

Global faith-based aid alliance says a billion hungry wrong

by [Stephen Brown ENI](#)

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Geneva, October 29 (ENI)--The head of a worldwide faith-based humanitarian and development alliance has said his organization needs to take a more vocal stance on global inequalities.

"We are fired up and motivated to challenge political figures, big business and the vested interests of the world's richest nations," ACT Alliance general secretary John Nduna said at the end of the group's 19-22 October assembly in Arusha, Tanzania.

"In today's world, a billion people are going to bed hungry, only 30 percent of children in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa have access to anti-malarial drugs and climate change is devastating the world's poorest people," said Zambian-born Nduna in a statement, made available to ENInews. "We know this is wrong. We know we must make our voices heard against all these gross injustices."

The alliance says its 105 church and church-related members employ 33 000 staff and volunteers in 140 countries and have an income of US\$1.6 billion a year. Its international secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Opening the Arusha gathering, former Tanzanian prime minister Frederick Sumaye urged ACT Alliance to use its power within and outside the churches in the global South and North to bring an end to corruption and poverty, Lutheran World Information reported.

The meeting was the first general assembly of ACT Alliance, created in January by merging two development and emergency relief networks, both of which had the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation as founding members.

In a 20 October address to the meeting, WCC general secretary the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit pointed to the need for "strong alliances to support the struggle of communities which suffer ongoing poverty or have become victims of disasters".

Tveit, a Norwegian Lutheran theologian, described one of the strengths of the ecumenical movement as being its links "from the local level to the global, and from the global to the local".

No other organization or network, he said, "is so deeply rooted in the local realities of people, while at the same time having widespread, well-organized structures at the national, regional and global levels".

Still, some churches have said that in times of crisis they are not seen as "valuable local partners" by ACT members, Tveit asserted, referring to a visit to Haiti as well as messages from churches in Pakistan after recent floods there.

In Haiti, he said, there had been impressive relief work by agencies, including ACT members, after the January earthquake, "but when the WCC called for a meeting, it became clear that the churches were not involved in the work on the ground and that they were not included in the ACT Alliance's day-to-day deliberations".

Cooperation with local and national churches would give ACT Alliance, "precisely the unique added value that will make it relevant and more effective in its work".

Tveit also referred to the "multi-religious realities" in which most churches and members of the ACT Alliance are working.

"The practical work done together by members of different religions could be an important instrument in avoiding conflicts and building bridges," said the WCC leader. "The question here is whether development cooperation and humanitarian assistance can play a role in long-term peace building."

The Rev. Martin Junge, LWF acting general secretary, said in a message to the assembly that he hoped decisions made there would transform the lives of the poor and of the structures and systems that deny the poor access to their rights.

"As we serve people and strive to uphold their rights, we understand ourselves as a communion of churches that participates in God's mission and does so jointly with other churches and their diaconal institutions," said Junge.

The assembly elected the Rev. Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel as ACT Alliance moderator. She is executive director of two German aid agencies, both members of the ACT Alliance: Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe. The Rev. Francisco de Assis da Silva of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil was

elected vice-moderator.