**Joint statement by LWF Vice-Presidents for Europe
on the occasion of the** solidarity visit by
Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien and Bishop Dr Frank Otfried July
to Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny

The refugee question is a great challenge confronting us at the present time and probably for years to come.

As Vice-Presidents of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for Europe, we have met together in Budapest, 2-3 October, in order to thank the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary and Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, Vice-President for Central Eastern Europe, and to support him and his church in their efforts to enable refugees to be received appropriately in Hungary, too. In particular we have personally witnessed the diaconal activities of the Lutheran church in Hungary during this crisis. We encourage all Lutheran churches to do their utmost to provide for incoming refugees in a Christian way.

Our Lutheran churches in Europe represent around 40 million members. We are part of a worldwide Communion of 72 million Lutherans, who are guided by Christ’s words: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

We understand this to be a challenge for the whole of Europe and encourage all European governments to confront it together. We are also grateful for the enormous efforts being made by countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

The many different experiences with open borders in the whole of Europe call us today (celebrated in Germany as the Day of German Unity), exactly 25 years after the end of the division of Germany and Europe, to take responsibility for dealing with these profound upheavals. Fences and walls are no way to shape a good life together for people.

We expect all European states to receive refugees and find ways of meeting this common challenge for the long term.

Concern for refugees has characterized the work of The Lutheran World Federation from its very beginnings. As Lutheran churches, and in cooperation with others, we strive to enable refugees to live in peaceful environments and in conditions that are as fair as possible.

We would therefore like to increase our efforts to assist those who come to our countries. The Lutheran World Federation is currently supporting over 2 million refugees worldwide. The Lutheran churches will allocate over EUR 200 million for refugee assistance in 2015. Besides financial support that covers primarily food and housing, blankets and heating for the winter, it is particularly important to extend a hand of welcome.

We appeal to the countries from which the refugees come to take up peace negotiations and create the conditions for a life in safety. We remind the governments and rulers of these countries of their responsibility before God and humankind to finally do their utmost to ensure that no one needs to leave their native land. We call upon the global community to take its responsibility in this respect.

3 October 2015

Budapest, Hungary

*Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien, Church of Norway
LWF Vice-President for Nordic Countries*

*Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary
LWF Vice-President for Central Eastern Europe*

*Bishop Dr Frank Otfried July, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany)
LWF Vice-President for Central Western Europe*