

BWA speaks on religious liberty, women and immigrant families

July 11, 2018



ZURICH, Switzerland—Advocating for religious liberty in eastern Ukraine, protecting women and girls, and keeping immigrant families together were the focus of resolutions the Baptist World Alliance General Council approved at its meeting in Zurich July 2-6.

Religious Liberty in Eastern Ukraine

The first resolution expressed concern about the curbing of religious freedom in an occupied area of the Lugansk region in eastern Ukraine, where Russian forces have taken control of the area and abetted its reorganization as the Lugansk People's Republic.

The "Resolution on the Freedom of Religion in the Lugansk Region in Eastern Ukraine" notes that a new law imposed by the LPR requires that "all religious organizations within the LPR, except the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, must now prove their loyalty to LPR authorities through a re-registration procedure in order to maintain their

legal status,” as well as “to report in detail their activities.”

The statement observes that the law “violates universal human rights, restricts religious freedom, and threatens the existence of existing religious groups and organizational networks,” which violates several articles of international law. Enforcement of the law threatens the futures of 43 Baptist churches in the area.

“All people are created in God’s image and endowed with freedom to worship and practice their religion according to the dictates of their own hearts,” the resolution states, urging the Lugansk Peoples Republic “to change the law in order to make it compatible with freedom of religion or belief as stated in the international declarations, conventions and agreements.”

The resolution further calls upon the UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to gather information, visit the region, and pressure LPR authorities to bring the law in line with international standards.

Protecting Women and Girls

A “Resolution Opposing Violence and Abuse of Women and Girls” responded to issues recently brought to the fore by the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. It “affirms that women and girls are created in the image of God and invested with inestimable worth and dignity as gifts from God, and are essential to the health and vitality of families, churches, communities and national life.”

A teal-colored square with the text "#MeToo" in white, sans-serif font, centered within the square.

The color teal represents sexual assault awareness.

“The church has at times stood silent,” the resolution states, “or has been guilty of perpetuating biblical and theological interpretations regarding women and girls that render them vulnerable to violence and abuse in the home, the church, and society; and hinder their ability to live into the fulness of God.”

The resolution “Notes that the harassment and violence against women and girls worldwide are immoral,” and that “the church has too often been guilty of abusing and demeaning women and girls, and of covering up instances of abuse.”

In response, the resolution calls on BWA member bodies to “enhance the appreciation of the worth and dignity of women and girls in all aspects of family, church life, and in society;” to “provide access to counseling and safe places for women and girls who are victims of abuse;” to “ensure a system of transparent accountability that includes reporting of suspected abuse to appropriate authorities both inside and outside the church;” and to “design and implement culturally contextualized curricula to educate ministerial leadership and congregations about the multi-faceted problem of violence on women and processes to prevent such violence.”

Separating Immigrant Families

The resolution on immigrant families was inspired largely by U.S. actions that have separated many children from their parents at the border, but family separation was recognized as a global problem. The “Resolution on Preserving the Primacy of Family in Immigration” notes that “the human desire to preserve and protect one’s family from violence, disease, economic depravity, and other threatening conditions is universal and drives millions of people to leave their homelands seeking better lives for themselves and their family members.”

The resolution further “affirms the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger” and asserts that God created the family as integral to a healthy society. It, “Calls upon individuals, churches and religious organizations to be involved in immigration issues, supporting the primacy of family solidarity;” and “encourages all Baptists to prophetically challenge immoral policies that seek to undermine the rights and dignity of immigrants, migrants, and refugees.”

Finally, the resolution “urges all governments to follow international law regarding the proper treatment of immigrants, migrants, and refugees, and to uphold the primacy of the family unit.”