

# Lutheran World Information

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Head of LWF delegation Caroline Richter speaks with Yeb Saño at Sunday worship. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

## Spiritual Solidarity with Victims of Extreme Weather Events

### LWF Delegation at the Climate Change Conference in Poland

**WARSAW, Poland/GENEVA (LWI)** – Leaders and lay people from Christian, Buddhist and Muslim religious traditions came together in support of a meaningful outcome to negotiations at the COP 19 United Nations climate change conference in Warsaw, Poland.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation at the latest round of the Conference of the Parties (COP 19) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) initiated an interfaith chain of fasting in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable who are the worst hit by extreme weather events which are increasing in frequency.

More than 190 countries were represented at the 11-22 November

conference, negotiating solutions to global climate challenges. One of the primary aims is to cut CO2 emissions.

Pranita Biswasi who was part of the LWF delegation brought first-hand experience to the global talks in Warsaw: “Cyclone Phailin that hit Orissa, where I am from in India, has left a million people homeless, and destroyed crops, killed livestock, ruined livelihoods. This disaster is a very real thing for my people, and it hurts the poorest most, it is harder for them to recover and rebuild. And our huge disaster, barely a month ago, has already been overshadowed by other disasters, even greater in magni-



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## Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?

*Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* the title of the latest volume in the LWF Documentation series, addresses the many ways in which religion has influenced development either positively or adversely.

It also looks at religious concepts, institutions and practices that inhibit women and young people from broader participation in society.

The publication (LWF Documentation 58) includes essays that were first presented at an international conference on religion and development, organized and hosted by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Mission EineWelt in 2012. The aim was to help the LWF and its partners to reflect further on the value of



religion and religious orientation with regard to the overall well-being of humanity and creation.

The book is available online at [www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-religion-help-or-hindrance-development](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-religion-help-or-hindrance-development)

Hard copies for CHF 15, EUR 12 or USD 15, plus postage and packing, can be ordered at [dtpwpublications@lutheranworld.org](mailto:dtpwpublications@lutheranworld.org)

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tude. These disasters are becoming routine, and they leave a trail of suffering and misery in their wake.”

The urgency of the talks in the Polish capital was highlighted at the beginning of the conference by Philippine negotiator Mr Yeb Saño, whose country was hit by the devastating super Typhoon Haiyan just days before the conference began.

Saño, who had been fasting since the start of the conference, and had shied away from the media, met with the LWF delegation. He thanked the LWF delegation and Lutherans around the world for their support for the people in the Philippines and their call for a satisfactory outcome of the current round of talks.

“Together, we can turn things around,” he said. “In the past few days I’ve been hiding from the media, I’ve never experienced anything like it, I’ve had hundreds of media requests. I didn’t imagine that it would snowball into this, but we feel strongly that we are now in the 19<sup>th</sup> COP and this process has been slow, it has not been functioning as well as we would want it to, so maybe it’s time to reach out to real people, out there in the real world, to fight climate change and turn things around.”

Saño added, “Climate change is something that can only be won or lost at the community level, at the grassroots, it’s not going to be won or lost at the level of ministers and diplomats. Many communities are losing the battle against [climate change] but there is still hope and that’s the reason that we continue to persevere. There is time, but the time is very short, but with all of you we can do this, we can win this battle.”

He thanked the LWF delegation and all others fasting in solidarity, on behalf of the people in the Philippines who are suffering the impact of super typhoon Haiyan.

Caroline Richter, LWF Youth secretary spoke to Saño, expressing the delegation’s feelings about his position and speech in the plenary.

The speech “inspired us to start a fasting chain here in Warsaw, with our own delegation and people from other faiths. Our General Secretary [Rev. Martin Junge] and many other leaders pledged to fast too, and they have all shared the call to fast with the communion, with their constituencies all over the world.”

Richter continued, “We are in a similar situation, we’ve never experienced a wave of solidarity like this. While the long days of work at the conference are exhausting it is so exciting that we can’t sleep. We have brought interfaith representatives together, who have made a worldwide call for fasting and solidarity for climate change. We are united on this, we are moved and

we stand together with you, thank you for spreading the light.”

## Members of the LWF COP19 delegation included:

- Ms Pranita Biswasi, United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India
- Ms Raquel Kleber, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil
- Mr Martin Kopp, Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine
- Ms Matilda Mattson, Church of Sweden
- Ms Rose Stephens-Booker, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Mr Piotrek Sztwiertnia, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland
- Mr Elija Zina, Lutheran Church in Liberia, LWF Council member

The delegation was led by Ms Caroline Richter, LWF Youth Secretary.



Piotrek Sztwiertnia, member of the LWF delegation speaks to an interfaith meeting during the COP19 climate change conference in Warsaw. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

## LWF COP 19 Delegation Fasts for the Poor and Vulnerable

The official LWF delegation to the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 19) decided to fast in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable who are

disproportionality affected by extreme weather events.

The Philippine representative, Yeb Saño, addressed the opening session

on 11 November with a passionate plea for a substantial outcome of the climate negotiations. In solidarity with his countrymen and women affected

by super typhoon Haiyan, he pledged to fast “until a meaningful outcome is in sight.”

LWF member churches have experienced first-hand the increasing and frequent climate change consequences in recent times. The drought in Angola and Namibia, flooding in India and hurricane Sandy in the United

States show that it is the poor and the vulnerable who are disproportionality affected by extreme weather events. For this reason the LWF delegation at the COP 19 decided to join Saño in the fasting.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan along with vice-presidents

from Asia, Europe and North America joined the action on 15 November. The LWF invited member churches to participate in the initiative to fast for one day during the conference in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable adversely affected by extreme weather events, and to call for a meaningful outcome to the climate change negotiations.

## LWF Presents Interfaith Call for Climate Justice to UN Executive Christiana Figueres

On the initiative of the LWF delegation to the COP 19 in Warsaw, religious leaders from Anglican, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches and representatives from Muslim and Buddhist traditions vouched to fast for a meaningful outcome to the climate change negotiations.

On 20 November the LWF delegation officially presented an “Interfaith

Call to Fast for Climate Justice” to Christiana Figueres, UNFCCC Executive Secretary. The call was supported by 28 religious organizations including the LWF.

“People of faith are concerned about the stewardship of creation. We see that the poor and vulnerable are affected the most by the severe weather

events that are increasingly common in our world today,” said Caroline Richter, head of the LWF delegation. “Through the fast, all over the world, people have an opportunity to stand in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable.”

Figueres received the interfaith call to fast for climate justice. She insisted that for the parties to come to a conference with ambitious goals and commitments, politicians need to hear the voice of the people they represent; and that religions can help raise that voice.

She shared with the LWF delegation her understanding of the significance of how religions are standing together, speaking out and taking action together on climate justice. “This is not a sprint, this is a marathon,” Figueres said, and invited the interfaith movement to keep up their engagement also after COP 19 and continue putting pressure on international and national level for the sake of the climate.



*Christiana Figueres speaking with the LWF COP19 delegation. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey*

## “People of Faith Stand Together” for Climate Change

Delegations from the LWF, the international Catholic climate organization CIDSE and the World Council of Churches (WCC) at COP19 hosted a press conference on 22 November to launch a monthly fasting day towards COP20.

Faith groups called for a tangible and ambitious outcome to the climate change negotiations.

“Because people of faith stand together,” said Caroline Richter, head of the LWF delegation to COP19.

This year’s round of talks at the United Nations climate change conference was meant to lay the foundation for the new global climate accord to be agreed in Paris in 2015. On 21 November however, 800 representatives of non-governmental organizations walked out on the conference due to lack of progress.

As disputes over targets to lower CO2 emissions continued, delegates from the major world religions gath-

ered to discuss how to hold negotiators accountable towards a meaningful outcome.

The religious organizations’ Interfaith Call to Fast for Climate Justice handed over to UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres on 20 November invited “those who are capable to fast for a meaningful outcome here in Warsaw as we head to COP20 in Lima, Peru, in 2014, and the urgent cut-off date for a binding emissions



COP 19 plenary session. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey.

agreement for all countries at COP21 in Paris, France.”

Speaking at the faith groups’ press conference, which was joined by Philippine delegate Yeb Saño, Richter said that “fasting is a voluntary effort to reduce. It is a refusal to feast in an unhappy time. When our neighbor suffers, we suffer. And we believe we can do something concrete to change the condition of our neighbor.”

She continued, “As people of faith we urge the international community to put those most vulnerable communities at the center of attention as they talk about the climate crisis. The commitment to preserve human dignity and the integrity of creation needs to be concrete and tangible.”

The co-signers of the Interfaith Call to Fast for Climate Justice will

discuss how they can continue working together as people of faith towards COP20. The monthly day of fasting in the period leading up to COP20 is one of the initiatives in this discussion.



Many of the 15,000 participants at the UN climate change conference are civil society. Photo: Sean Hawkey

“For religious people fasting is a sign of re-thinking how we live our lives, of repenting and of re-committing ourselves to a responsible and sustainable way of life. Did we do everything right? Did we consciously choose how to live? Can we change?” reflected Richter.

“This climate crisis is an existential crisis and people of faith now jointly draw on their spiritual resources in order to respond to this dramatic challenge.”

(Sean Hawkey, accompanying the LWF delegation in Poland, wrote LWI articles in this section.)

[More information on the LWF Youth blog, Facebook and Twitter](#)

[www.lwfyouth.org](http://www.lwfyouth.org)

[www.facebook.com/LWFYouth](https://www.facebook.com/LWFYouth)

[www.twitter.com/lwfyouth](https://www.twitter.com/lwfyouth)

## Typhoon Haiyan: LWF Provides Food, Water and Shelter in Samar Islands

LWF’s local partner the National Council of Churches in the Philippines has set up an operational center in the city of Catbalogan on Samar Island to provide food, water and shelter. Volunteers from local churches are assisting the team that is reaching out to people who lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods following the devastating typhoon Haiyan in early November.

Water purification stations are being established on Samar Island in cooperation with local authorities and specialists from Norwegian Church Aid. A second operational center has been set up in Iloilo municipality on Panay Island, where the LWF is providing food, water and materials for shelter.

As of 27 November, more than 8,600 families across five municipalities in Leyte, Eastern and Western Samar had received food relief.

(Read more on page 11)



A woman cradles her package of rice, tinned fish and cooking oil. Through the NCCP, the LWF is giving priority to the poorest of the poor, female-headed households, and families with disabilities. Photo: NCCP/ACT

# Raising the Lutheran Profile in Slovenia

## Bishop Erniša Awarded State Medal of Merit for Advocating Tolerance

**LJUBLJANA, Slovenia/GENEVA (LWI)** – Bishop Geza Erniša of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia, who recently received Slovenia’s highest state award, said the recognition was a reflection of both his efforts and the church’s work for understanding in the nation.

“We Slovenian Protestants have always advocated for tolerance in dialogue and in dealing with both religious and sociopolitical questions in everyday life,” Erniša said in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*. “And, of course, we continue to do so.”

Erniša said that he was pleased that Slovenians of various religious affiliations and worldviews have congratulated him on the award.

“Being a Lutheran in Slovenia means today being a member of a church that is valued by the majority of people and whose standpoints and contributions on all the relevant issues and challenges facing the churches and society are given serious attention,” he added.

On 30 October, the eve of Reformation Day, the Republic of Slovenia President Borut Pahor, awarded Bishop Erniša the Silver Order of Merit in a ceremony at the presidential palace in Ljubljana. He noted that the Lutheran leader had enhanced the church and the country’s reputation during his 18 years as bishop.

“Bishop Erniša has raised the profile of his church as a reputable institution at home and abroad, as well as in the

community of Protestant churches,” the Slovenian president stated in awarding the state honor.

As a living organism, whose members are also citizens, the Lutheran church must have an impact on the country, while working with civil society, Erniša responded.

“The moral and ethical questions that we confront with the aid of Christ’s social teaching are a constant challenge to society, which has to face many issues relating to human rights, religious freedom and the economy,” he emphasized.

“We Christians are called upon to work together and draw on all biblical and universal human values in order to find the most appropriate responses and solutions,” the bishop stated.

A member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) since 1952, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia has 20,000 members in 13 parishes throughout Slovenia.

Erniša commented that being part of the LWF is an important aspect of the Slovenian church’s identity, and allows the church an opportunity to work with Lutheran churches worldwide to tackle spiritual and material issues.

“Joy in life and the concerns of this world: these are two things I would like to share with as many people as possible in the world,” he said. “I believe that we Lutherans have some good, appropriate answers to these questions.

“That is why I am glad to be Lutheran,” Erniša concluded.



*Republic of Slovenia President Borut Pahor awards Bishop Erniša (left) the Silver Order of Merit. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA*

# Future Theological Discussions Encouraged at LWF-ILC Meeting

## Global Lutheran Organizations Meet in Wittenberg

**WITTENBERG, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)** – Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) have agreed to

encourage the 11 churches belonging to both organizations to act as “a bridge of understanding” between the two bodies.

In a communiqué following their meeting, 12-13 November, in Wittenberg, Germany, the two organizations said that future joint meetings of



Participants at the ILC–LWF meeting in Wittenberg. Photo: Gijsbertus van Hattem

representatives of the LWF and ILC will continue to reflect on the question of dual membership.

With reference to issues of controversy between the two organizations, “The LWF and ILC explained to each other the processes, contexts, and background regarding situations where there is no current agreement,” the communiqué stated. “The LWF and ILC discussed areas where conflict emerged and how future conflict might be addressed in a way that is mutually respectful.”

The LWF and ILC engaged in theological discussions regarding their respective positions, agreeing that future theological discussion could be beneficial. They will continue to share plans for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and consider the possibility of joint action.

Representatives of the two organizations said they were “deeply touched” by the disaster in the Philippines and urged their constituents to contribute to the relief efforts and pray for the victims of the typhoon Haiyan.

The ILC and LWF met under the auspices of a 2005 “Memorandum of Understanding,” by which they agreed to regular gatherings in order to increase mutual understanding between the two bodies and their member churches. LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and ILC chairperson Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt co-chaired the Wittenberg meeting.

The ILC was established in 1958 as an association of confessional Lutheran church bodies that support one another and study theological issues together. Founded in 1947, the LWF currently has 142 member churches.

“Both the LWF and ILC thanked one another and appreciated the frank conversation and transparency shown in the discussion. Both agreed that the conversation was valuable and look forward to the next opportunity to gather. A desire was expressed to meet annually,” the communiqué noted.

The next meeting will be hosted by the LWF in Geneva on 14 January 2015.

## Global Religious Leaders Endorse “Welcoming the Stranger” Affirmations

### LWF President Younan: Apply Justice by Accepting “the Other”

**VIENNA, Austria/GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan joined global religious leaders in signing the historic “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders” that pledge support for refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons, and to work against xenophobia.

The signing took place on 21 November at the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of Religions for Peace held in Vienna, Austria, and attended by more than 600 delegates representing Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim faiths. A representative from each

religion read a part of the document before signing it.

The affirmations developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) following an LWF-led initiative, were launched in June this year, and endorsed by the LWF Council at its meeting the same month.

Younan said the signing of “Welcoming the Stranger” less than a year after its initiation was an emotional event, which illustrated what can happen when religious leaders and politicians work for the good of humanity.

“We are troubled to see that some extremists are excluding the other (the

stranger) on the basis of religious identities,” the LWF president said.

“We are troubled to see that some governments legislate against immigrants at the time our world is becoming a small village. Also to find immigrants coming from Africa and the Middle East running away from their troubled regions to face sometimes death,” he added.

The LWF president said that despite the significance of the signing of “Welcoming the Stranger,” the ongoing plight of refugees and asylum seekers shows that there is a long way to go to change policies and behavior toward the stranger.



LWF President Younan (third left) at the Religions for Peace Assembly.  
Photo Religions for Peace

“This is the reason I continue to call religious leaders in Europe and all over the world to take this document as a guidance and challenge governments and communities that continue to exclude and seclude the stranger,” Younan said.

“Welcoming the Stranger” underscores that welcoming strangers, refugees, the internally displaced and “the other” is a core value of faith. It pledges

that faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of conscience will welcome strangers with compassion, mercy, love and hospitality.

“I will remember and remind members of my community that we are all considered ‘strangers’ somewhere, that we should treat the stranger to our community as we would like to be treated, and challenge intolerance,” the document states.

The document underscores that people flee their home countries because of persecution, violence or exploitation, natural disasters or to provide better lives for their families.

“I will welcome the stranger,” it concludes.

At the Religions for Peace Assembly, Secretary General Dr William Vendley sought the affirmations’ endorsement by acclamation. The religious leaders formally endorsed the document and received a copy.

Religions for Peace is a multi-religious coalition that advances common action for peace among the world’s religious communities.

The “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders” are the culmination of a UNHCR Dialogue on Faith and Protection convened in December 2012 by UNHCR chief Mr António Guterres. It concluded with a recommendation for a code of conduct for faith leaders, which had been originally recommended by the LWF president.

## LWF Receives Nobel Peace Prize Money

### Project to Provide Education Support for Children in South Sudan

**GENEVA/BRUSSELS (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has received a grant of EUR 600,000 from the European Union (EU) to undertake education for war-affected children in South Sudan. During an award ceremony in Brussels on 20 November, the LWF signed a contract with the European Union for the funding that is dedicated from the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize money.

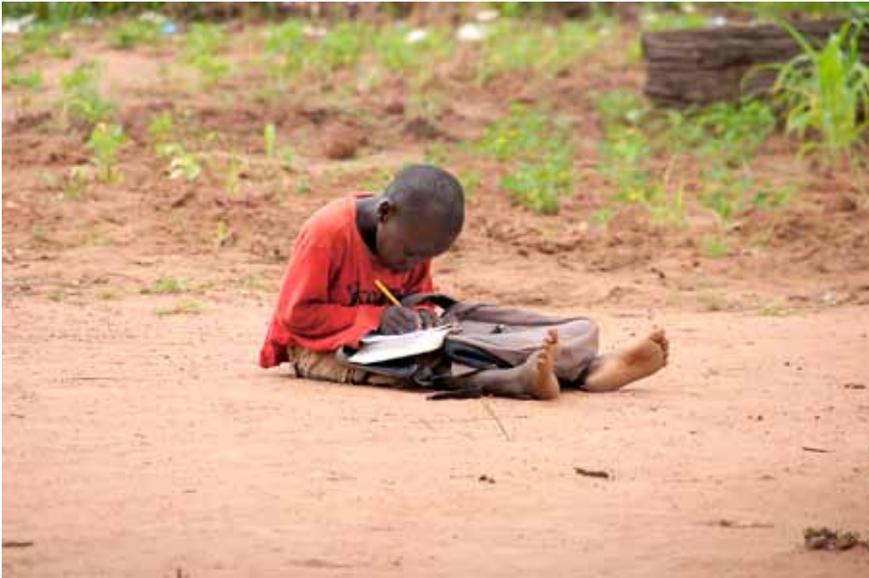
“We are grateful for the opportunity offered through this project,” said Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, LWF Department for World Service (DWS) Humanitarian Director, during the “EU Children of Peace” award ceremony. “The LWF has extensive experience providing education and child sup-

port in conflict zones. Through this project we will be reaching over 5,000 children and offer them hope for a sustainable and peaceful future.”

In 2012 the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize that came with an award of EUR 930,000. The EU decided to top up the prize money to EUR 4 million and use the money to fund humanitarian projects providing education to conflict-affected children in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The EU states that through the project it “wants ‘children of war’ to become ‘children of peace.’” The EU also hopes to advocate for more support towards education projects in the future through the EU Children of Peace project.

LWF DWS Director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler underlined the significance of the EU funding in creating a peaceful environment for children. “Some years back I visited a school in Nimule, a small border town in South Sudan near Uganda. Over 500 children were learning and playing in the compound,” he said.

“It all looked very peaceful until the children shouted ‘Antonov.’ Only seconds later, the first of 12 splinter bombs were dropped on the village. I will never forget the terror in the eyes of the children, who were running in all directions seeking cover. The reality that these war-affected children are facing made a strong impression on me,” Hitzler added.



LWF supports school-age children at the Yida refugee camp in Unity State, South Sudan.  
Photo: LWF/M. Hyden

“The LWF has been working with education and support for children in some of the world’s most precarious conflict zones for many years. We are grateful for the opportunity offered

through the EU project, and we are deeply committed to assisting children in South Sudan become children of peace through this project,” Hitzler explained.

The LWF is among nine organizations chosen under the EU Children of Peace initiative. The 18-month project starts on 1 December and activities will be focused on refugee camps in South Sudan’s Upper Nile and Unity states, which are hosting around 200,000 people who have fled violence in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in neighboring Sudan. A majority of the population in Upper Nile and Unity states are school-age refugee children who are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to violence at community level and to being recruited as child soldiers.

The LWF has been working in South Sudan for several years. The funds from the “EU Children of Peace” will be used to accelerate learning programs and ensure safe school environments, an area which is acutely underfunded.

## Violence in Sudanese States Pushes Hundreds Daily into Refugee Camps

The LWF has been actively engaged in supporting South Sudanese refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) for more than two decades.

Despite the end of civil war and the establishment of South Sudan as an independent country in 2011, violence in the border states continues to push Sudanese into Yida refugee camp in Unity State.

Proximity to the conflict in South Kordofan State poses serious security concerns, and only basic lifesaving and emergency



Young people playing at the Yida refugee camp. The LWF will increase the learning programs and ensure safe school environments. Photo: LWF/M. Hyden



Particular attention is being given to children and young people living in households without adults. Photo: LWF/M. Hyden

support are provided at Yida, which was hosting around 70,000 Sudanese in early December. The South Sudanese government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees began relocating Yida’s refugee population to a new refugee camp, Ajuong Thok , which had more than 6,500 people by December.

The LWF supports refugees in Ajuong Thok by providing education and child protection services to children and young people. The camp, which is designed to hold up to 20,000 people, receives approximately 300 to 400 new arrivals every day.

More LWI News at  
[www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

# Overcoming Impunity for Gender-Based Violence in Colombia

## Lutheran Church Support to People Living with HIV and Marginalized Women

**BOGOTÁ, Colombia/GENEVA (LWI)** – On the first Saturday of each month, about 40 to 50 people meet at the Redeemer Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) in Bogotá. Often, there is a new face joining in the informal conversations about daily life, concerns in the community and finding out more about the group.

avoid new HIV infections; encouragement to people living with HIV to live in dignity and claim their rights; and sustained networking and advocacy with local and international civil society organizations and the government.

“The efforts by the Redeemer congregation are paying off, and other churches are requesting support from

highlighted the impact of sexual and gender-based violence on women and the right to health for people living with HIV in a country that has experienced five decades of armed civil conflict.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supported Rincon’s participation at the CEDAW committee discussions through collaborative work with IELCO’s women’s ministry and the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) program of the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness.



Ros Mary Rincon, coordinator of HIV and AIDS work at IELCO. Photo: LWF/Maximilian Haas

“Walking Together,” an occasional gathering of a handful of people started ten years ago, has grown into a strong support group of and for people living with HIV and AIDS in the Colombian capital. Membership is open to anyone wishing to join irrespective of gender or faith affiliation, and for many individuals and families affected by HIV, it is the only place they can find assistance.

“We strive for zero discrimination on who can be a member of the group so that we can reach our goal of zero new HIV infections in our communities,” says Ros Mary Rincon, coordinator of IELCO’s HIV and AIDS work, explaining the church’s response to the goals of the 2011-2015 global HIV campaign.

The Lutheran church AIDS work includes awareness raising on how to

the Lutheran church to start such support groups,” Rincon said in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*. Colombia has an estimated 190,000 people living with HIV, a majority of who are vulnerable women as they live in poverty, experience sexual and gender-based violence and have limited access to health care, she added.

Rincon was among representatives of 27 civil society organizations who presented the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shadow report for Colombia’s examination at the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 30 September - 18 October, in Geneva, Switzerland. The report titled “A Look at Women’s Rights in Colombia,”

### Holding Government Accountable

The CEDAW committee sought response from the government on various commitments, including its efforts to revise laws that currently make it possible for medical practitioners to impose sterilization on women or girls with disabilities, and those living with HIV.

Progress was being made in strengthening the respective legal framework, government representatives said, but admitted that high levels of domestic and sexual violence exist in Colombia’s context and that women’s reproductive rights are abused.

Rincon welcomed the committee’s call on the government to amend and develop the regulatory framework as well as guidance to ensure that sterilization is carried out with the free and informed consent of all women.

Referring to her own experience, the mother of a four year-old daughter said, “If I was not aware of my rights as a woman living with HIV, the doctors would have forcibly sterilized me in the early stages of my pregnancy.” Today, Rincon’s work with IELCO includes support to vulnerable women struggling to build sustainable livelihoods “as they also deal with gender

and sexual violence, fear, shame and ignorance, and their obligation to provide for and protect their families especially children.”

## Prevent, Investigate and Punish

The armed conflict in Colombia has displaced up to 5 million people, over 10 percent of the population, mostly women and children. The CEDAW committee underlined that “while all civilians are adversely affected by armed conflict, women and girls are primarily and increasingly targeted by the use of sexual violence.”

Citing surveys by the non-governmental organizations Profamilia and the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (NILMFS), the NGOs’ shadow report stated that sexual violence is perpetrated by all armed groups involved in the Colombian conflict.

Still, Rincon expressed hope that peace negotiations between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), begun in October 2012 in Norway and currently continuing in Cuba, will result in a total cessation of conflict.

But, as underlined in the CEDAW committee report, for most women, the violence does not stop with the signing of a peace agreement. It often increases in the post-conflict setting and is exacerbated by failure to “prevent, investigate and punish all forms of gender-based violence,” Rincon emphasized.

Referring to some examples in the shadow report, the IELCO represen-

tative noted that the cases of sexual violence reported in 2010 and 2011 included 84 percent women victims compared to 16 percent men: “a ratio of 1 man for every 5 women.” She underlined the assertion by NILMFS that “The impunity of these crimes is 98 percent, [a figure that] goes together with a high percentage of underreporting, the invisibility of these crimes and the constant fear to denounce them.”

## Advocacy

Rincon expressed gratitude to the LWF for accompanying IELCO in its AIDS work and the struggle for women’s rights and gender justice. She said there is progress in many areas but “still so many challenges in breaking the culture of violence that has become commonplace in Colombia.”

At an LWF-coordinated meeting at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva,

Rincon and Fabiola Tapasco, also from Colombia, shared their impressions about the CEDAW meeting, and churches’ work among marginalized women in the Latin American country. The 30 representatives from church-related organizations at the gathering discussed the challenges in protecting women’s rights, and how church organizations can strengthen ongoing support for peace and justice in the country.

Rincon added that stronger advocacy is needed also with churches, civil society and other UN platforms “to hold Colombia accountable for its obligations to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which it ratified in 1982.”

LWF’s presence in Colombia includes IELCO which has been a member church since 1966, and the Department for World Service country program.



*A leader of a women’s group that is part of IELCO’s diaconal work in Garacolí near Bogotá. Photo: LWF/ German National Committee /F. Hübner*

# Philippines: “The Tree of Life”

## Typhoon Haiyan – A Survivor’s Account

**CATBALOGAN, Philippines/GENEVA (LWI)** – Maria Sol thought her family was prepared for the super typhoon headed towards her home in the community of Basey in Samar Province in the Philippines on 8 November.

They had survived many typhoons before but they were not prepared for the unprecedented fierce onslaught of Typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda, which killed thousands of people and disrupted the lives of millions more, who

are now desperately in need of food, water and shelter.

In the midst of so much death and destruction, Sol and her family escaped almost certain death by clinging desperately to the coconut tree near



Maria Sol and her family narrowly survived typhoon Haiyan. Photo: NCCP/ACT

their house—the “tree of life”— she told a volunteer team of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), which is providing relief assistance to thousands of families affected by the extensive devastation from the typhoon. The islands of Leyte and Samar were the most devastated by the “super” typhoon, which has affected around 12 million people in the Philippines’ central region, and displaced more than 674,000.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is supporting NCCP’s response through ACT Alliance, which coordinates emergency relief for churches and their related organizations globally. An ACT preliminary appeal for typhoon Haiyan seeks to raise USD 14 million to provide families like Sol’s with food, clean water, sanitation and hygiene services, and non-food assistance such as plastic sheeting, blankets and tents. Psychosocial assistance will

help families to deal with the trauma caused by the disaster.

When the storm hit Basey town, Sol said, “It was strange because the typhoon was not just bringing winds, but also a huge swell in the sea.” She and her husband were dumbfounded as they witnessed the water rising rapidly, flooding the area with a very strong current.

Although they were expecting a large amount of rain and strong winds, they never thought that the water from the sea, which is some distance from their home, would ever reach their neighborhood. Soon they realized their lives were in grave danger as huge tsunami-like waves rose rapidly, and they panicked for a while, Sol thinking that their two daughters, aged five and three, were too young to die.

Out of desperation, they swam towards the nearest tree just beside their house as the water rose to a level

of seven then eight feet deep. “It was as if the waves from the ocean were angry, striking time and time again,” she remarked.

## Food, Water and Shelter

When the storm subsided they were surprised that they had survived, saved by the coconut tree. Sol and her family are still struggling alongside their neighbors to survive each day. They need food, water and shelter. But they will forever thank God for the coconut tree beside their house—“a tree of life,” she added.

LWF member churches are in the storm areas where pastors of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines have reported extensive loss of life and much destruction. The Asia emergency hub team of the LWF Department for World Service is working with the NCCP in the city of Catbalogan on Samar Island to ensure coordination in the local procurement and transportation of relief materials.

Additional support by the LWF and its partners to the disaster-affected communities will include provision of construction materials and awareness building and skills development on disaster preparedness and risk mitigation.

*(A contribution by the LWF/NCCP volunteer team in Samar, Philippines)*

**Read more about the response:**

[www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-super-typhoon-haiyan-philippines](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-super-typhoon-haiyan-philippines)

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