

Mennonites support Lutheran efforts in Horn of Africa

News

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Geneva, October 6 (ENInews)--An organization supported by Mennonites has made a significant contribution to the Lutheran church's work at refugee camps serving the Horn of Africa, a gesture that both groups said is a practical expression of a reconciliation that was celebrated last year.

The Akron, Pennsylvania-based Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development agency, pledged a contribution valued at US\$369,500 that includes mosquito nets as well as expertise for education projects, said the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which is managing the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

"This means for us much more than just financial assistance," said the Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service, on 4 October, according to an article published by the LWF's information service. "It is a symbol and an expression of the beauty that grows out of reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites," he added.

The population of the world's biggest refugee camp is expanding rapidly at Dadaab, the LWF said. Currently the complex houses about 480,000 refugees fleeing war and famine in Somalia. Numbers are expected to swell to around 550,000 by early 2012.

In a telephone interview from Nairobi with the LWF news service, Canadian Ron Ratzlaff, who represents the MCC in Kenya, said that the appeal was launched in North America and commented, "The LWF is doing a good job as the lead agency in Dadaab."

In July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany, at its 11th assembly, the LWF unanimously approved a statement calling Lutherans to express their regret and sorrow for past wrongdoings towards Anabaptists, the forebears of Mennonites, and asked for forgiveness. Anabaptists, who deviated from some elements of conventional Christian theology and practice, were subject to persecution in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The LWF represents 145 member churches in 79 countries, comprising more than 70 million Christians.