



Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration

Response to Testimonies

Bishop Munib A. Younan President, Lutheran World Federation

Ecumenical Event in Malmö Arena

Monday, 31 October 2016

It brings me immense joy to be here today, bearing witness to the work of the Holy Spirit sowing unity among the followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, in the words of Martin Luther, "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in unity with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Today, in Lund and in Malmö, we are experiencing the modern miracle of the Holy Spirit as the disciples experienced it in my hometown Jerusalem two thousand years ago. We thank the Triune God that we are moving from conflict to communion.

Our historic gathering today is sending a message to the entire world that strongly held religious commitments can lead toward reconciliation rather than always contributing more conflict to our already troubled world. When religious people work for unity and reconciliation, religion can promote the flourishing of all human communities.

I have listened carefully to your testimonies. They have cut me to the heart. In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul said of the Body of Christ that "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it." In the same way, "if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor. 12.26). Today, each of us who have heard your testimonies are suffering with you, even as we honor the many ways God has worked through you to address the needs of your neighbors.

Pranita, I thank you for challenging us with the notion that climate justice is not an isolated concern. The changes we are seeing in the climate affect all of us, starting with the most vulnerable. Climate justice therefore involves intergenerational justice and gender justice. The churches have a strong role to play in shaping climate policy. You and many young people have converted us older leaders to the cause of confronting climate change. I ask all of you to keep working for change. Never keep silent. As the Psalmist says, "the earth" is the Lord's. Climate change is a question of justice for God's creation.

As the LWF Council met in Bogotá in 2012, we heard the cries of the Colombian people from all parties and groups. Msgr. Fabio, Catholic and Lutheran leaders in Colombia have always encouraged peaceful reconciliation of the 52-year-old

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civil war in that country. As we greet those who have accepted a negotiated peace, I plead with the Colombian people: give peace a chance. Give your people the chance to live in dignity and justice. Do not allow weapons and their greedy merchants to ruin your life. Only peace will bring a future of abundant life. We know that the vast majority of people in Colombia want nothing to do with fighting and war. Thank you for raising the challenges facing indigenous communities in particular: those people who were there before modern boundaries were drawn around them and modern ideologies ensnared them in conflict. May they also have peace and rights in their land.

Our sisters from Burundi and South Sudan, Marguerite and Rose, have reminded us of the high cost children pay in times of conflict and displacement. Children constitute about 41 percent of the world's 43 million refugees. Close to half of all refugees are women. I am a Palestinian refugee whose parents are from Beer Sheva. All refugees are my sisters and brothers in humanity. My family was poor and displaced, but that the church embraced us. I still have the taste of the hot chocolate that the Lutheran World Federation sent along with the food to strengthen us. The churches in Jerusalem educated us, nourished us in faith, caring for our spiritual and material needs. The Lutheran church empowered us for justice. I call all churches in the world to "Welcome the Stranger Among Us," as the UNHCR document says. We are committed to educate and empower all refugees and all people so they can return and build up their own civil society. In addition to proclaiming the Gospel of God's embracing love as we heard from our sister from Burundi, we challenge each state in the world as Micah says "to do justice" for all communities experiencing injustice! (Micah 6.8) Set aside political interests and work for the dignity of every child of God.

We will soon hear from Bishop Antoine from Aleppo. It is vital today that we speak on the challenges facing Christians in the Middle East. You, in Syria and Iraq—along with Christian communities in Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh—have taught us the real meaning of martyrdom. You are our role models. While we do not wish to die for our faith, our prayers are with those communities coming under increasing pressure and persecution. Christians living in difficult contexts yearn to be integral parts of their societies, equal citizens with equal rights and responsibilities, embracing diversity. For all of you, Jesus' message is clear: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12.32).

Today, we have heard your voices yearning for justice. Since we are liberated by God's grace, we have no option than to work for justice. There can be no peace in this world without justice. As you have spoken with one voice, so our churches must speak with one voice, aligning with all people of good will to form a symphony of justice disturbing all who would promote oppression. I ask each of you to pray for my country and for the just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Pray that God's will of justice will be done. Pray that Jerusalem should be a city shared by 3 religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and two peoples—Palestinians and Israelis. Let justice spread throughout the Middle East and to the corners of the earth.

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Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote: "Our conversion to the Lord implies. conversion to the neighbor." As we meet here, Catholic and Lutheran, with many other ecumenical guests, the Holy Spirit challenges us to new beginnings. I am confident that our common purpose will be found not just in theological dialogue, but in the practical witness, the martyrria, of prophetic diakonia. The LWF enthusiastically embraces the agreement between Caritas and World Service for working together to alleviate human suffering, whether caused by natural disasters, political oppression, systemic poverty or communicable disease. I am proud to answer God's call with you so the world can see how Lutherans and Catholics love one another and serve their neighbors, so the world may believe. May God bless you; we pray that God will bless our deepening relationship with one another.