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Message from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Africa Pre-Assembly Johannesburg South Africa 06 to 10 February 2017

“From his fullness we have received, grace upon grace” (John1:16)

Preamble

We representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Member churches in Africa, in preparation for the LWF Twelfth Assembly and the celebration of 500 years of the Reformation in Windhoek Namibia, held our Pre-Assembly at the Premier Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa, from 6-10 February 2017, under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace”.

We appreciate the presence of the LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, former LWF Vice President for Africa Ms. Angelene Swart, former LWF Vice President for Africa who is currently an LWF Council Member and the Namibian Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare Bishop Dr. Zephaniah Kameeta, former LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and two former LWF DMD Directors Rev. Dr. Peri Rasolondraibe and Bishop Dr Musa Filibus. We were equally blessed and appreciated the presence of ecumenical guests, particularly the moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, Dr. Agnes Abuom and a salutation visit by representative of the Minister of Social Development and the Religious Relations of South Africa Ms. Mayathula Khoza and other guests.

We had diverse presentations and reflections on different aspects of the three sub themes of the Twelfth Assembly – “Salvation – Not for Sale”; “Human Beings – Not for Sale”; and, “Creation – Not For Sale”. We also received messages from the Women and Youth delegates at the Pre-Assembly.

We appreciate the opportunity for fellowship and to be nourished spiritually through Worship with Holy Communion, morning and evening devotions, bible studies, songs and prayers. Hence our Pre-Assembly was filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The message of liberation by God’s grace evokes in us, a response of gratitude to care for one another and the whole creation.

We acknowledge and strongly affirm the work of the LWF in responding to global human suffering and the accompaniment of member churches in their various contexts.

We discussed at length several issues particularly affecting Africa but also the world at large and resolved as follows:

1. Commercialization and Commoditization of Creation

We noted with deepest concern that human life and creation is increasingly commoditized and commercialized for selfish reasons. In this way, every dimension of creation entrusted unto us and human life is endangered. It is disturbing that even the message of God's grace and the ministry of the church are being commercialized as though it is something for sale.

We therefore:

- Decry the excess destruction of natural resources including the misuse of land for commercial purposes only, declaring that human destruction of creation is self-destruction because humans are an inseparable part of creation.
- Are concerned with the notion of carbon emission compensation, whereby people could pay for the pollution they make, that is to say, pollution is now permissible. We call for the prevention of such emissions.

2. Mission Work/Decline of Christianity

We noted the concerns expressed about the decline of the church in the Western world and the increasing level of negative consequences of secularization on the Gospel message and ask for prayers on these developments.

At the same time, delegates called the attention of African churches to the developments in the Western world and what lessons to learn from their struggles.

We therefore:

- We commend the efforts of some churches to start mission work and accompany sisters and brothers in the West.

3. Theological Education and Ministerial Formation

We noted the urgency to bring contextual realities and contemporary issues into theological training and ministerial formation in Africa. Pastoral formation today must integrate the social, political and economic dimensions and the changing landscape of theology. Content training within the classrooms needs to be strategically connected to the life of the congregations. We further observed with concern the decline in number of students willing to engage in pastoral training particularly due to economic reasons.

We therefore:

- Call on member churches to critically re-examine their models and systems of theological education and ministerial formation.
- Encourage theological networking in the Communion and ecumenically.
- Urge member churches to motivate pastors and take due regard of their welfare.
- Advise churches to strengthen efforts at local resources mobilization for institutional sustainability.

4. Refugees

It is with great sadness we noted that some of the countries of the world are today too busy building walls of separation and refusing to welcome refugees. Equally we noted with great sadness that even within the Africa region people are denied the possibility of movement between countries.

We therefore:

- Acknowledge and commend the Communion Office for the good work amongst and for the refugees and the displaced people regardless of their religious affiliations.
- Commend African countries that open their borders to receive refugees and displaced people.
- Call upon the USA, France, UK and other European countries to open their borders and build bridges to welcome the refugees, remembering that they were also refugees at one time or another and still could become refugees themselves.
- Strongly condemn the unabated annexation of Palestinian land by Israel. We see and understand it to be an effective means of robbing herself of a two-state co-existence. We call upon the Israeli government to respect the 1967 border agreements.
- Call upon African Union leaders to allow free movement of people and goods within the continent.
- Remind governments of their responsibilities and commitments to protect, promote and fulfil their obligations under international law in international treaties.
- Call upon Churches to raise awareness concerning the perils of irregular, unnecessary migration and accompanying the returnees to restart their life.

5. Women's Message

We noted that women's ordination continues to be a challenge. While acknowledging that a lot of progress has been made, yet the journey continues. As a gift for the church we also noted that in many places, they are ordained but not really allowed to exercise their pastoral ministries in the parishes.

We therefore:

- Urge churches to continue ordaining women and support them to carry out their ministerial services.
- Advise churches to seriously support theological education for women.
- Encourage churches to promote Gender Justice in Church and Society and the inclusion of women in leadership.

6. Youth Message

We were challenged by the message of the youth who pleaded that the social evils they are struggling with should not only be left to the governments and secular organizations. We received with appreciation the report of LWF Africa Youth delegation to the UN Conference of Parties on Climate Change and commend the LWF in supporting these initiatives.

We therefore:

- Call upon churches to step up action in addressing the social vices affecting the youth such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, forced marriages, school drop outs, and poverty.
- Strongly advise churches to create space including intergenerational dialogue to engage and accompany the youth in dealing with these issues.
- Urge churches to develop mechanisms for strengthening youth leadership development and participation in the church.
- Remind African governments their obligation of ensuring the implementation of policies that create conducive environment for job creation, employment and entrepreneurship.
- Advise member churches to encourage and support initiatives aimed at building the capacity and participation of youth in addressing the challenge of climate change.

7. The Reception of Ecumenical Agreements

We were reminded of the fact that “to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical.” Thus, we were inspired by the way the 500th Anniversary celebration of the Reformation is being commemorated ecumenically and jointly.

Hence we:

- Commend the LWF for the past and on-going ecumenical dialogues and various agreements reached.
- Appreciate the ongoing theological dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and other denominations.
- Rejoice at the ecumenical celebration of these agreements at grassroots level, making it a reality in their daily lives.
- Encourage churches to sensitize and support members in general on these ongoing dialogues.

8. Peace, Justice and Reconciliation

We were so distressed at the increasing level of violence globally and in Africa in particular, some of which even happens within the churches. We declare that human life is sacred, thereby rejecting any form of violence and injustice.

We therefore encourage:

- The churches to prioritize issues of peace and justice in their work.
- Member churches to stand strongly against the injustices promoted by any government, religious body or out laws.
- Churches to be the voice for those whose voices are not heard or ignored.
- Member churches to work out processes of conflict resolutions and training.
- Churches to strengthen interfaith relations through inter-religious dialogues for sustainable peace building.

9. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

We welcomed the UN initiatives through the SDGs and appreciated LWF efforts to sensitize and accompany its member churches to clarify their roles in implementing these goals. We see these goals having direct connection to the biblical mandate to care for creation and humanity that the churches have been carrying out through history, many of our church programmatic work today and the LWF Twelfth Assembly theme.

We therefore:

- Strongly advise member churches to integrate these goals into their diaconal services.
- Encourage the LWF to step up efforts in building the capacity of member churches in implementing and monitoring the SDGs in partnership with governments and civil society organizations.

10. Concluding Remarks

We appreciate and applaud the LWF communion office support and accompaniment towards organizing this Pre-Assembly. We commit ourselves to the implementation of these proposals in partnership with governments, ecumenical partners and other civil society organizations.

Liberated by God’s Grace, we entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit to enable us to remain firm in the faith in Christ and the care, healing and reconciliation of the whole of creation.