

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES – THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Joint Submission for the Compilation Document for the
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference)
1 November 2011

The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation submit these inputs and contributions for inclusion in the compilation document for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference). Both the WCC and the LWF are non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

General Content a): What are the expectation for the outcome of Rio+20, including views on a possible structure of the Outcome document?

In the churches' perspective, **justice** must be the basic criterion of applied ethics in all decisions concerning the measures to promote sustainable development and to cope with climate change. Although climate change is a global issue affecting all peoples and nations, those who are and will increasingly be affected by negative climate change consequences are the vulnerable communities who have contributed the least to global emissions. These include women and children, indigenous peoples, poorest communities, people with disabilities and inhabitants of coastal low lying areas.

Vulnerable communities and states are also much more dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and do not have the means to mitigate emissions and to adapt to climate change. Their survival is at risk, and justice requires that the nations most responsible historically for the adverse ecological conditions should take the greatest responsibility towards the adaptation of these vulnerable communities and nations.

Accordingly, we strongly urge that the Outcome document include a preamble that highlights ethical principles that can be shared by people who are religious and non-religious. Some suggested wording:

Promises of unlimited economic growth, fueled especially by carbon consumption, are jeopardizing the planet's future and the future of life as we have known it—especially the lives and lands of those who are the most vulnerable in the world. Climate change is accelerating, as made evident through increasingly severe and frequent storms, rising seas and devastating droughts. It also contributes to more severe food shortages, the increased spread of diseases, conflicts over scarce land and water, and the forced migration of people.

Who dies first as a result of climate change? This is an everyday reality for the millions of victims of droughts or storms. Death as a result of climate warming is not a natural disaster, since climate warming is caused by human activity.

The question is thus not who dies first due to fate, but whom do we sacrifice first because of what we do or fail to do? Do we sacrifice the populations of the small islands whose

land disappears? The children in the slums of the megacities who suffer from hunger because of high food prices? Older people in industrialized countries who are infected by new diseases due to climate change? The victims of storms or broken dams? (These questions posed by Christoph Stueckelberger in *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives* – LWF Studies, July 2009, p. 47.)

We must begin to live sustainably—in such a way as not to detract from the potential quality of life of future generations.

General Content b): What are the comments on existing proposals?

There should be specific and measurable goals. One positive example would be the *Sustainable Development Goals* proposed by the Governments of Colombia and Guatemala.

General Content c): What are the views on implementation and how to close the implementation gap?

A binding outcome treaty would be desirable. There should be economic incentives for behavior that promotes sustainable development and that mitigates climate change, and economic disincentives for behavior that does not.

General Content d): What specific cooperation mechanisms are envisaged?

No specific comments.

Specific Content a): Objective of the Conference

The Conference should lift up human rights mechanisms as major instruments to hold governments and the private sector accountable. A clearly integrated human rights framework would include the right to development, the right to food, the right to clean water and sanitation, the right to housing, the right to medical care, the right to education, and so forth.

Specific Content b): Green Economy

The Conference should reflect the ethical insights that a green and just economy has to be measured according to the well-being of all and not just a few. In particular, this time-honored ethical measure should be applied: what is the situation of the poor and most vulnerable, especially women and children.

Going toward a green economy must mean that externalities are included in the price of products (e.g., by taxes or other means). Policies should be made from the perspective of small-holder farmers and small businesses (as opposed to the perspective of powerful large corporations).

In particular, a less wasteful and more efficient use of natural resources, including water, is vitally important. The question, however, is how to ensure control over and access to these resources for those sections of society who are less "competitive" (e.g., as small farmers compete

with large corporations over user rights for water) and who have limited access to the finance and technology required to, for example, make more efficient use of water resources.

Specific Content c): Institutional framework for sustainable development.

A rights-based approach is necessary as an accountability mechanism.

Specific Content d): Any proposals for refinement of the two themes.

No proposals.

The World Council of Churches – The Lutheran World Federation
150 route de Ferney
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Contacts:

The World Council of Churches: Guillermo Kerber, guillermo.kerber_mas@wcc-coe.org

The Lutheran World Federation: Ralston Deffenbaugh, ralston.deffenbaugh@lutheranworld.org