

World Evangelical Alliance closes with major statements and commitment to world evangelisation

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The World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly came to a close on Thursday after five days of intensive discussion to plan out the way forward in world evangelisation.

More than 500 senior evangelical leaders gathered for the assembly in Pattaya, Thailand from 25 to 30 October 2008.

On Wednesday, delegates agreed six major resolutions setting out an evangelical response to religious liberty, HIV and Aids, poverty, peacemaking, creation care and the global financial crisis.

"The Body of Christ, His Church, is living with HIV," stated the resolution on HIV, a major focus area for the WEA. "With brokenness we admit that as Evangelical Christians we have allowed stigmatisation and discrimination to characterise our relationships with people living with HIV. We repent of these sinful attitudes and commit to ensuring that they are changed."

In the preamble to the resolution on the Millennium Development Goals, evangelical leaders stated, "In coping with the financial crisis of 2008, governments and international institutions have shown how quickly and effectively they can move to mobilise massive resources in the face of serious threats to our global, common economic well being.

"Yet one child dying of preventable causes every three seconds and 2.7 billion people barely sustained on an income of less than two dollars per day has yet to evoke a similar level of urgent response.

"We believe this to be an affront to God, a shame to governments and civil society, and a massive challenge to the witness and mission of the followers of Christ."

WEA international director Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe told delegates that they faced additional challenges to fulfilling the Great Commission from radical secularism, postmodernism, declining Christianity at the same time as growing interest in spirituality, trafficking and migration.

He insisted, however, that great challenges also brought great opportunities for evangelical engagement.

"We see this tremendous growth and this seismic shift in the church around the world and we are excited to what God is doing as he raises up women and men around the world in so many different places," he said.

"As we think about the global reality of the world in which we live, [there are] immense challenges but also immense opportunities."

Dr Tunnicliffe also said that the WEA would remain committed to integral mission "or holistic transformation, a proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel".

"It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are done alongside of each other but rather in integral mission proclamation has social consequences. We call people to love and repentance in all areas of life," he said.

He reaffirmed the WEA's commitment to world evangelisation.

"If anyone tells you that we've gone soft on world evangelisation you can tell them that we are totally committed to world evangelisation because it is only Jesus Christ that changes people's lives," he said.

A highlight of the week was an address from the Rev Joel Edwards, who was commissioned during the assembly as the new director of Christian anti-poverty movement Micah Challenge.

In his address, the former head of the UK Evangelical Alliance told delegates that the power to rehabilitate the word 'evangelical' lay in their hands.

"Whatever people think of evangelical Christians, if people are going to think differently about evangelicals the only people who can actually change their minds are evangelicals," he said.

"We must reinvent, rehabilitate and re-inhabit what evangelical means as good news. We must present Christ credibly to our culture and we should seek to be active citizens working for long-term spiritual and social change.

"Words can change their meaning. If 420 million evangelicals in over 130 nations across the world really wanted it to happen, evangelical could mean good news."

In another key address, the head of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the Rev Richard Howell said that an identity anchored in Christ and a universal God was an evangelical non-negotiable in an age of pluralism.

"We have but one agenda: obedience to the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ," said Dr Howell. "We are evangelical Christians for the sake of God."

"Our identity has to be related back to God. Unless we do that, we will never know who we are. Our identity comes from God and God alone."

"The Christian belief in the oneness of God implies God's universality, and the universality implies transcendence with respect to any given culture.

"Christians can never be first of all Asians, Africans, Europeans, Americans, Australians and then Christians."

The assembly also heard from the Chair of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, Douglas Birdsall. The World Evangelical Alliance is collaborating with the LCWE in its major Cape Town 2010 meeting, which will bring together 4,000 evangelicals to assess the next steps in realising the movement's vision of 'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world'.

"You might ask is there a need for an international congress that deals with world evangelisation," Birdsall told the assembly. "I would say that throughout history, such a gathering is only necessary when the future of the life of the church is threatened by some type of challenge – either internal challenge or external pressure."

The assembly also saw the launch of the WEA Leadership Institute, a brand new initiative to see the leaders of the WEA's 128 national alliances trained to serve and proclaim Christ within some challenging contexts.

"Leading an Evangelical Alliance is not easy," commented Dr Tunnicliffe. "That's why we want to provide them with the relevant training and resources."

Also commissioned during the week was the new leader of the WEA's Religious Liberty Commission, Sri Lankan national Godfrey Yogarajah.

Dr Tunnicliffe rounded up the assembly with a call to evangelicals to keep in step with God's work on earth.

"It is my prayer that we in our community will be women and men who live with divine purpose within our lives, that we will be good leaders envisioned by God to make a difference in the world," he said.

"The most important thing that you can do with your [life] is to integrate it into the never ending story of God's kingdom. God's already at work in the world. He's doing things. We just need to align with what He is doing."