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Statement on Welcoming the Stranger

On 17 June 2014 the LWF Council adopted the following Public Statement:

The LWF Council, meeting in Medan, Indonesia 12-17 June 2014, appreciates the affirmations thus far expressed by faith leaders in the *Welcoming the Stranger* statement, launched in June 2013 and endorsed by the LWF Council at that time. Many faith leaders and secular organizations have signed this document which was produced under the strong leadership of the LWF together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other partners.

We see today that Welcoming the Stranger is as necessary as ever before in our world. It is part of our duty to act with love toward those in need, regardless of their religion, gender or nationality. Bearing in mind that migration can sometimes lead to great challenges, we want to focus on the positive outcomes, on the benefits of welcoming strangers:

- In many countries refugees and migrants have enriched the fabric of society;
- In many countries it has been refugees and migrants who have formed the churches there;
- Many churches have received many benefits from the migrants which, in turn, have enriched the whole communion; and
- New ways of living the faith have been brought by migrants and refugees to existing congregations, thereby enriching them.

We note that there are an increasing number of refugees in the world. Whether migrants, refugees, or those marginalized, all need our solidarity and support.

Many of them need housing, jobs, and education. We have to continue to address these needs. We recognize that there is a connection between the economic situation in a country and the preparedness to welcome strangers. We recognize that we have to work to avoid the development of tensions between the citizens of a country and the incoming migrants. All persons in a country of refuge, "including the stranger, are subject to its laws and none should be subject to hostility or discrimination." (*Welcoming the Stranger*, 2013).

How can we as Lutherans, as Christians, react to this challenge?

- We can tell the story of the Holy Family who were a refugee family shortly after the birth of Jesus;
- We can tell of the strong call in the Bible for all people of faith to welcome the stranger;
- We can tell the stories of our fathers and grandfathers, our mothers and grandmothers who have often been migrants themselves or received migrants into their communities;
- We can tell the story of the LWF which has supported refugees from its beginning and ever since with tangible assistance, such as food, shelter, education, etc., and other forms of care;
- We can tell the various stories of former “strangers” who became a blessing for their societies;
- We can confess that we have not done enough. We should have greater confidence in the support God will provide: God will give us all that we and they need;
- We can recognize that it is often the poorest countries in the world that have been the first to take up and welcome refugees from other poor nations; and
- We can stand in solidarity with the communities where the newcomers are and help them address the burdens and fears of welcoming the stranger.

Therefore it is urgent that we encourage our congregations and all people of faith to build their relationships with the “strangers” among them, and to be more open, to have more faith, and to trust God’s own support.

Medan, Indonesia