# Tsunami now, climate change tomorrow, warn church officials: "A clear warning"

News in the January 25, 2005 issue

The killer tsunami that devastated islands and shorelines on the Indian Ocean within hours last month ought to alert political leaders to the perils of what some scientists call a much slower but earth-circling climate change, say two international church executives.

“This was a clear warning on what climate change could do to the world,” said Sam Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches. The Geneva-based Methodist minister from Kenya reiterated the feeling of ecumenical leaders that powerful nations that have not signed the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions should do so.

The Kyoto accord requires developed countries to reduce their output of heat-trapping gases produced by industry, cars and power plants. Countries such as China, India, Saudi Arabia and the United States have not signed the treaty, fearing it could damage economic growth.

The general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Ishmael Noko, echoed the long-term concerns of Kobia that melting ice near the earth’s poles is a sign of long-lasting dangers. “The lands temporarily inundated by the severe [quake-generated] waves could be claimed permanently, along with all other similarly low-lying coastal areas, by rising sea levels caused by global warming,” he said in a statement.

“It is a reminder that we would do well to heed, at a time when even the relatively inadequate efforts by the international community to address climate change continue to be subverted and undermined by some of those most responsible,” said Noko, who is also based in Geneva.

The WCC has 342 affiliated churches in more than 120 countries, and the Lutheran federation has 138 member churches in 77 countries.

Both men also addressed the immediate relief needs, appealing to their constituencies to make special efforts to help those hit by the undersea 9.0 magnitude temblor December 26 off the coast of Sumatra. “This is the calling and a true mark of the church in the face of such terrible events,” Noko said.

Kobia called it “a time for humanity to see how global efforts can try to overcome a tragedy . . . on a scale like this.” He noted that victims included both the poorest of the poor and tourists from richer countries enjoying the warm seashores in the southern hemisphere. Besides the huge death toll, the tragedy left millions of people displaced, according to World Health Organization officials. *–Ecumenical News International*