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The Lutheran World Federation Asia Pre-Assembly, 15th to 19th August, 2016, in Bangkok, Thailand

Message from the Asia Pre-Assembly to the Lutheran Communion

We are the 93 participants—including delegates lead by LWF President Bishop Munib Younan, General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, DMD Director Rev. Fidon Mwombeki, stewards and LWF staff, from 19 countries gathered together from August 15th to 19th 2016, for the Asia LWF Pre-Assembly in Bangkok, organized by the Asia Desk of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.

In preparation for the Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, 2017, and for the commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, we reflect on the theme 'Liberated by God's Grace' from the perspectives of the diverse contexts in Asia. We commence our reflections with the sub-themes 'Salvation not for sale', 'Human Beings not for sale', 'Creation not for sale' and extend these to re-examine our values and practices within the Church and society. At the pre-assembly, we also engage in a wide range of programs and activities. However, the more important task is to seek to articulate the message of God's liberating grace for the next decade, as we enter into another 500 years of continuing reformation.

1. 'Liberated by God's Grace' from the Asian Perspective

We recognise that the LWF was formed in response to human suffering. Today we, as churches in Asia, are facing common issues and challenges such as poverty, discrimination, violence against women and the vulnerable, refugees, consumerism, individualism, destruction of our environment and donor-controlled ministries. We are the Church liberated by God's grace. People cannot be liberated by money, power or technology, but by the grace of God alone. Therefore, we cry out to God to strengthen us in spirit, to be able to share this holistic gospel; to empower us to help people in their suffering and poverty; and to recognise the giftedness of women and young people.

By the grace of God we have the Communion of Churches as a gift and have already begun the mutual sharing in altar and pulpit fellowship; bringing together our different and diverse gifts to bear witness to the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ; and sharing the confessional Lutheran foundations. The challenge now is to begin sharing beyond the traditional north – south relations, by extending it to south – south exchanges.

1.1 We join our voices to affirm – Salvation not for sale

We understand that people in our region try to gain God's favor through many different practices, including rituals and sacrifices; self-torturing; good works; education and the like. These influence our Asian Christian practices. In Asia today, money, education, technology, modern culture, family, pastors, leaders, charismatic preachers, the gospel of power, Christian icons, liturgy, even Word and Sacrament – all these can be misunderstood and can become our idols. We also acknowledge that the issue of 'prosperity gospel' is a serious challenge to our churches, because it distorts the Good News of being liberated by God's grace.

In our pluralistic religious contexts, we continue to affirm that the Word of God is the power of salvation. And our wholehearted acts of love, caring and sharing, flow from our experience of being liberated by God's grace.

1.2 We join our voices to affirm – Human Beings not for sale

We see sad and horrific situations in many countries in Asia, including incidents of human trafficking; rape; gender discrimination in work places; violence against women, children and other vulnerable people; and the abuse of power and financial resources.

We urge our churches to provide a prophetic voice by speaking out against such abuse, discrimination, violence and injustice.

1.3 We join our voices to affirm – Creation not for sale

We recognise that Asia is the focus of rapid industrial advancement and consumerism, causing destruction of the environment and affecting people in many ways. Destructive behaviours such as disposal of industrial waste, mining, deforestation, nuclear power plants, acquisition of farm land and pollution of water sources, affect people's lives and livelihoods now and into the next generations. We urge our churches to create awareness for environmental justice, for all ages, through education and action.

2. We join with the Voice of Women

Our sisters urge the Asian church leaders to take intentional actions to motivate and involve women in church leadership. They ask for fair selection processes and representation in all aspects of ministry and leadership: changes to the methodology of voting which are based on gender justice and equality; and which allow women to nominate and be nominated.

They recommend that the LWF Gender Justice Policy be translated and contextualized in every member church with a plan of action, which encompasses both men's and women's issues, and be implemented in every level that includes the LWF Assembly, LWF Council and the regional councils, in ensuring that every member church receives this policy with the recommendation that this is addressed in all sectors of church life and decision making processes. They further recommend that the churches be proactive in addressing all types of violence against women.

The sisters further encourage churches to embrace women who are doing theology to be recognized for their capabilities in the ministry. They re-affirm the goal, as stated in the past five consecutive LWF Assemblies, to include women in the ordained ministry. They further encourage the member churches that have yet to ordain women, to join their fellow churches in the Communion in doing so.

3. We hear the Voice of Youths

Young people are crying out in the midst of a confusing and rapidly changing world, seeking inclusion and integration into church life. They show their deep interest and commitment to work together with others in their churches to find solutions to many issues, such as: detachment from the worship life of the congregations, gap between rich and poor, politics and climate change. They want to be part of the solution. Therefore we affirm and support the development of the Asia Lutheran Youth Network (ALYN) which was formed at the ACLC 2015. We encourage youth leaders to engage in the ALYN.

We join our voices together with the youths at the Pre-assembly to sing their song, 'Liberated by God's grace to change the world!' The message of liberation by God's grace can reach more people when we communicate face to face and or through the expanding range of social networks.

4. Vision for the future

As Lutherans in Asia, we see a communion of churches where our Lutheran identity, formed by God's liberating grace, is understood and lived out in the lives of all believers in the church and society. Our freedom in Christ is the Good News which unites us all. We are called to share this message with all people.