



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
ÖKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN – CONSEIL OECUMÉNIQUE DES ÉGLISES – CONSEJO MUNDIAL DE IGLESIAS



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

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

Geneva, 9 April 2009

Dear Friends

This comes with heartfelt thanks and appreciation for your participation in the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in Bangkok last month. We were a very diverse group gathered around a context-specific issue, but seemed to have achieved a genuine mutual commitment as we struggled to learn about and respond as people of faith to the Dalit experience. And we ended with an unequivocal consensus on our solidarity with the Dalits in their struggle for justice and dignity. This we believe certainly was the work of the Holy Spirit. We also want to say that you were a unique combination of expertise, experience and perspective. Each one of you contributed to the flavour and success of this event. Thank you especially to all those who have helped lead the conference in many ways – moderating the plenaries and workshops, writing the group reports, facilitating the workshops, leading prayer services, offering bible studies, clarifying issues and contributing to the discourse.

We are attaching a copy of the Declaration and Call which our team of listeners have so meticulously prepared. After the discussion on the draft text in the plenary, two younger Dalit friends joined the group as they incorporated the suggestions from all conference participants. The Declaration was released through WCC and LWF media last week after the Geneva staff team finished editing the text in consultation with the listeners. We rely on you to circulate the Declaration widely – in your respective churches, congregations, networks, news bulletins, magazines, and websites. The weblinks are: <http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/2009/BangkokDeclaration.pdf>
http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIahr/Issues_Events/Dalit-Bangkok_Declaration.pdf

We would also like to urge you to do whatever you can to strengthen this emerging ecumenical movement for justice and dignity for Dalits. This we believe is the commitment we shared at the conclusion of the conference. Please keep us informed about your plans and initiatives and tell us if you think we can be of help. For our part, we in the WCC and LWF secretariats have identified a few specific steps to focus on in our follow-up. These include the following:

Joint letter/s by the WCC and LWF general secretaries to member churches and partners, urging them to address the issues that the Bangkok Declaration and Call raises.

Appropriate interventions at the Durban Review Conference, which will take place in Geneva on 20-24 April 2009 – even if the issue is not a part of the official agenda of the conference.

Formation of the proposed Task Group, and establishing a process for work on the proposed theological statement on churches' response to caste and caste-based discrimination.

Support for efforts by churches in the region to convene a South Asian regional event on this issue in one year's time.

Publication of a report of the conference, and related materials.

It is important that the Bangkok conference and its preparation and outcome be properly evaluated, so that we can try to redress any shortcomings in the follow-up process and in subsequent related events and initiatives. We have set up an online evaluation survey at the following address: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=2SDIfQ6t_2fRPNvh_2frMcqOA_3d_3d We ask you, in the spirit of the Bangkok conference, to help us by taking the time to complete this survey by **1 May 2009**.

Many of you took photos at the conference, and as part of our process of making a record of this important event in the life of the ecumenical movement we would like to invite you to share your photos with us and with the other participants. We have established an online photo-sharing account for this purpose at <http://www.flickr.com/>. You can log in to this account using ID: **dalitconference2009** and password: **bangkok**. Then it is a simple matter (bandwidth permitting) to upload any digital photos you may wish to share. Or you can just view the uploaded photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dalitconference2009/>.

We close this letter by reiterating that we look forward to your active engagement and partnership with the churches and movements involved in confronting and exposing this culture of discrimination and oppression. We also hope that the bonds of solidarity in the cause of justice that we have established in Bangkok will continue to grow stronger '...to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed...' (Isaiah1:17) May the resurrection continue to happen in our lives – and in the lives of Dalits – as we live out this faith in the world today.

With thanks and in anticipation,

Sincerely



Rev. Deenabandhu Manchala



Mr Peter Prove



Rev. Chandran Paul Martin