LWF National Committee Strengthened to Enhance Communion of churches in Indonesia

In conjunction with the visit of LWF General Secretary and Asia Secretary in 2000, LWF member churches in Indonesia were encouraged to establish a LWF National Committee. The LWF National Committee in Indonesia (NCI), established in 2000, has performed its tasks as stipulated by the LWF to:
• Strengthening relationships, unity and cooperation between LWF and among member churches
• Retaining the right of direct communication between LWF and member churches
• Presenting an annual report on its activities to the LWF Council

The daily work of the Committee has been implemented by its Executive Secretary in consultation with its Board members and accompanied by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD).

The work of the LWF NCI has also been developed since the outset. Having existed for 10 years, the LWF DMD and member churches in Indonesia felt that an evaluation is due. A “Workshop on Evaluation of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia” was organized in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra, from January 19-21 by the Board of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia in cooperation with LWF DMD Capacity Development Team from Geneva (Asia Secretary, Secretary for Human Resources and Development and Coordinator for Capacity Development).

The purpose of the workshop was to assess the work of the LWF NCI from its inception – to ascertain the results and the effectiveness, efficiency and relevancy of its programmes. The outcome will form the basis for future planning and structure of cooperation between the Indonesian LWF member churches to strengthen the NCI to carry out the mandate.

The workshop was attended by Bishops, General Secretaries and women representatives from every member churches in Indonesia, including the Rector of Nommensen University Medan, local consultants for the scholarship evaluation and LWF Council members in Indonesia. Participants took great interest in the work of the LWF NCI and were active in the discussions. The atmosphere were highly positive during the discussion with a general feeling that member churches in Indonesia should contribute more actively to the strengthening the LWF NCI.

After much deliberation, participants unanimously declared that the work of the LWF NCI should be further developed to enhance the communion of LWF member churches in Indonesia. They acknowledged that the LWF NCI is an important tool to strengthen unity and cooperation among the 12 LWF member churches in Indonesia that has a total membership of about 5.5 million. It enhances relationships between churches, and organizes programmes and projects that are helpful and relevant to member churches in Indonesia.

Participants reaffirmed that the position of a full time LWF NCI Executive Secretary should continue. A suitable person will be appointed from among the member churches to fill this position and the sending church will be responsible for his/her monthly salary. All member churches in Indonesia have pledged their commitment to contribute to other expenses for the running of the office. A system will be worked out by the LWF NCI Executive Board on how to distribute these costs in a fair way among the member churches.

The strengthened LWF NCI, together with the support of its newly appointed coordinators for Diakonia and HIV/AIDS, will help churches in Indonesia to strengthen their capacities in handling their projects and programmes.

The LWF Department for Mission and Development, through its capacity development programme, is committed to accompany the activities of the LWF NCI to develop the capacity of churches in the various aspects of their holistic ministries.

Rev Dr Ginda P Harahap
ASIA Secretary
Attacks on Churches in Malaysia over the use of the word “Allah”

On January 8, 2010, three churches in Malaysia were attacked with firebombs perpetrated by irresponsible persons. These churches (the Roman Catholic Church, Assembly of God and the Brethren) are located within Petaling Jaya. The only comfort is that there was no loss of life in these acts of insanity.

While police investigations are under way to determine the motive behind such heinous crimes, it is widely believed that the attacks were a response by some extremists to the High Court ruling on 31 December 2009, which permits the Catholic Church to use the word ‘Allah’ in its internal publication, The Herald. Two years prior to the High Court judgment, both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, theologians, historians and academicians have generally spoken in support of the fact that the word ‘Allah’ is not used exclusively by Muslims. Interestingly, even the Islamic Party of Malaysia (a political party) has issued a statement in support of the High Court’s judgment.

On the morning of January 9 (Saturday), arsonists tried to set fire to the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Petaling Jaya, one of the oldest congregations of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). By God’s mercy, the petrol bombs missed the targeted windows, and thus causing only minor damage to the exterior walls. A police report was immediately lodged and the police forensic team arrived promptly to investigate the incident.

In the interviews which I gave to the press following the incident at Good Shepherd, I called upon members of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia not to give in to fear. Instead, we must return tomorrow to our respective churches for worship and prayer, for this is our Christian way of life. I also informed them that Lutherans from around the world are praying for us and standing with us in the midst of these troubles.

But fresh attacks on churches occurred again on Sunday, 10 January; fortunately, the affected churches suffered no major damage or no one was injured. What was more disturbing was the attacks were no longer limited to the Kuala Lumpur Petaling Jaya area. In fact, the oldest Anglican church in Malaysia and a Catholic church, both in Taiping (Perak) were petrol-bombed. A Baptist church in Melaka was splashed with black paint. Even a mission school in Perak was targeted.

The Metro Tabernacle Church was worst hit – the ground floor of its three-storey building was completely gutted, while the other three churches suffered minor damage.

Not all was doom and gloom. In the face of further possible attacks, Christians from all traditions returned to their respective churches for worship and prayer that Sunday. Among the Lutheran congregations, worship attendance was as usual, and I must thank all our members for their courage to gather for worship as we have done in the past. We must never bow down to such intimidations and allow fear to disrupt our Christian way of life.

These waves of fresh attacks prompted churches, political parties and civil societies to come together to find a solution to prevent the country from spiraling further downward. One such meeting was hosted by our church, and held at our own Lutheran Centre in Petaling Jaya. This close-door dialogue was attended by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the People’s Coalition (Pakatan Rakyat), members of Parliament, state assemblymen and church leaders. One of the outcomes of the session was the call to the governing authorities to initiate the much needed inter-faith dialogues aimed at promoting understanding and peace in the country. During this period, I have received many emails from churches around the world pledging their prayer support for the church in Malaysia. One of them comes from the Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Bishop Younan, an Arab Christian, met Datuk Seri last October in a Muslim-Christian dialogue in Georgetown University. In his letter, Bishop Younan argues that the word ‘Allah’ has been freely used by Arab Christians for nearly 2000 years! He further urges Datuk Seri and fellow lawmakers to safeguard the freedom of worship for the Christian community in Malaysia.

I would like to thank all of you for your solidarity and prayer support as our nation tries to pick up the pieces, and finds a peaceful and long-lasting solution to the present religious tensions.

Please continue to pray for the situation in Malaysia:
1. That all these horrible attacks on churches, schools or other places of worship will end
2. That inter-faith conversations at all levels of the society be held to promote understanding and peace in the nation.

Finally, it is important for me to share this heart warming story to you, and I hope this story will be retold many times in our daily conversations. One of our congregations in Petaling Jaya is located just next to a mosque. That Sunday, just as our worship service was about to start, three Malay gentlemen walked into the church. They identified themselves as leaders from the adjacent mosque, and gave their affirmation to the church of their continual friendship. They further assured the church that it is safe to continue with our services and ministries.

In response to such kindness, I urge members to go and do likewise to our Muslim neighbours, our Muslim colleagues or our Muslim classmates, and affirm our friendship with them. This is the way of peace. This is the Christian way, and the only way we know.

Rt Rev Philip Lok
Lutheran Church in Malaysia

P.S. According to local newspaper, as of February 3, “19 people had been arrested for their roles in the attacks on churches, mosques and Muslim prayer halls - which have been pelted with Molotov cocktails, stones, paint and severed pig heads” (Ed)
The Passing Away of President Benjamin Lasegan, LCP

We bring you the sad news of the passing away of Rev Benjamin Lasegan, President of Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP). He passed away on December 30. His wake took place at the Baguio Memorial Chapels with the burial on Monday, January 4. He has been undergoing dialysis for renal problems and succumbed to his 3rd stroke. Please remember his family and LCP in our prayers.

A meeting by the LCP Board on January 16-17 has decided to work towards holding a party convention in October this year. (LCP)

Green Christmas, Youth Desk of JELC India

The Youth Desk of the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church called on its congregations to celebrate Green Christmas to express its solidarity with the dying eco system. A big Climate Justice Peace Rally was organized on 29 December 2009 in Koraput, Orissa which drew the attention of many as this was the first of its kind in Koraput town. Youth from different congregations of JELC numbering 500 took part in the rally. The event also received good media coverage.

The Youth of Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church committed themselves to continue in their response to climate call and to stay as active friends of the Earth. Congregations were also urged not to cut down Christmas trees, not to have noisy Christmas celebrations, use vehicle as less as possible and to avoid using plastics completely. They also expressed deep concern over the increasing deforestation in Koraput district and appealed to the communities to plant as many trees as possible to bring back the greenery. The deteriorating water situation in Koraput was also raised as a serious concern because of lesser rain due to climate change.

Later in the evening, nearly 300 youth representing different congregations of JELC took part in the Christmas Carol under the theme: “Peace to Earth”. The Bishop of JELC, Rt Rev Subas Chandra Gouda, delivered the Carol sermon while Mr Amar Thomas, treasurer of JELC, spelled out the church’s eco-mission agenda and its future course of action. The honorable Member of Legislative Assembly of Koraput, Mr Raghuram Padal, shared his greetings on the occasion as well.

Environmental concern is one of the 7-Mission Point Programme of JELC. The Youth Desk has charted out a series of workshops and programmes to address the issue of water and climate change for this year and the years to come.

Angelious Michael
Youth Desk, JELC, India
FMEEC Votes to Support Women’s Ordination

Harissa, Lebanon – (Jan. 12, 2010)

Ordaining women as pastors to serve Middle Eastern churches took one step closer to becoming a reality today. Delegates at the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) voted unanimously to adopt a statement in support of this change. The statement was drafted on the spot in response to a report by the fellowship’s theology committee, which found no biblical or theological reasons to oppose female ordination.

The vote occurred at the Sixth General Assembly of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) is an association of evangelical (Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed) churches of the Middle East.

The report inspired lively conversation as to how to respond to it, with delegates expressing support for it as well as concern for how their congregations would accept it. Dr Mary Mikhael, President and Professor of Christian Education at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, acknowledged the obstacle presented to the church by societal traditions but, she asked, “Who should reform who?” Finally, conference leaders agreed to reconvene after drafting a short statement in support of the report and of female ordination. It passed unanimously among the fellowship’s 29 voting delegates, including two women.

ELCJHL Bishop Munib A Younan, who serves as FMEEC’s president, developed the statement in Arabic. An English translation provided by the conference interpreter reads: “The Sixth General Assembly supports the ordination of the women in our churches in the position of ordained pastor and her partnership with men as an equal partner in decision making. Therefore we call on member churches to take leading steps in this concern.”

Speaking later of the historic vote, Younan said it is in keeping with the Middle Eastern evangelical tradition of leading the way in ministry. The fellowship’s action means its 16 member churches are urged to open the doors to women’s ordained ministry, he added.

The vote resonated with the remarks with which Younan opened the conference the previous day. “If we have any influence in the Middle East, it is the theology of grace,” he said.

To a world that values work, achievement and ritual, “Jesus Christ gave us the theology of grace that we may influence the community that we live in,” he said to some 70 people gathered for the January 11-13, 2010, conference.

FMEEC was formed in 1974, the fruit of a long history of ecumenism among member churches. The purpose of FMEEC is to strengthen the mission and ministry of its member churches through training and formation of leadership and laity, both women and men, and promoting unity through joint work and education.

(ELCJHL)

RDRS brings warmth during cold spell in Bangladesh

Dhaka (Jan 11) - Another cold wave is now sweeping over Bangladesh. Most parts of the country are shivering in the cold. January 12, the lowest temperature was recorded in Srimangal at 5 degree Celsius. The Metrological Office said the cold wave will continue for the next few days.

RDRS Bangladesh has already distributed 2,905 blankets and 7,150 wrappers to the cold affected people through local church associates, Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) and partner NGOs. RDRS’ staff had also donated warm clothes for the poor people in its working area. RDRS will continue the distribution of warm clothes and another 1,900 blankets to the needy.

RDRS is not planning any emergency appeal at the moment, but will continue to monitor the situation and keep donors/partners informed accordingly.

Sabrina Sharmin
Communications Manager, RDRS Bangladesh
Thank you Jus!

Justin Wong, our ALN layout artist, has decided to call it a day after completing his layout work for ALN48. Justin, a member of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS), has been on the ALN team for about seven years from as early as 2003. His contribution has brought about refreshing changes to the newsletter from that of my amateurish layout work during the earlier years after my office took over the production in 2002. His work and contribution is much appreciated and we regret we can no longer have him on the team.

We are thankful, however, that God had provided someone almost immediately! Ms Rebecka Colldunberg, member of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and assistant to the Editor of the LCA magazine, The Lutheran, has eagerly responded to the need of the hour. More of Rebecka’s work will be seen from ALN50 onwards as she prepares to ease into the process. We hope you will like the changes that will be coming up. Do drop us a line to inform us how we can improve. (Ed)

Does the Copenhagen climate accord give hope?

The UN Climate Change Conference in “the port of hope” – Copenhagen – from December 7 to 19, 2009, raised and lowered hopes. Anyway, the conference is not a total failure as some would call it. The accusation is that what is agreed upon will not limit the temperature rise within 2°C, the upper limit for the healthy survival of humanity. But here are three reasons why the conference is a success.

First, it is a massive conference unprecedented involving not only represented by more than 110 heads of state or government, but also different shades of civil society organizations. The 50,000-strong international gathering could not be handled by Danish police and they had to call the Swede police as well. I had been a witness to the official deliberations, seminars held as side events, and protests by civil society activists. From the day one, several developing countries made strong statements that climate change is the creation of developed countries because of their extravagant lifestyles propelled by extensive use of fossil fuels. Developing countries also said that developed countries had been exploiting their resources down the colonial era. Speakers pointed out the futility of going in for another agreement when what was agreed upon by 37 developed countries as part of the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012 is not honoured. Even when the Copenhagen Accord was agreed upon on the final day of the conference, some of the developing countries made vehement criticisms. Tuvalu, the tiny Pacific island nation, said the accord was like the Biblical trade-off for “thirty pieces of silver”.

Second, the United States which had been the biggest polluter before China overtook it in recent years because of the latter’s size of population is not a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol set the emission reduction targets for developed countries which have a historic responsibility to reduce emissions given their fossil fuel-based development. There was time when the United States was saying that the American way of life was non-negotiable. That is, Americans will not give up or compromise on their consumerist lifestyle so as to reduce greenhouse emissions to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. But in Copenhagen, the United States has taken a pro-active step in joining hands with other countries in bringing about an accord, though falling short of expectations.

Third, BASIC countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – along with the United States were the core countries to bring about the Copenhagen Accord. For the first time, such a shift in power centre has taken place. This may go a long way in India gaining a permanent membership in the UN Security Council. As Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh told The Week, “I think one good thing about Copenhagen is that for the first time Indians were not seen as being negative or obstructionist. And there is widespread recognition of the constructive role that we played. We were not sanctimonious as we normally are. We were not argumentative as we usually are. We have to protect our national interest, but we have to do so in a dignified manner.”

Dr I Arul Aram
ALN Editorial Member
(The writer is an Associate Professor of Science Communication in Anna University Chennai)
APAC – Ms Dora Hemalatha, Women Secretary, ALC

APAC – Ms Yoko Takemori (Japan ELC), updating on the LWF Endowment Fund

Asia Lutheran News workshop - participants and resources persons
APAC – Women & Youth meetings

APAC – Ms April Praise, LC Philippines

ALN- Francis, Marco (Hong Kong), Jie-Sung (Korea) Joanne (Philippines), Hsin-ya (Taiwan)

APAC – (L) Rev Chandran Martin, Dr Noko, Bishop Younan, Dr A Jeyakumar (UELCJ), Bishop Nag
APAC – (L) Bishop Solomon Rajah (ELC Malaysia) & Dr Ginda P Harahap, LWF Asia Secretary

APAC – President Sueoka (Kinki ELC), Mr Kisku, GS Hasdak (BNELC) & Rev Arobindo (BLC)

Interfaith Diapraxis-Group discussion

APAC – Bishop Nicholas Ranara, LC Philippines

APAC – Bishop Upama (ELCThailand), Dr Prawate, GS of Christian Conference of Asia, Dr Ishmael Noko and Bishop Terry Kee (LCS)
ALN-Trainer Dr Aram (India), Imad (Palestine) & Limatina (Indonesia)

APAC – Ms Pauline Mumia, LWI English editor

ALN-Logen (Bangladesh) and Martin (Singapore)

APAC – Bishop Mangisi Simorangkir, GKPI

APAC – Bishop Munib Younan with delegates from ELC-PNG, Ms Dawa, Mr Isaac Teo, Ms Nakei Siloi
Interfaith Diapraxis-Solidarity March

APAC – Bishop Thomas Tsen & Rev Laura S Hindrianto (BCCM)

APAC – Bishop Um Hyum Sub (LC Korea), Rev Neville Otto & Rev Wayne Zweck (LCA)

APAC – Ms Janis Cummings, LWF Asia Desk

APAC – (L) Rev R Hutahaean, General Secretary, & Rev Piasthon Simanjuntak (HKBP)
(Please refer to LWF Calendar at www.lutheranworld.org for latest updates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>UNIT*</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JANUARY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-31</td>
<td>DMD/North America</td>
<td>Kitchener, Canada</td>
<td>North America Church Pre-Assembly Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-17</td>
<td>DMD/Europe</td>
<td>Bratislava, Slovak Republic</td>
<td>Consultative Pre-Assembly Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>OGS</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
<td>LWF Executive Committee Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-26</td>
<td>DMD/Africa</td>
<td>Abuja, Nigeria</td>
<td>Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation and Pre-Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-16</td>
<td>DMD/Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>Bogoto, Colombia</td>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean Pre-Assembly Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>DTS/OEA</td>
<td>Strasbourg, France</td>
<td>Board Meeting: Lutheran Foundation for Inter-confessional Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>DWS</td>
<td>Montreux, Switzerland</td>
<td>DWS Annual Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>DWS</td>
<td>Montreux, Switzerland</td>
<td>Standing Committee Meeting for World Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>DMD</td>
<td>Montreux, Switzerland</td>
<td>LWF Project Committee Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-17</td>
<td>DMD Youth</td>
<td>Dresden, Germany</td>
<td>Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>OGS</td>
<td>Stuttgart, Germany</td>
<td>LWF Executive Committee Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>OGS</td>
<td>Stuttgart, Germany</td>
<td>LWF Council Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-27</td>
<td>OGS</td>
<td>Stuttgart, Germany</td>
<td>LWF Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-29</td>
<td>OGS</td>
<td>Stuttgart, Germany</td>
<td>LWF Council Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>DWS</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland (to be confirmed)</td>
<td>Standing Committee Meeting for World Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DMD-Department for Mission & Development, DTS-Department for Theology & Studies, DWS-Department for World Service, OCS-Office for Communication Services, OEA-Office for Ecumenical Affairs, OFA-Office for Finance and Administration, OGS-Office of the General Secretary, OIAHR-Office for International Affairs & Human Rights*
EVENT : CONSULTATION ON ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL NETWORK OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS

Date : March 17-21
Venue : Ambassador Hotel Bangkok, Thailand
Participants : Representatives from Lutheran Seminaries and Church Leaders in Asia

EVENT : MEKONG MISSION PARTNERS' CONSULTATION (MMPC) & MEKONG MISSION FORUM (MMF)

Date : April 30-31
Venue : Pilgrim Hall, Tao Fong Shan Unit, Hong Kong
Participants : Members of Mekong Mission Forum (MMF) & Invited Guests

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