Guiding Principles and Commitments

Human Rights

I. Background

ELCA Global Mission, through action by its board, has affirmed its commitment to the promotion, preservation and protection of universal human rights. It does so within the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) faithfulness to the Gospel, this church's governing documents and relevant social statements and actions which constitute the social policy of the ELCA.[1] ELCA Global Mission understands its responsibility to further the mission of the Triune God as requiring the upholding of human dignity and participation in the struggle for internationally-recognized human rights. The accompaniment paradigm, affirmed by ELCA Global Mission, both requires and informs the nature of that participation.

In addition to its ecclesial commitments, ELCA Global Mission also wishes to raise up several relevant United Nations documents. These include the International Bill of Human Rights (consisting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, which articulate specific aspects of the definition of, call to, and struggle for human rights for all women, men, and children.[2]

II. Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century & Human Rights

The ELCA is situated within a nation which has a great potential to influence the behavior of other nations. ELCA Global Mission, as mandated by this church, attempts to pursue justice, peace and the integrity of creation in its programs by being in solidarity with people most affected by injustice, repression, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and the degradation of their environment and seeking to accompany churches outside the territory of the ELCA. This solidarity and accompaniment also motivates ELCA members to engage in advocacy.

Goal II in the board-approved document Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century (GM-21) requires ELCA Global Mission to "be in solidarity with and advocate for people who are oppressed, poor and

suffering, and share our resources to meet human need." In order to carry out this mandate, Goal II further requires the division to "inspire ELCA members to participate in public and prophetic advocacy programs" by:

a. Cooperating with the ELCA's Division for Church in Society, the communion of churches within the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and U.S. ecumenical partners and companion churches in public as well as informal advocacy efforts;
b. Enlisting members of the ELCA for the communication of messages and other activities to influence public policy makers and others in positions of power;
c. Focusing on a limited number of selected major issues and advocacy concerns in selected countries and in consultation with companion churches.[3]

ELCA Global Mission understands its solidarity and accompaniment role as a bridge between this church, its companion churches and ecumenical agencies.

III. Implementation

ELCA Global Mission shall:

a. Promote awareness throughout the ELCA, out of concern for justice in all parts of the world and in critical solidarity with those who struggle for a just society in their own nation, about the social policy instruments of this church (such as social statements, Churchwide Assembly resolutions, Church Council resolutions) which affirm the protection and preservation of internationally-recognized human rights[4] and help educate the church about these human rights in their many dimensions. To this end ELCA Global Mission, in coordination with the Division for Church in Society, will provide accurate and timely background information about the situation of the churches and their national contexts.

b. Collaborate with the Division for Church in Society to identify human rights concerns in all parts of the world, appraising the board of ELCA Global Mission about critical human rights issues on a regular basis. ELCA Global Mission recognizes that the ELCA's response to the deprivation of human rights will vary from place to place, and time to time, depending upon such factors as: 1) the presence of a sister church in a particular country, 2) the request from such a church for assistance, and 3) the political and economic context facing Christians and others in a particular country where human rights issues are to be raised. In this regard staff of ELCA Global Mission will, as appropriate, initiate conversations with companion churches/agencies regarding local human rights issues in order to mutually discern contextually sensitive and relevant strategies for action on behalf of those whose rights have been denied or are in jeopardy. In so doing staff of ELCA Global Mission will act consistent with its Personnel Policies and Expectations (March 2000), especially 11.8 and 11.19.

c. Collaborate with the Division for Church in Society in challenging U.S. policies and practices that negatively affect the human rights of persons in other countries.

d. Express its solidarity with organizations and groups, including companion churches, which are striving to call nations to account for their obligations with respect to international human rights instruments.

e. Encourage ELCA members to support and strengthen international institutions which promote these human rights.

f. Challenge ELCA members, congregations and companion synods to express their concerns about human rights violations, developing partnerships for common strategies and utilizing the resources of the Division for Church in Society for technical and other assistance, particularly with regard to appropriate and effective methods of advocacy and action on behalf of those whose human rights have been violated.

g. Implement Priorities in Support of ELCA Global Mission Commitment to Women.

h. Assist ELCA members in developing a better understanding of the connections between the exploitation and consumption of the world's resources, unfair trade patterns and international debt burdens and other issues related to globalization which have led to the deprivation of the world's majority of their basic right to a decent livelihood. Such assistance will help foster a commitment to advocate economic justice at the global level in cooperation with relevant units of this church.[5]

i. Promote education and awareness of human rights among companion churches and agencies, local communities and ELCA synods in their companion relationships.

j. Strengthen cooperation with other units of the ELCA and its ecumenical partners, such as Bread for the World, the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Church World Service and Witness, and the World Council of Churches, as well as world and secular leaders, as they seek to address human rights issues with the U.S., other governments and inter-governmental bodies.

APPENDIX

Particularly Relevant Excerpts from "For Peace in God's World", adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995.

Promote respect for human rights. "Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." These words from the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) are consistent with our understanding of humans created in God's image. Human rights provide a common universal standard of justice for living with our differences, and they give moral and legal standing to the individual in the international community.

We therefore will continue to teach about human rights, protest their violation, advocate their international codification, and support effective ways to monitor and ensure compliance with them. Our priorities are to:

> oppose genocide and other grievous violations of human rights such as torture, religious and racial oppression, forced conscription (impressment), forced labor, and war crimes (including organized rape);
> provide for the most basic necessities of the poor; and
> defend the human rights of groups most susceptible to violations, especially all minorities, women, and children.

Insist that peace and economic justice belong together. Massive hunger and poverty, alongside abundance and wealth, violate the bonds of our common humanity. Such economic disparities are a cause of conflict and war and spur our efforts to build just economic relationships necessary for peace. Justice points toward an economy ordered in ways that:

> respect human dignity;
> provide the necessities of life;
> distribute goods and burdens fairly and equitably; and
> are compatible with a life-sustaining ecosystem.[12] …

Strengthen international cooperation. Belief in a common humanity, increasing global integration, and national self-interest all compel this task. In the Charter of the United Nations and in other international agreements, nations have stated how they believe their relations should be ordered. Normally nations comply with these principles. States pledge to respect the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of other states and not to intervene in their internal affairs, and to honor the self-determination of peoples. They also pledge to fulfill international obligations, to cooperate with other states, and to settle disputes peacefully. While states have the right of self-defense and may resist aggression, they are otherwise to abstain from the threat or use of military force.[14] At present, such principles offer the best framework for a just ordering of international relations. Citizens have responsibility to hold governments accountable to these principles.

As is evident in internal conflicts today, however, the principles of international law are at times in conflict. For example, when a state massively violates the fundamental rights and freedoms of its people, particularly with acts of genocide, does the principle of nonintervention still hold? In our judgment it does not. Because of its responsibility for human rights, the international community, through its regional and global organizations, has an obligation to respond and a right to intervene, with military force if necessary. Yet any such intervention must be carried out with extreme caution and be accountable to the principles of the just/unjust war tradition.

In support for international cooperation, we:

> call for building confidence among nations through forms of state conduct that are legal, nonviolent, truthful, reliable, and open, and for minimizing all forms of covert action;
> advocate increased respect for and adherence to international law;

support viable, long-term efforts to strengthen the United Nations as a forum for international cooperation and peace, including the International Court of Justice,[15] and regional courts;
support creation of an International Criminal Court, which would hold individuals accountable for violations of international law, for example, in cases of genocide and war crimes; and
encourage continuing deliberation on the international community's responsibility for internal conflicts.…

Advocate participatory and accountable political structures within nations. In view of the high number of internal wars, the concern for political structures and processes within nations is crucial for peace. The success or failure of democratic efforts may have significant impact on international peace, since historically democracies have seldom declared war on each other. We expect governments to be accountable to law and people, provide for the participation of all and space for loyal opposition, protect individual and minority rights, and offer processes for conflicts to be resolved without war.

In support for just political structures, we:

call for assistance to nations struggling to form democracies, recognizing that in many nations grinding poverty and population pressure are major obstacles to democracy;
acknowledge that the responsible use of sanctions may on occasion be the most effective and least harmful measure to lead states to stop oppressing their people; and
insist that one of the most important contributions the United States can make to peace is to have its own democracy work for a just and peaceful ordering of its diverse society.

Encourage non-governmental organizations and their work for peace. Freedom of association and activities of non-governmental local, national, and international organizations are indispensable to building peace today. These organizations counter the abuse of state power and mediate between individuals and organized centers of power. Through them, people expose serious human rights violations, respond to human need unmet by governments, organize people who are poor and oppressed, keep attention focused on the brutality of wars, and help resolve conflicts.

In support of non-governmental organizations, we:

recognize and strive to further the role churches play as a worldwide network of communication in the defense of human rights;
encourage people to become active supporters of one or more such non-governmental organizations;
call upon nations to protect by law and nurture in their culture the freedom of their citizens to join together in voluntary association; and
support the emerging forms of service in which teams of highly-trained volunteers seek peace through nonviolent intervention in conflicted and war-torn areas of the world.[17] …

Care for the Uprooted. Tens of millions are refugees in foreign lands. At least as many are internally displaced. In unprecedented numbers people have had to flee their homes because of persecution or general violence.

We support compassionate survival assistance for refugees and vigorous international protection for them. The world community has a responsibility to aid nations that receive refugees and to help change the situations from which they have fled. In our own country, we support a generous policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants. We pledge to continue our church's historic leadership in caring for refugees and immigrants.

NOTES

1 Several ELCA social statements have dealt with justice issues as related to this church’s Christian social responsibility and its advocacy role with governments. Among the relevant social statements adopted by the ELCA are: "The Church in Society, a Lutheran Perspective" (1991), "For Peace in God’s World" (1995) [especially relevant sections appended to this document], and "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" (1999). The ELCA has also adopted numerous resolutions at its churchwide assemblies and Church Council meetings. Prior to the

creation of the ELCA, the American Lutheran Church adopted in 1972 "Peace, Justice and Human Rights" and the Lutheran Church in America adopted "Human Rights: Doing Justice in God's World" in 1978.

2 In doing so ELCA Global Mission also affirms the other major international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations: the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3 Global Mission in the Twenty-First Century, 26-27.

4 Among these human rights are: an end to torture in any form; the promotion of equality among women and men; advocacy and protection for vulnerable groups, including the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, refugees and the displaced, and those denied a voice in society; adequate preventive health and health care; the promotion of and the implementation of the right to peace; the prevention of genocide; legal redress for racial, ethnic and gender-based discrimination; the promotion of the rule of law; and the right to freedom of religion or belief.

5 Many aspects of the ELCA's commitment to economic justice are discussed in "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" (1999) (op. cit.). The social statement addresses local economic justice and its relationship to global economic justice in areas such as poverty reduction, international debt reduction, shifting global budget priorities, community development projects, regulatory reform (especially as it relates to the global economy), employment, sustainable agricultural practices, and efforts to sustain the environment.

The following correspond to the endnotes in the social statement "For Peace in Gods' World"

12 See the ELCA social statement, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice," 1993.

14 See Dorothy V. Jones, Code of Peace: Ethics and Security in the World of the Warlord States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

15 This includes strengthening United States' support for the International Court of Justice. "For the sake of strengthened confidence in the evolving structures of international law and institutions, nations holding self-judging reservations to the Statute of the International Court of Justice by which they reserve the right to reject the Court's jurisdiction should repeal these reservations." See "World Community" (LCA social statement, 1970), page 2.

17 For more on these forms of service, see Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND, Seeds of Peace, Harvest for Life: Report on a Global Peace Service Consultation, from an International Consultation at the Church Center for the United Nations, New York, N.Y., November 18-20, 1993 (St. Meinrad, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1994).

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