint standards and appropriate certification systems.

Care for Natural Resources and Community Livelihoods in Nicaragua

Lutheran Church “Green Project” Improves Food Security and Economic Opportunities for Rural Families

EL RODEITO, Nicaragua/GENEVA (LWI)—Freidys Velazquez, a shy teen from El Rodeito, Nicaragua, a small, community deep in the mountains without electricity or potable water, smiles when she talks about the future.

“My goals are to live better, help my community live better, and fight to protect our environment,” says Velazquez, whose parents are both Lutheran pastors. “The church has helped me learn a lot.”

Through its so-called “Green Project,” the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE) works in El Rodeito to help community members improve their lives by establishing family gardens, building communal water wells and constructing latrines.

The project’s goal is to strengthen the capacities of church members to live better by promoting sustainable management of natural resources through alternative environmental methods.

The church hopes to nurture organic agriculture and the use of corresponding technologies in its faith communities.

The Green Project involves several rural communities in the Central American country. It has established a farm learning center that uses new techniques for planting, and implemented solar energy and environmental education programs.

The ILFE project also offers opportunities to learn about forest management, fruit tree nurseries, soil conservation, sustainable cooking methods, irrigation systems and horticulture.

The church’s director of diakonia, Angel Aragon, says the project, which was started in August 2011, has been a great success.

“We have made progress in transforming the reality of farm life here in Nicaragua and are helping to develop synergy within communities where we work,” he says.

Education Programs on Climate Change

Aragon speaks proudly of the project’s education programs on climate change, establishment of tree nurseries, production of fruit and forest plants, management of local resources, and cultivation of papaya, coffee and bananas.

“These families are benefiting in ways that are very important to them. The Green Project is allowing them to make a change in their living standards and local practices,” Aragon adds.

“As a church we are fulfilling our mission; we are responding to our communities and we are responding to our brothers and sisters around the world whose prayers and financial support make these projects possible,” he notes.

Velazquez mentions her experience in a communal garden in El Rodeito, where five families from the local church work together on a large family garden.

“Everyone helps maintain the garden by going every afternoon to help water and weed the plants. Right now we have different types of squash, mangoes and oranges.”

Families also receive fruit trees and vegetable seeds to plant at home to assist in diversifying their diets with more nutritious foods, “Instead of eating corn bought in the market, we eat our home-grown bananas and *yucca* (cassava). Now we have the fruits and vegetables we need here at home, our diets have greatly improved and our families are healthier,” Velazquez says.

She stresses the importance of growing one’s own crops in Nicaragua.



ILFE youth members Freidys Velazquez (right) and Alejandra López.
Photo: ILFE/Chelcea Macek

“Before, all of the fruits and vegetables we bought in the market were grown with agrochemicals. We’ve learned through the classes at the Green Project the dangers of using chemical pesticides,” she says. “Now that we are growing our own food, we have control, and everything is grown organically.”

The economic situation of families has also improved. “If we are able to harvest a lot of produce from the garden, we can sell the extra vegetables to community members to help our families make money,” adds Velazquez.

Improved Hygiene and Health

She recalls a time when it was very difficult to acquire water in her community. “The well was not working correctly. It was also being contaminated because people didn’t understand the dangers of human waste being dumped nearby our water source.”

The Lutheran church assisted the community to obtain materials for constructing a safe, accessible well. “The new well assures us that clean water is almost always available.”

Lack of proper disposal of human waste is a key cause of illness in rural Nicaragua. A latrine project is also underway to make El Rodeito homes more hygienic and healthy.

“Right now we do not have any latrines in our community,” Velazquez says. “This project will greatly help better the people’s health.”

Deforestation and forest burning in Nicaragua has resulted in crops drying up more than ever before, while the rains have diminished. “We have to keep planting trees and working together as a community or we will soon have no resources left.”

A Growing Church

The Green Project’s programs have led to open conversations between members of the church and others in the community. Velazquez, whose parents conduct services at home, says the church is growing, with youth joining every day.

“Sometimes we can have over 50 people in our home, participating in worship. Watching the church grow, just as our gardens do, it really is

something very special,” Velazquez concludes.

The El Rodeito community is one of ILFE’s 44 congregations in Nicaragua. There are an estimated of 36 pastors and 60 lay leaders serving the 9,600-member church.

The Green Project, together with the “Food Security Project in Somotillo” encourages ILFE members to live their faith actively by caring for God’s creation, says Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“Through the involvement of young people, the projects promote approaches that help communities relate to the environment in responsible ways. The diverse experiences from the projects offer the Lutheran communion space for sharing and learning, and a good opportunity for cross-regional empowerment,” she adds.

The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope joined the LWF in 1994.

(Contributed by Chelsea Macek, Managua, Nicaragua)

LWF Urges Unity Following Nairobi Attack

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expressed its pain and shock over the brutal extremist attack at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, communicating solidarity with the people and urging the Kenyan government to respond with wisdom and courage.

“We pray for all the people in Kenya, so that they are not derailed from their vocation to live together as different communities, yet with the fundamental conviction that difference is not to be combated,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, in a 23 September letter to church leaders.

Junge wrote to Bishop Zachariah W. Kahuthu of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church and Bishop Dr Walter E. Obare

Omwanza of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, praying that the churches work for unity “so that a public opinion is forged towards togetherness of the people of Kenya in justice and peace.”

Reminding the Kenyan churches of Saint Paul’s exhortation to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21), the general secretary said the attack shows that extremism and violence lead to destruction.

“May the churches’ witness be carried by a voice towards moderation so that extremism doesn’t take away in one weekend what the people of Kenya have been building in committed efforts over the decades,” Junge concluded.

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