

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

To: LWF Member Churches &
National Committees

9 August 2011

Re: Urgent Appeal for Prayers and Support for the Churches and People of the
Horn of Africa

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Grace and peace to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Our world is facing an enormous crisis in which according to figures provided by the United Nations specialized agencies over 12 million people's lives are at stake. I am speaking of the situation of drought and conflict in the Horn of Africa. There is famine in large parts of Somalia, and severe drought throughout the region, the worst in 60 years. This comes on top of the more than 20 years of violent conflicts and lack of stable government in Somalia, an instability which is affecting its neighbors as well. At least a quarter of the Somali people are forcibly displaced from their homes, at the edge of survival. Already, shocking numbers of children and other vulnerable people have died.

The Lutheran World Federation is there, very much present and active, both through its member churches and its specialized diaconal arm, the LWF World Service. You will know from the Lutheran World Information news releases that I had the opportunity to visit Kenya last week. Joined by a delegation of local and regional church leaders and staff from the LWF Communion Office, we expressed our concern about the situation and our solidarity with the people and the churches. We also had dialogues with governmental and UN representatives about the humanitarian response. This was a strong mission of solidarity on behalf of the Lutheran communion.

Back from that travel, many images remain in my mind. We went to the Dadaab camp, the largest refugee camp in the world, where LWF provides the camp management. For some weeks already it receives more than 1,000 people per day fleeing famine and conflict in Somalia. Working with the United Nations, the LWF is responsible here for a "city" of about 400,000 people. We witnessed painful poverty and human misery there – a young woman, 21

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years old and with five children told me that she walked for 23 days in order to reach the refugee camp! With each day, people are arriving at the camp weaker and weaker. Particularly heart-rending were the stories of mothers having to hand off their children to others when the mothers do not have the strength to go further.

But we also saw the beautiful witness of concerted efforts of United Nations bodies, the Kenyan Government and NGOs, all of them coordinated by the LWF, with the firm conviction that every single human life counts, and therefore working with tireless resolve for the sake of each single human being seeking refuge. They are providing a relevant response and saving many lives. I was particularly impressed by the 120 LWF staff at Dadaab, mainly young Kenyans, many of them women. They work long and hard with enormous dedication and compassion. Each person arriving at the camp was being met with dignity and treated as an equal.

We also had the opportunity to worship on Sunday at a Kenyan Lutheran congregation in Maasai country, at the border with Tanzania. The members of this congregation are also heavily affected by the drought. The water levels are extremely low at many places and rain is not expected for several months to come. Most of the communities rely on livestock and they have far fewer cows now. The people and churches of host countries, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, need our solidarity and support not only so that they can sustain their generous welcome to refugees, but also so that they can sustain their own livelihoods in this time of drought. Churches are active in many respects already, for instance by drilling water holes, organizing schools for children and supporting farming projects. I was moved to see how much the communities count also on the voice of the church advocating for them at a local, regional and national level.

Against this background, amidst this crisis, I respectfully and urgently appeal to you:

1. Pray for the refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, for the people and communities who receive them, and for the governmental, international, and NGO staffers who are working so hard to respond to the crisis. Pray particularly for the LWF staff in Dadaab, who are working under very hard and challenging conditions.
2. Pray for the LWF member churches in the region—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania—and for all the churches, that they may be re-energized and continually inspired for their crucial presence through proclamation, diakonia, and advocacy.
3. Respond generously as you are able, as “cheerful givers”, to the LWF and ACT Alliance appeals for the Somali refugees and for drought relief in the Horn. I invite all member churches to consider offering support, regardless of their size and wealth. The example of the people in Kenya shows that even within contexts of their own vulnerability and precariousness there is still space to be in solidarity with others. The example of Congregations in Tanzania collecting for their brothers and sisters in the northern part of the country is another encouraging example to follow.
4. Urge your governments to respond adequately to the appeals coming from the United Nations bodies. There is currently a USD1.3 billion gap between urgent needs and what has been raised so far.
5. Advocate with your governments so that they will redouble the international efforts to make for peace in Somalia.

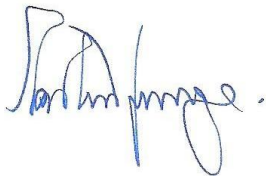
Before closing, I would like to share two more sober reflections with you. First, we have to be aware that this crisis will not end quickly, nor is the immediate disaster response enough. This might be only the beginning. The effects of the drought will be ongoing at least until December, and will likely spread further through the region. Beyond that, after the drought is over, we have to prepare for mid-term and longer-term solutions for rehabilitation, climate

change adaptation, and disaster preparedness. During our visit in Kenya, member churches and LWF World Service began discussions on the long-term perspectives of pastoralist communities in semi-arid regions, and the implications for diakonia and advocacy. The LWF Communion Office looks further for ongoing and deepened discussions and actions in this respect.

Secondly, I am very much aware that I am making an appeal for financial resources at a time when many of your countries are suffering economic stress and uncertainty. I want to acknowledge the many spontaneous donations and grants that the LWF has been given already, by individuals, by staff, by churches and related organizations. I am deeply grateful for these expressions of solidarity. Yet lives continue to be at stake. I cannot help but ask: why is there this USD1.3 billion funding shortfall to save the lives of unfortunate vulnerable people, when sums of 50 or even 100 times that amount were quickly raised to rescue the global finance industry? From the perspective of the gospel, I am even bold to suggest that the world focusing compassionately on the right to food for millions in the Horn of Africa would go a long way toward giving new meaning to economic activity in the world. And furthermore—through such a focus on the neighbor in need – I believe that perspectives would be shifted in such a way that promising approaches to overcome the current financial crisis would be opened.

I close with renewed deep appreciation for your prayers, your support, and for our Communion. In the presence of all forms of human suffering, we confess God's initiating and justifying grace, which liberates us for the needs of others.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martin Junge".

Rev. Martin Junge
General Secretary