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WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2013: “1 FAMILY TORN APART BY WAR IS TOO MANY”

Message from LWF World Service Director Eberhard Hitzler

The past year has seen an increase in the number of armed conflicts, resulting in a growing numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons—over 45.2 million people by the end of 2012. For The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the conflicts in Syria, Sudan and South Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been, and still remain a major concern for our global humanitarian response.

The theme for the 2013 World Refugee Day, “1 family torn apart by war is too many,” resonates in the faces of mothers, children, elderly men and women seeking immediate shelter, protection and safety in refugee camps managed by the LWF in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

With this theme, we are reminded of just how quickly a family’s life can be torn apart by war, changing the lives of children and parents forever. For nine-year-old Savid and his brother Mohamed, an artillery attack on their village in 2012 forced the boys and their father to flee their home in Sudan’s Upper Nile state. And that was the last the boys heard from their mother, two brothers and a sister who were at a wedding in another area when their village was attacked. Exhausted, afraid and desperate for their mother and siblings, they joined other villagers trekking to seek refuge in neighboring South Sudan.

At the Yusuf Batil refugee camp in Maban county where the LWF provides education and child protection services, the two brothers live with their grandparents and their uncle’s family, while their father works in a nearby town as a cart puller.

Children comprise more than 50 percent of the world’s refugees and internally displaced people, many of them still longing to be reunited with their loved ones.

As one of the world’s largest faith-based humanitarian organizations, the LWF supports children like Savid and Mohamed by ensuring care by relatives, community members or by seeking alternatives that provide some semblance of a family unit. LWF–managed schools in refugee camps provide a secure learning environment for children including child-friendly spaces and psychosocial support.

Through its Department for World Service, LWF expanded its operations in 2012 in the countries with a high influx of refugees including Uganda, providing support and a secure environment to an additional 250,000 people.

Reaching out to families torn apart by conflict remains a practical expression of LWF's commitment to serve people in need irrespective of religious affiliation, race or gender. Every life, each family counts. As Christians we want to protect children and their rights for a future in dignity.

On World Refugee Day, we are reminded that one family torn apart by war is too many. More than ever before, LWF World Service is committed to providing a caring and secure environment for refugee children and their families in Jordan, Mauritania, South Sudan and many other parts of the world where we are operational.

One family torn apart by war is too many. We are grateful to churches and people around the world for the continued support to LWF's commitment to provide hope for families torn apart by conflict.

Geneva, 19 June 2013