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June 19, 2003

Posted 6/19/03

Baptist World Alliance report includes plea for unity

By **Tony Martin**

Mississippi Baptist Record

PHOENIX, Ariz.-Immediately before Denton Lotz stood to bring the Baptist World Alliance report to the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers voted not to reconsider a partial defunding of the world Baptist body.

"The Lord has a wonderful sense of humor, doesn't he?" quipped Lotz, BWA general secretary, as he began his report June 18.

Despite the cut in funding and related tensions between the SBC and BWA, Lotz's report was positive and upbeat.

"We Baptists in the Baptist World Alliance, 260 conventions, we want to stick together with Southern Baptists, with brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, with Baptists in South Africa and Zimbabwe," he said. "We stick together because we belong to Jesus Christ."

Lotz brought greetings from BWA President Billy Kim of Seoul, Korea. Kim thanked Southern Baptists for their support of the BWA since 1905.

Kim also invited Southern Baptists to a "birthday party," to the centennial celebration of the BWA in Birmingham, England.

Today is a new day in missions, Lotz declared.

“In 1900, 25 percent of the Christians in the world lived in North America and Europe,” he explained. “In 2003, 60 percent of the Christians are now in the southern hemisphere. The Spirit is moving, and perhaps one day Africans will have to come to re-evangelize Europe and North America.”

In Turkmenistan, Baptist pastors are being beaten and their churches closed, Lotz reported. “That's why we need to work together. That's why we need Southern Baptists to work with us. We work together for religious freedom.

“We also work together for reciprocity,” Lotz continued. “Thirty years ago, there was only one mosque in Washington. Today there are 39. So now, we need to tell our brothers and sisters that we need a church in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. We want religious freedom for the whole world. That's why we work for reciprocity and work in the United Nations for religious freedom.”

The need for a unified Baptist witness also is seen in Russia, Lotz said, noting that in 1990 there was only one Baptist church in Moscow. Today there are 52.

“These are the brothers with whom you need to work and whom you need to support,” he said. “The Holy Spirit is moving all over the world, and that's why we need the support of Southern Baptists. We need your support because we know your commitment to evangelism.

“Southern Baptist need to stay in the BWA because of your joy in stewardship,” Lotz continued. “You have supported us over the years, and we want your continued support.

“Your Baptist brothers and sisters around the world say, 'We don't know you, but we love you in Jesus Christ.'”