

BWA presents human-rights award, accepts four new African groups

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KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (ABP) – A Baptist leader who helped broker peace among rival factions in the northeast Indian state of Nagaland accepted the 2011 Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award July 9.

Wati Aier, principal of the Oriental Theological Seminary in Dimapur, convened the Forum for Naga Reconciliation in 2008. Last September the forum brought together leaders of three armed nationalist groups bringing about a historic pledge to end hostilities that have beset the region for decades.

Wati Aier accepted the 2011 Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award July 9.
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Janice Lotz, who is married to former BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz, presented the annual award that recognizes individuals “engaged in significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights.”

Aier accepted the award, accompanied on stage by his wife, Alongla Aier, a professor at Oriental Theological Seminary and a keynote speaker at last year’s Baptist World Congress in Honolulu.

Aier, a former vice president of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation and current member of the BWA Commission on Peace, credited the Baptist

World Alliance and other Baptist bodies for helping to broker peace "in one of the longest, lasting conflicts in recent history."

More than 2,330 insurgency-related fatalities were recorded in Nagaland between 1992 and 2009. Tight security in the area has curtailed travel in an era in which Aier said the Naga people longed "to live in peace."

BWA President John Upton, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia said what Aier did, "he did for Christ and for his people."

In other business, the BWA accepted four African organizations into its membership during the General Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The BWA now has 222 member bodies in 120 countries.

Two Baptist bodies in the Democratic Republic of Congo became BWA members. The Association of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Congo includes 3,021 members in 36 churches, with offices in Goma, in the eastern part of the nation. The Baptist Churches Union Community of Congo, formed in 1964, includes 46,321 members in 372 churches and has offices in Kikwit in the southwestern part of the country.

The groups bring to 10 the number of member bodies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of Africa's largest countries.

Another new BWA member, the Baptist Convention of Sudan, started in refugee camps in Kakuma, Kenya, in 1996, and includes 18 churches and another 32 in the process of being established. The convention has

Joel Gregory (right), professor at Truett Theological Seminary, presented a report on "Global Baptist Preaching" to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. BWA President John Upton (left) praised the report as "of great value for Baptist world preaching."

more than 13,500 members, with offices in Malakal in South Sudan.

The Free Evangelical Baptist Church of the Central African Republic joins three other BWA member bodies in the French-speaking African nation. It has 57,000 members in 250 churches, with offices in Berbérati.

The BWA General Council also accepted the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India into associate membership. It includes several church bodies in Northeast Indian states, some of which hold full membership in the BWA, and it represents more than 1 million members.