Lutheran World Federation again defers decision on new leader

By Peter Kenny and Stephen Brown
Geneva, 23 October (ENI) -- Members of the main governing body of the Lutheran World Federation have postponed for a second day a decision on the election of a new general secretary for the global grouping that unites more than 68 million Protestants.

At the same time, the search committee for the position was asked "to make every effort to bring an additional name of a candidate" forward, the LWF said in a statement issued on 23 October. It said it the intention was still to make an election during the 22-27 October meeting of its council. "This in no way reflects on the quality of the search committee's report," said the LWF president, Bishop Mark Hanson, in the statement.

At a media conference, Hanson answered questions about criticism of the process being closed and lacking in the type of transparency expected in the 21st century that had emerged before the meeting in Lutheran media and was uttered confidentially by some council members.

Hanson, who heads the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said the federation would in the future try to make the "process stronger". "We will seriously analyse this process," he stated. "We are always learning."

He described the process for the selection of the LWF president as being open, but said that matters are different in seeking a general secretary who is the chief executive officer of the Geneva-based grouping.

"We must respect the confidentiality of those who are not willing for it to be known to their own employer or their own organization that they are being considered by another, for if they are not selected that can often put their own ability to lead in some jeopardy," said Hanson.

The LWF’s council had been scheduled to elect a successor to the Rev. Ishmael Noko, a Zimbabwean theologian, as general secretary in a behind-closed-doors session on 22 October, the first day of a six-day meeting near Geneva.

After more than four hours of discussion, Hanson said the council had agreed to reconvene the following day. After it met on 23 October it failed to make a decision on a new general secretary.

Discussion on the general secretary's election and the report by the search committee, headed by the former president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus the Rev. Iteffa Gobena, took place in a closed session of the council. The seven-member search committee comprises representatives from all the LWF's regions.

At the June 2008 Council meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, Noko announced that he would be leaving office on 31 October 2010, after the next LWF assembly in July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.
The council is made up of 48 members elected by the LWF’s highest governing body, its assembly, and the LWF president and treasurer. The LWF is made up of 140 churches from 79 nations with a total membership of 68.5 million people.

The Finnish Lutheran weekly newspaper Kotimaa earlier in October reported dissatisfaction among some church members who said that the lack of transparency in the process was not appropriate means of communication in the modern era.

(Source: ENI)