

Thirteenth LWF Assembly, 13-19 September 2023 Kraków, Poland

Public Statements

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

As the Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation meets in the city of Kraków, Poland, it is keenly aware that there is a war going on in the neighbouring country, Ukraine.

The LWF Assembly condemns the brutal attack of Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is contrary to international law. We are appalled by the destructive power the aggressor is exerting to achieve its imperial goals.

Thousands of men, women and children have lost their lives; many more suffer physically and mentally because of the horrors of the war. Cities, towns and villages have become uninhabitable, environmental damages are incalculable and it will take decades to rebuild them. Once again, the sexual violence against women, children and men has become a weapon of war. This war, moreover, does not have only a local dimension, but has global impact as it is conducted by a nuclear superpower and has huge economic and food security consequences for many people all over the world.

We strongly condemn the imperialist ideology that the aggressor uses to justify its attack. We oppose all attitudes that consider some states entitled to include others into their “spheres of influence”, be it in Africa, South and Central America, Asia or Eastern Europe. We are shocked by the fact that some Christian churches adopt this ideology and misuse their authority to justify aggression.

Once again, there is an existential threat of nuclear war. We are alarmed by the intimidations coming from the government representatives of the Russian Federation, while keeping in mind that, in this case, there are no “two sides escalating the conflict”, but only an aggressor that threatens and a victim.

We therefore ask the Member Churches to continue to pray for peace – not only a ceasefire, but a peace that would be just. We recall the Statement on Peace and Justice from the LWF 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. We ask the Member Churches to include in their prayers also those living in Russia and Belarus who are being persecuted for their anti-war and anti-imperialist stances. There can be peace only if all the neighbouring countries, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, are free and democratic, respecting human rights.

We stand in solidarity with all who suffer from the war, including our sisters and brothers from the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine. We support the Member Churches who are helping the people of Ukraine and who have opened their hearts for all those who had to flee the war, not forgetting the refugees from other parts of the world.

We, at the same time, do not forget the vast suffering caused by wars and conflicts all over the world. The same mechanisms of evil are at work there as in the case of the war against Ukraine. We, therefore, as an LWF Assembly stand in solidarity and pray for the victims of all armed conflict in the world.

The LWF Assembly calls on:

1. Russia to end its war against Ukraine and to cease weaponizing the food supply chains, especially to countries in the Global South;
2. the international community to invest more in developing and supporting just and peaceful means, including mediation, to prevent and overcome conflicts;

3. the international community for bolder efforts to address conflicts and crises in other parts of the world, including through concerted humanitarian aid and peacebuilding processes;
4. the LWF Member Churches to pray and work for peace and justice in all communities, regions and in the world.

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON CHRISTIAN PRESENCE AND LIFE IN THE HOLY LAND

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF is deeply concerned by the continuing violence, hatred and loss of lives in the Holy Land. 2023 is already one of the most violent and deadly years in the last two decades on the West Bank, fueled by extremist policies violating human rights and human dignity for all affected. According to the United Nations, there have been over 200 Palestinian and nearly 30 Israeli fatalities in the West Bank and Israel thus far this year, already surpassing 2022 annual figures, and the highest figure since 2005.

The situation for Christians in the Holy Land has significantly deteriorated over the past years. There has been an increase in anti-Christian attacks by Jewish extremists and militant groups, including harassment of clergy and vandalizing of church property. Access to holy sites have repeatedly been restricted for both Christian and Muslim Palestinians.

As the Government of Israel continues to support the expansion of settlements which are illegal under international law, an ever-increasing number in the Palestinian community see their houses demolished, and their access to land, housing, employment, and basic services such as health and education restricted or denied. The LWF Assembly condemns such actions and would like to recall the Statement on Peace and Justice from the LWF 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. The policies and actions of the recent Israeli governments have diminished the possibility of a Palestinian state. An increasing number of human rights organizations and some of Israel's own politicians and former heads of internal security have described the reality of the situation today. This should be a matter of concern to all of us.

The Church leaders in Jerusalem have been appealing to their sister churches and to the international community for solidarity and support. There is a growing fear that the already diminished Christian presence could disappear altogether from the Holy Land.

The LWF Assembly stands in solidarity with its Member Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), and affirms its ministry and witness in these challenging times. Further, the LWF Assembly expresses solidarity with other Christians, people of other faiths and Palestinians who are affected by the escalation of violence, occupation, and lack of access to holy sites. The LWF realizes that there are churches that are complicit in the injustice that the Palestinians and Palestinian Christians suffer, through colonial theologies of superiority and power.

The LWF Assembly also affirms its commitment to the LWF-owned and operated Augusta Victoria Hospital as a sign of its commitment to the Palestinian community and a symbol of hope in these extremely troubled times.

That the LWF Assembly calls on:

1. The international community and the Government of Israel to respect and ensure the access to Holy Sites for believers of all three religions.
2. The Government of Israel to end its occupation and settlement expansion activities and immediately ensure equal rights for all.
3. The international community to urgently address the Israel/Palestine situation, given the recent and ongoing escalation of violence and occupation, hold the State of Israel accountable for their violations of human rights and the international law, and find a lasting solution which

would end of the half-century-long illegal occupation of Palestinian Territories and ensure peace, justice and equal rights for all.

4. The LWF Member Churches to examine, discuss, discern and respond to the implications of the recent reports by international human rights organizations, which describe the discrimination against Palestinians living under occupation or as citizens of Israel, as overt and systemic, and find that the occupation continues to ignore the equal human dignity and human rights of Palestinians living under this system of control.

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ASIA

The Lutheran World Federation Assembly expresses its solidarity with Member Churches and other communities who are living as minorities, especially in the Asia Region.

The LWF Assembly stands in solidarity and expresses its deep concern to all the suffering and violence the Christian minorities in their own countries are facing. As an example, we recognize the situation of indigenous peoples, tribal people, the Dalits, and Adivasis, some of whom are members of our own churches, who have long been marginalized and oppressed under structural systems that have been designed to exclude them.

Like many other marginalized groups, Christians in minority settings in Asia are disproportionately affected by numerous challenges including violations of their human rights and dignity, environmental disasters, and poverty among others. We note particularly that their freedom of religion or belief has, in the recent past, been severely diminished.

Apart from their struggles, these minority communities offer rich cultures and traditions that we can all learn from including sustainable living, especially in these ecologically challenging times.

The LWF Assembly calls:

1. On Member Churches to continue standing in solidarity and act upon any injustices happening to any Member Church facing any kind of violence due to its minority situation.
2. On the Government of India and other governments to ensure the protection of the human rights, justice and dignity for all.
3. On the LWF Member Churches to stand in solidarity and support Dalits and Adivasis sisters and brothers in their ministries, including through continued advocacy at all levels.

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON TAX JUSTICE

In a world that suffers from multiple crises: the climate crisis, a push-back on human rights and gender justice, forced migration and economic inequality, the need for financial resources is crucial. But the current international economic and tax system exacerbates inequalities and causes depletion of the creation, for the sake of generating profit. According to the Tax Justice Network's *The State of Tax Justice 2023*, countries are losing a total of over \$480 billion in tax revenues each year to international corporate tax abuse and private tax evasion. This has a direct impact on the ability of countries to address poverty and provide basic services for their citizens.

The Lutheran World Federation affirms the discussions and process towards the development of an international legally binding tax convention that was mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2022. The prospects of a multi-lateral convention to stop tax abuse is a sign of hope in these times of multi-crises.

We reiterate LWF Assembly's call from 2017, for churches and related organizations everywhere to stand up and demand fair redistribution of wealth and social protection, as a matter of justice and human rights. The Lutheran World Federation remains committed and will continue advocating for economic justice and tax justice together with ecumenical, interfaith and civil society partners.

We further call on Member Churches to embody hope in the public space, through calling for a new international financial and economic architecture through demanding an inclusive, democratic and legally binding global tax convention.

As the world's leaders are gathered in New York for the 2023 UN General Assembly and the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the Lutheran World Federation Assembly calls on the Member States of the United Nations to:

1. Expedite the process of developing the proposed legally binding UN Convention on Tax, ensuring that it is fair, just and equitable.
2. Ensure the meaningful participation and contribution of civil society, including churches and other faith communities, in the process of drafting the proposed tax convention.

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION AFFIRMING THE CONTINUATION OF WORK INTERRUPTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To affirm the solidarity with which the LWF responded to the pandemic, particularly through the Rapid Response Fund, theological reflection, and advocacy.
2. To call upon the LWF Communion Office to identify and continue to implement those commitments that were made at the Twelfth Assembly (2017) and provide a report to the Council by 2024.
3. To encourage Member Churches to implement the resolutions that will be identified in the report.

RESOLUTION ON STRENGTHENING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on Member Churches to prioritize investing in theological education and the sharing of resources to support the sustainability of theological institutions;
2. To encourage Member Churches and their theological institutions to improve their curricula with content that addresses misleading theologies and promotes responsible theologies as defined in the message of the Thirteenth LWF Assembly;
3. To call on the Communion Office to enhance its networking role with Member Churches and theological institutions, to further strengthen and improve the theological education and formation network, the LWF Learning Platform, and the LWF scholarships program; and
4. To call for the creation of transformative Lutheran theologies that address gender justice with the aim of including them in the core curriculum of theological studies at universities and Bible colleges and ensuring that they are an integral part of the education of ministers, Sunday school teachers and others carrying faith formation responsibilities within our churches.

LWF RESOLUTION ON STUDY PROCESSES IN THEOLOGY

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the Council to initiate, and Communion Office to develop and implement, the following study processes, and for these processes to include ecumenical and interreligious engagement:
 - Theologies of the cross for the 21st century;
 - The relevance of the Augsburg Confession for contextual realities of Member Churches -- emphasis on gender justice and ecumenical approach;
 - Peace and reconciliation in contexts of conflict and in times of war;
 - The identity and participation of men in the life of the church and society with particular attention to power relations, gender relations, and masculinities;
 - The theological framework in the context of persons with disabilities; and
 - The meaning of holistic mission for the LWF in the 21st century

2. To call on the Communion Office to ensure that LWF publications and materials are accessible to the Member Churches, followed by an intentional process of reception and wider use.

RESOLUTION ON INCLUSIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Communion Office to prepare a process of evaluating LWF events, such as Assemblies, Council meetings and other similar events with an emphasis on inclusion, full and active participation, and representation;
2. To call on the LWF Communion Office to support Member Churches in the development of accessible liturgical resources, such as music and prayers, as well as other resources. This inclusive approach should incorporate sign language interpreters, Braille materials, assistive technologies where needed, and any other necessary approaches for full and active participation;
3. To call on the LWF Communion Office to encourage Member Churches to foster a culture of understanding and acceptance for any who face mental health challenges, encouraging an environment of solidarity and support;
4. To call on the LWF at all levels to recognize the importance of youth involvement in decision-making processes, presentations, and planning committees to ensure that the voices and perspectives of young people are heard and valued; and
5. To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the Men's Pre-Assembly continues in the future, and to explore ways and opportunities for men to gather and continue the conversations that have arisen in this Assembly and from regional expressions.

RESOLUTION ON AN INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE POLICY

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Council to develop an Intergenerational Justice Policy;
2. To call on the Council to make sure that the Intergenerational Justice Policy includes a framework for advancing the leadership of young people alongside all generations and includes examining the generational balance of the Vice Presidents, the Executive Committee and the Delegates to the Assembly within the regions;
3. To call of the LWF Council to convene a task force to develop the policy and to follow the progress of this task force annually;
4. To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the task force will honor the LWF gender quotas, be representative of the regions and be made up of at least 50% people under 30 at the time of convening, and request the task force to propose policy recommendations which consider contextual realities, meaningful participation for young people in faith communities, and consider the ways in which intergenerational justice is vital to people of faith;
5. To call on the LWF Council to request the task force to recommend a policy for adoption by the Council by 2026.

RESOLUTION ON MOVING FORWARD ON GENDER JUSTICE IN POLARISED TIMES

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Council to initiate a strategic process on the next steps in the concrete implementation and development of the Gender Justice Policy (2013), and also the Emmaus Conversation, regionally;
2. To call on the LWF Communion Office to gather good practices and concrete tools that exist within Member Churches of successful dialogue on potentially divisive issues and urge Member Churches to share their contextually relevant tools and practices;
3. To call on the LWF Communion Office to develop and strengthen platforms and strategies for sharing of such resources, practical tools and strategies to enable capacity building and resource development within various contexts and urge Member Churches to engage in such capacity building;
4. To call on the LWF Communion Office and the Member Churches and regions to prioritize funding or at least to secure minimally the same percentage to advance and support gender justice and women's empowerment;
5. To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the Accountability Framework now under development itself be gender just and to have a specific element to support gender justice; and
6. To urge the LWF Communion Office to continue accompanying Member Churches in supporting women in the ordained ministry and women in leadership.

RESOLUTION ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Communion Office to revisit the resolution on Sex Education and Elimination on Sexual and Gender-based Violence from Windhoek 2017 “To encourage Member Churches to focus on sex education and the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual coercion, and sexual harassment within our churches. This focus is to be ethically and theologically comprehensive in cooperation with civil society. These efforts should include collecting the testimony of those who have survived violence, so that their story is told and the silence is broken.”;
2. To require that all LWF activities have safe-guarding mechanisms against sexual harassment and gender-based violence including on digital platforms; and
3. That the Communion Office support Member Churches in creating and utilizing a Code of Conduct and other relevant policies and training materials to end sexual harassment and gender-based violence in Member Churches.

RESOLUTION ON REAFFIRMING THE YOUTH QUOTA

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call upon the Member Churches to implement the youth quota, so that youth are fully engaged through participation and voting in decision-making structures and processes;
2. To call upon the LWF Council and the Member Churches to develop a transparent and accountable mechanism to ensure that the youth quota will be met with *official delegates who have the right to vote* (not stewards, advisors etc.) by all regions at future Assemblies; and
3. To call upon the Member Churches to continue preparing youth in their leadership, strengthening youth networks through activities that empower their members for mutual cooperation in local and global contexts and, in so doing, nominate youth delegates who are familiar with the church's work.

RESOLUTION ON REAFFIRMING THE LAY QUOTA

Action

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To urge the LWF Council to implement a lay quota of forty percent in all bodies of the LWF as stated in the resolution; and
2. To call upon the LWF Council, the Regions, and the Member Churches to develop a transparent and accountable mechanism to ensure that the lay quota will be met at future Assemblies.

RESOLUTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Communion Office to ensure accessibility in all its events and of services it provides;
2. To call on the LWF Communion Office develop strategies to improve and mainstream disability inclusion, in LWF policies, in LWF advocacy work and within LWF's programs and all activities, including Assemblies;
3. To call on the LWF Communion Office to acquire and analyze disaggregated data on the participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the Member Churches;
4. To call on the LWF to work together in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities to access relevant expertise; and
5. To call on the LWF Communion Office to advocate actively for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

RESOLUTION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous people's rights and the Lutheran World Federation

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To reaffirm the resolution from Winnipeg 2003 which called on the LWF to initiate a specific program for Indigenous Peoples, initiate theological study processes and support a process at the national, regional and international levels for protecting human rights of Indigenous peoples, including land rights;
2. To call on the LWF Communion Office to ensure that work on indigenous people is included in the new strategy for indigenous work;
3. To call on the LWF Communion Office to collaborate and share learnings with the WCC central office conducting this work;
4. To call on the Communion Office to support Member Churches to commit to investigating their own truth and reconciliation processes together with indigenous populations within their own contexts and to support indigenous people to acquire contacts across national borders that separate the indigenous population from each other and others; and
5. To call on the LWF to offer a dedicated space in conjunction with the Assemblies for delegates for indigenous peoples in the form of, for example, a Pre-Assembly.

RESOLUTION ON JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call upon Member Churches and theological institutions to develop further theological reflection on Jewish-Christian relations from a Lutheran perspective in a global context;
2. To encourage Member Churches to explore the possibility of beginning or furthering dialogues with Jewish partners both at the academic and grassroots level to foster a deeper understanding of each other's communities; and
3. To call upon the LWF Communion Office to further dialogue, engagement and collaboration with Jewish partners such as the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) on topics of mutual interest by the next Assembly.

RESOLUTION ON AFFIRMING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF THOSE AFFECTED BY DISASTERS IN LIBYA, MOROCCO AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the Member Churches to continue praying and standing in solidarity with the many people and communities around the world that are affected by humanitarian disasters; and
2. To call on the LWF World Service to continue, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, its humanitarian assistance, livelihoods and advocacy on behalf of the Member Churches in order to support people and communities affected by disasters.

RESOLUTION ON THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF to continue with its efforts to encourage, support and accompany Member Churches and other people affected by climate change through appropriate programs; and sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge;
2. To call on the Communion Office to strengthen its advocacy for climate justice at all levels, including by encouraging Member Churches to incorporate climate justice campaigns into their activities;
3. To call on the Communion Office to support, as appropriate, the protection of the rights and dignity of environmental defenders and people displaced by climate change impacts, including by the provision of the necessary humanitarian and livelihoods assistance;
4. To call on the Communion Office to intensify the LWF's efforts towards reducing emissions and pollution by putting in place a Paris Agreement-aligned viable plan of action, with the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030;
5. To encourage all Member Churches to reduce their emissions to contribute to the action plan mentioned above, within their contexts;
6. To encourage Member Churches to emphasize the importance of eco-theology as a framework for integrating spiritual and ethical values into environmental stewardship, articulating our theological basis for the care of creation, sharing technical knowledge, and advocating for climate justice; and
7. To call on the Communion Office to develop a climate justice policy and materials on the relationship between the climate emergency and human rights.

RESOLUTION ON SERVING WITH PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on Member Churches to unite and reaffirm their commitment in advocacy and action to serve people on the move due the climate crisis, conflicts, wars and violations of human rights; and
2. To encourage Member Churches to show solidarity and act together strongly and work with like-minded networks to influence public opinion and all governments on issues of migration, refugees and internally displaced persons and to stand up for the human rights of all in society.

RESOLUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To affirm the crucial role of Member Churches in their public voice in their contexts, recognizing that some of them are faced with risks and restrictions;
2. To call on the Communion Office to strengthen its efforts and programs to support Member Churches in theological reflection and in their advocacy at the local and national levels, particularly through capacity building and provision of relevant advocacy tools;
3. To call on the Communion Office to continue to amplify the advocacy work of Member Churches at regional and global levels – including through supporting the engagement of Member Churches with the United Nations and regional intergovernmental bodies;
4. To call on the Communion Office to continue enhancing theological underpinning for LWF advocacy to ensure that thematic work, including those related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and .
5. To call on the LWF Communion Office to invest in and enhance advocacy capacity-building for young people.

RESOLUTION ON STRENGTHENING ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT AND ECUMENICAL COMMEMORATION OF 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

1. To call on the LWF Communion Office to prepare for the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in conversation with ecumenical partners;
2. To call on the LWF Communion Office to utilize the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession to engage with the Augsburg Confession in ongoing ecumenical dialogues; and
3. To call on the LWF Communion Office to engage in strengthening the reception process of ecumenical study documents in accordance with the LWF Council decision 2023, including facilitating a global network of ecumenical experts.