



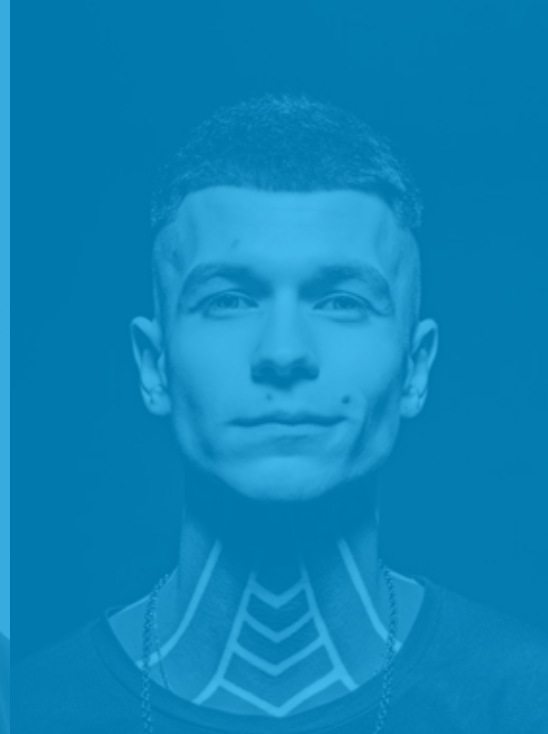
# HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN 2022



But who  
are **you**,  
to judge your  
**neighbour**?

James 4:12





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James 4:12

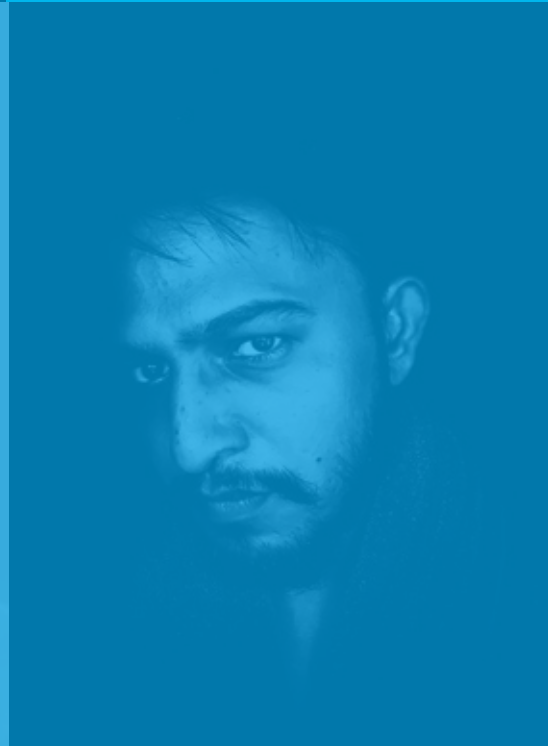
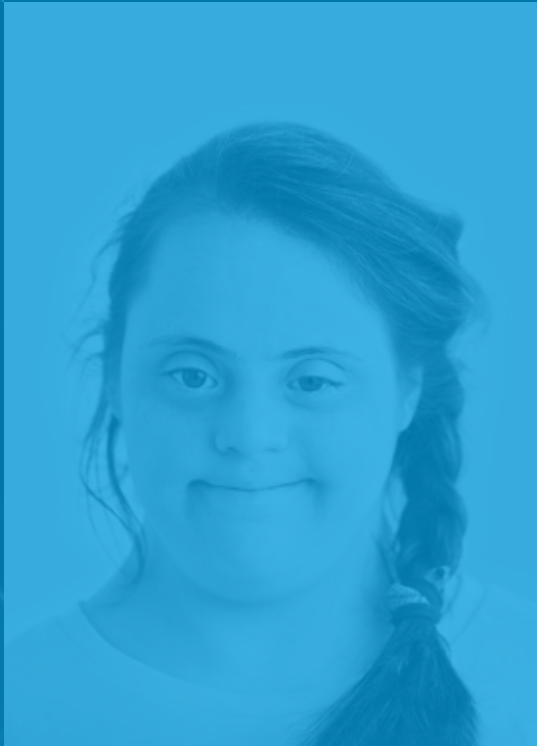
**Against Discrimination and Exclusion.  
For Human Rights.**

For Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation - Against Discrimination  
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United Evangelical Mission



The Poster for the Human Rights Campaign 2022 for Germany region





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## INTRODUCTION

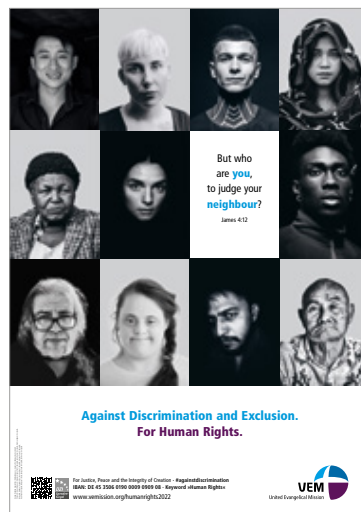
# UNITED AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION FOR AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

JOCHEN MOTTE

“But who are you to judge your neighbour?” (James 4:12). One year ago, young people in the UEM community used this Bible verse to introduce the human rights campaign against discrimination and exclusion. Young adults in Africa, Asia, and Germany committed themselves to actions and projects advocating for inclusive communities: they opposed discrimination against young women in Rwanda who were excluded from church choirs because of pregnancy and were not allowed to go to school, fought against racism in church and society in Germany, worked to combat discrimination against indigenous people, and campaigned against the intimidation of people in the Philippines based on their political beliefs. From numerous individual actions in Africa, Asia, and Germany, a movement has emerged, with many different Christians working in their respective environments to stop the condemnation, disadvantage, and degradation of people.

We have seen on social media how fast people can be condemned and how negative the forces this can unleash. “Likes” determine the value of people, judge who belongs and who doesn’t, who is “in” and who is “out”.

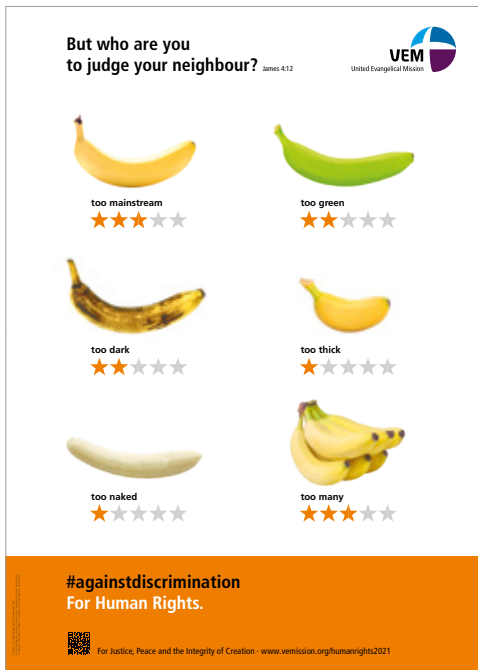
- “Against Discrimination and Exclusion” is the focus of the human rights campaign for the second year running. The UEM has selected two posters for the German region for the 2022 human rights campaign: black and white faces (see below) and a colourful mirror image (page 5, right). One poster was designed for the Asian region (page 6) and one for the African region (page 12).



Again and again in his life Jesus Christ found signs and words to oppose judgment and exclusion: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He included everyone: people with disabilities, including sick people who back then were considered unclean; children, who were not considered fully fledged human

beings; single women; the needy; and people looked askance at by society, such as tax collectors. It is not that Jesus approves of everything that people do or bring about, but in him God reaches out to all people and says: You all belong, you are part of fellowship with me, regardless of what you bring with you and what distinguishes you from one another.

Paul describes this belonging of God and man in his Epistle to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The two posters on the cover of this booklet – one page with different black and white portraits,



📍 The Poster for the Human Rights Campaign 2021 for Germany region



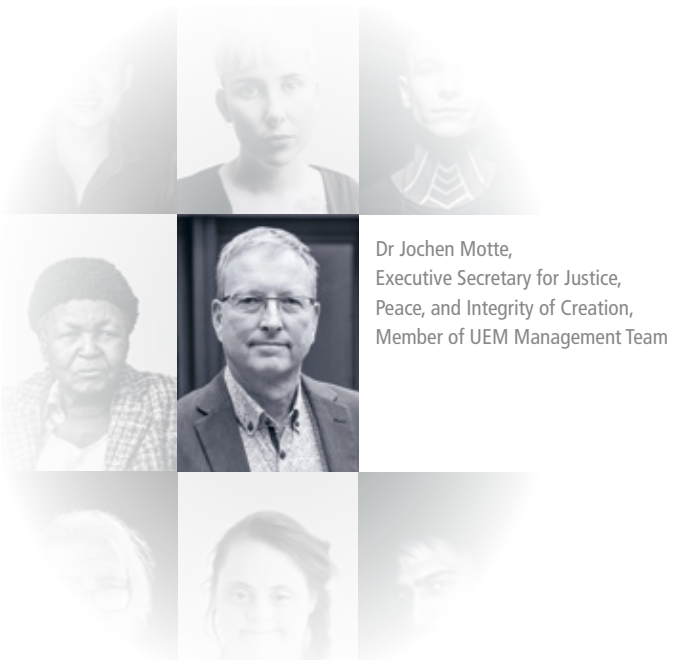
📍 The Poster for the Human Rights Campaign 2022 for Germany region

the other with a mirror image – express exactly that: people are different. But Jesus looks out at us through every person, embodying what true humanity is all about. Every person is given dignity and rights by God – in opposition to any discrimination or exclusion or violence.

The UEM community launched the campaign against discrimination and exclusion in December of 2020. It will continue through this year, with different priorities set for each region. In Asia, Christians in an inter-religious community are taking a stand against faith-based discrimination. In Africa, churches are raising awareness of the rights of people with disabilities and advocating for their participation. In Germany, the fight against racism remains the focus. Subject- and project-specific information can be found in this booklet.

We invite you to support these projects financially as well. We encourage you to organize campaigns against discrimination and exclusion in your communities and congregations, or to take part in such campaigns yourself. Just presenting one of our poster designs in a church, meetinghouse, or display case sends a visible sign and signal: “We as a church stand against discrimination and exclusion, and for an inclusive community”. You are welcome to obtain the posters we have sent to congregations directly from us. For information on the subject of discrimination and exclusion, we

invite you to refer to the booklet from the previous human rights campaign ([https://www.ve mission.org/broschuere\\_menschenrechte\\_2021](https://www.ve mission.org/broschuere_menschenrechte_2021)) and the UEM blog “Rassismus und Kirche” (Racism and the Church) <https://rassismusundkirche.de>. ■



Dr Jochen Motte,  
Executive Secretary for Justice,  
Peace, and Integrity of Creation,  
Member of UEM Management Team

**But who are you  
to judge your neighbour?**

James 4:12

**#againstdiscrimination  
For Human Rights.**



For Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation · [www.vemission.org/humanrights2022](http://www.vemission.org/humanrights2022)



## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

## ASIA

## Religious Discrimination in Asia

# For many people, freedom of religion is not simply a human right but a question of survival

IRMA RIANA SIMANJUNTAK

**C**ountries in Asia have religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. The residents of these countries live in a heterogeneous society, and the efforts to manage these differences are a part of people's lives. Several countries in Asia have legal systems in place that guarantee freedom of religious expression and belief for all citizens. In reality, however, differing political and economic interests still trigger many conflicts among religious communities in Asia. State-sanctioned freedoms are not sufficient to preserve peace and harmony among the people. Violence in the name of religion is increasing, and the number of people who fall victim to discrimination and exclusion continues to grow. Here are a few examples of religious discrimination from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

### Philippines: Religious freedom – Claim and reality

The Philippines does not have a state religion. Since its independence in 1898, the country has had freedom of religion, which is also constitutionally protected. The Philippines has also ratified important international agreements on the protection of human rights. But disturbing consequences have befallen religious groups in the Philippines that have protested against government policies and actions that violate human rights and suppress freedom of expression. The passage of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 is one example of how the Duterte administration has suppressed

freedom of expression. Another is the creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a task force organized by the Duterte administration to respond to the ongoing communist rebellion in the Philippines. NTF-ELCAC red-tags human rights activists, including religious leaders and groups, as terrorists or communists. A number of church workers have been arrested on trumped-up charges.

### Sri Lanka: Divided country at fragile peace

Religion is very important to most people in Sri Lanka. Religion and ethnicity are closely linked. That is why almost every ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is also a religious conflict. Although peace has returned to Sri Lanka after decades of civil war (until 2009) between the predominantly Hindu Tamils and the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese, religious harmony and unity are fragile in the South Asian island nation. Terrorist groups are a threat in a number of countries in Asia, and Sri Lanka is no exception. Many civil society actors and places of worship have been targeted with bombings, massacres, and violence. Even though general religious freedom is constitutionally protected, Buddhism is constitutionally privileged. The influence of radical Buddhist monks is great. They often make the headlines with their aggressive behaviour. Attacks against religious minorities are steadily increasing: in 2019 over 200 people were killed in the Easter Sunday bombings, and hundreds were injured. Many victims still suffer from severe trauma today. >



## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

- > Minority groups in Sri Lanka such as Muslims, Tamils, and Christians have become the targets of bombings by extremist groups. A number of activists who called for peace and the enforcement of human rights in Sri Lanka were arrested by the government under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).<sup>1</sup>

### Indonesia: Religious freedom in danger?

In Indonesia, freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in the constitution for the six recognised religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism). In everyday reality, however, there are still numerous violations of religious freedom. These violations have continued during the pandemic: 2020 saw various acts of discrimination and intolerance, with 180 incidents where freedom of religion or belief was violated, and 422 actions of intolerance committed. A total of 24 worship places were attacked in 2020: 14 mosques, 7 churches, 1 Vihara (Buddhist temple compound), 1 Pura (Balinese Hindu temple), and 1 temple. Muslims are the group whose houses of worship have been hardest hit. It should be noted, however, that the most commonly attacked Muslim sites are places of worship for Muslims, from different *madzhab* or groups that the perpetrators consider different from the mainstream.<sup>2</sup>

1 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/29/sri-lanka-pardons-meager-response-abusive-law>

2 <https://setara-institute.org/pandemi-lahan-subur-diskriminasi-dan-intoleransi/>

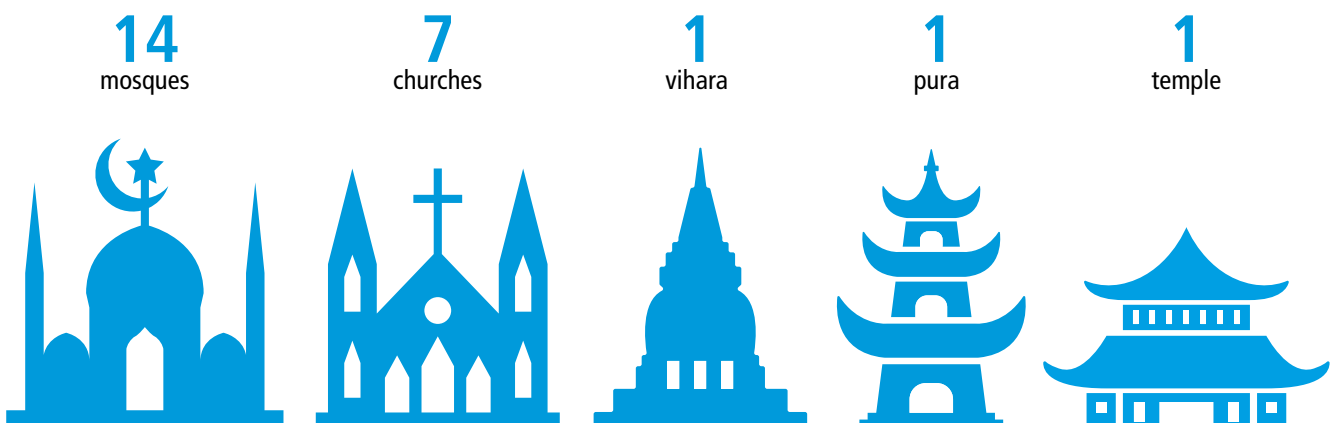
Sharia law is not applied at the national level in Indonesia, but it does have local application in different districts and municipalities. In such places the existence of other religions is more challenging due to regulations at the local level that make it burdensome to establish houses of worship. Regulations mandate the use of headscarves for female students and ensure that education in minority religions is unavailable in schools. In Padang, West Sumatra, girls are required to wear the hijab at school – a headscarf that covers the hair, the ears and the neck, usually also slightly the shoulders. If they don't comply, they are pressured to drop out. The same insistence applies to women who work in government agencies, who are required to wear the hijab even if they are of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or some other faith.<sup>3</sup>

### Aceh Singkil: Youth as agents of peace

In 2012, pressure from radical Islamists led the Indonesian police to close 17 churches in the Aceh Singkil region, including the Christian Church in Indonesia (HKI) and the Pakpak Dairi Church (GKPPD), both member churches of the UEM. The congregations have refused to accept the extremists' demands and the government's inaction. Various elements, including UEM member churches, have made continuing efforts to advocate on behalf of the closed churches to the president of the Republic of Indonesia. These efforts have not yet been successful.

3 <https://setara-institute.org/pandemi-lahan-subur-diskriminasi-dan-intoleransi/>

### 24 Attacks on places of worship in 2020





- Kevin Padang leads the Christian youth organisation in Aceh Singkil.



- Pastor Palti Panjaitan, together with others, has developed a project against religious-based discrimination.



- Taking a stand for peace and reconciliation: representatives of the major religions met in 2021 in Salatiga, Indonesia at the invitation of the UEM.

Christian residents in Aceh Singkil have faced eviction for defending their identity as Christians. In 2015, their churches were burned and closed down by the Aceh Singkil district government. Since then they have been using tents as an insufficient and inadequate place for worship. The National Human Rights Commission helped to facilitate mediation efforts with the Aceh Singkil government. Before the mediation occurred, the UEM trained the community through the GKPPD synod to be able to negotiate with the local government and gave them a number of arguments to advocate for themselves from various perspectives. Unfortunately, these mediation efforts

have not yet yielded any results because the Aceh Singkil district government is dead set against granting permits to the demolished churches.

On 14 July 2021, a UEM-funded project brought HKBP synod Rev. Palti Panjaitan to Aceh Singkil, together with the Solidarity Organization for Violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief (SOBAT KBB) Indonesia. Over the past decade, hatred and persecution against religious minorities has increased in North Sumatra. The HKBP Community Work Unit (Pengmas), together with the organisation SOBAT KBB has developed a project to combat religious discriminati-

## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

> on. Based on research and working visits minority groups in North Sumatra, the HKBP in Pematangsiantar would like to establish a network for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. This project is supported by the UEM. The HKBP, Christian Protestant Toba Batak Church, is a member church of the UEM. He met with Rosyidasari, a young Muslim from Simpang Kanan Village in Aceh Singkil, who invited Rev. Palti and his friends to attend the Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran (MTQ/Reading Alquran Festival) in Danau Paris District, Aceh Singkil.

Rev. Palti invited a group of Christian youths to attend as well. Franyudi Berutu, one of the members of this group, confessed that the MTQ event was the first time in his life that he had attended activities in his hometown that were organized by Muslims. He expressed that he still felt fear about the Muslim community because of the persecution that he and the Christian community in Aceh Singkil faced in 2015. Kevin Padang, the head of the Christian Youth Organization in Aceh Singkil, had a similar experience: "I just visited this Muslim community for the first time."

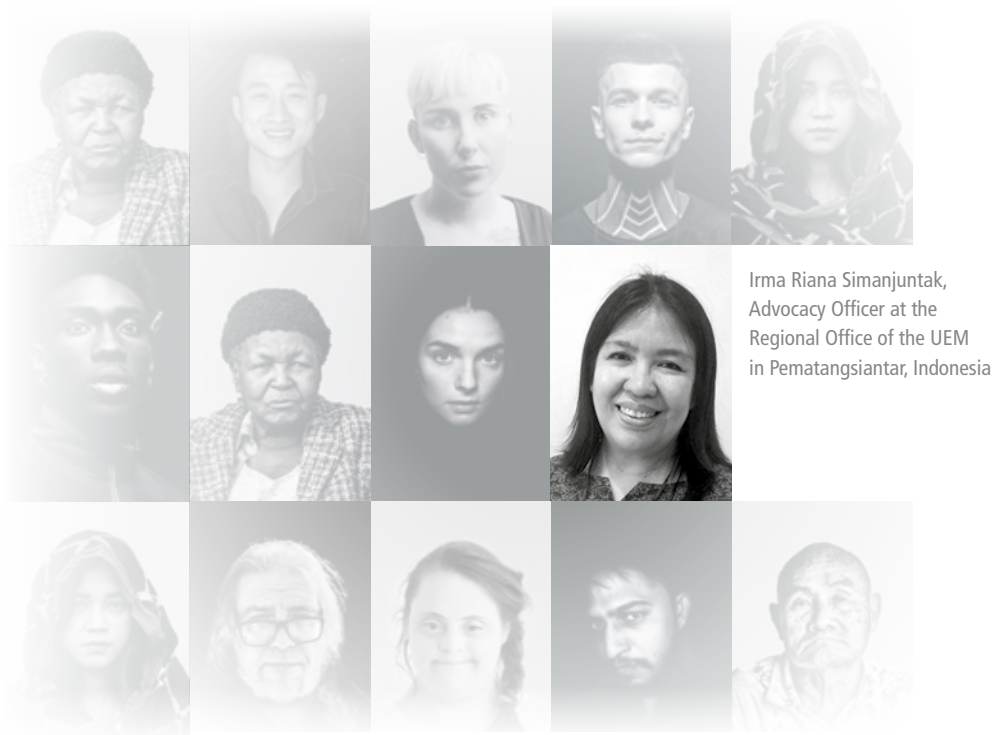
YOUR DONATION HELPS!

**This is what the UEM is doing in Asia:**

- Training young "peacemakers" of different faiths
- Organizing joint events that foster interfaith dialogue and cohesion
- Creating information campaigns on religious freedom in the Aceh Singkil region

**Support this project with your donation**

The Muslim and Christian youths at the meeting, some of whom had participated in activities organized by the UEM in Sabang, Aceh Province, were encouraged by these events. The assembly on that afternoon was intended to bring together the Muslim and Christian youth communities of Aceh Singkil through a mutual desire for peace and harmony. Attendees and organizers expressed the hope that more of these assemblies would occur in the future, to help break the standoff between the two groups from past conflicts and transform them into agents of peace in Aceh Singkil. ■



## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

## AFRICA

# Free and equal and self-determined Human rights for people with disabilities

KAMBALE JEAN-BOSCO KAHONGYA BWIRUKA

**T**o judge others is to reject the diversity that is part of the essence of God. The God who said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). He created that image as man and woman, with their different skin colours, shapes, and sizes, in complementary diversity.

Discrimination is everywhere, and Africa is no exception. No form of discrimination is tolerable on the African continent, no matter what kind: whether on the basis of socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, membership in a minority, or congenital disability, discrimination is always a violation of human dignity.

In Africa in particular, people with disabilities face severe discrimination and are wrongly referred to as “handicapped”. In some cultures, a baby born with a congenital disability is not given a name by its parents at birth. This means that the baby does not belong to the family and is not considered human. Parents will often hide the baby in the home, where it is left to fend for itself until it dies. Those who survive such cruel abuse are still not given the same opportunities in society as those without impairments.

In most cultures, people are given nicknames that correspond to their disability. When I was little I knew a man called Simoni Mutsiha. I thought that “Mutsiha” was his family name. Only later did I realize that I had misunderstood: Mutsiha meant “deaf” in his native language. Obviously, Simoni was deaf. These nickna-

mes can have several functions: either to describe a person’s particular suffering, which is already a kind of stigma, or to mock them, as if they were undeserving of respect.

Es kommt selten vor, dass ein Mensch mit Behinderung heiratet, in einem Büro angestellt wird oder eine hohe Leitungsposition innehat. Manche Einschränkungen hindern ihn sogar daran, in bestimmten Berufen tätig zu sein, zum Beispiel als Lehrer\*in zu unterrichten, oder einige Sportarten auszuüben. Soziologisch gesehen ist das die Folge solcher Stigmatisierungen.

It is rare for a person with a disability to marry, find employment in an office, or hold a senior position. Some restrictions even prevent persons with disabilities from working in certain professions, for example as a teacher or in various forms of sport. Speaking sociologically, this exclusion can be seen as the result of the other stigmatizations. Not many schools in Tanzania specialize in pupils with special disabilities. This limits their development opportunities enormously, and the conditions in the churches are basically no different. Of course the churches emphasize equal opportunities for all people regardless of ability, and some have schools and diaconal centres for people with special disabilities. But many congregation members have not yet developed sufficient awareness to understand that all people are equal and deserve respect. The church still has work to do on integrating people with disabilities. They could be offered a seat and a voice in church leadership, for example; they could take part in the liturgy and be included in the development of a more universally accessible church.





»But who  
are you  
to judge your  
neighbour?«

James 4:12



#againstdiscrimination  
**For Human Rights.**



For Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation · [www.vemission.org/humanrights2022](http://www.vemission.org/humanrights2022)





> **The Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Lutheran Church: Inclusion of people with disabilities**

People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups in the church. They are often stretched to their limits in their struggle for equality. With its project in the Central District church district, the UEM community is raising awareness among young people and group leaders about including people with disabilities into the Eastern and Coastal diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

In recent years, the number of parishioners in the Central District of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese has risen sharply. Children, young people, and women are becoming particularly active in church programmes and bringing their various skills to the church. The participation of people with disabilities in church activities, from normal worship to taking up leadership positions, is a major challenge here. Essentially they have not yet taken part in church life. They are considered to be inferior, and their interests and rights in the church are not being taken into account. The duty of the church to advocate for justice and peace has little credibility if the church is not fighting to actively involve people with disabilities in the spiritual and social life of the church and to integrate them fully into the church and parish.

Every four years elections are held at the parish, district, and diocesan level in the Central District, with its 44 congregations. These elections include leadership positions that young people and women could also stand for. No young person with disabilities won a leadership position in the 2018 elections. This shows on the one hand that they are not recognized and valued, and on the other that they have no voice to express their concerns and demands regarding inclusion. After all, at the beginning of 2020 almost 130 young people with disabilities were living in the Central District, as shown by a survey from the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

**Raising young people's awareness of the inclusion of people with disabilities**

The aim of the project of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese is to ensure that people with disabilities not only participate in the grassroots of the church, but that they also occupy leadership positions within the church and are actively involved in all church events. At the same time, inclusion makes young people with disabilities a part of the awareness campaign for church members. Youth leaders without disabilities provide support with this process. What makes this project special is its gender-specific orientation. The church has recognized that both men and women with disabilities face discrimination on the basis of their disability, but that women are more vulnerable because of the intersection of their gender and disability. Those in charge of the project hope that by its end, some 130,000 people will have been made aware of this subject through live radio and television broadcasts.

**YOUR  
DONATION  
HELPS!**

**Examples of the UEM's involvement in Africa in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania:**

- Joint events and live radio and television broadcasts to raise awareness among young people and group leaders for the inclusion of people with disabilities
- Active participation of people with disabilities in the spiritual and social life of the church
- Comprehensive integration of people with disabilities in parishes and the church, such as through seats and votes in church leadership and participation in the liturgy

**Support this project with your donation**



## Mathayo Masheko

» I am 29 years old and blind from birth. My little brother lost his eyesight in the course of his life. At first he could still see with one eye, but now he is completely blind too. I think we inherited this from our grandmother, who was also blind. I try not to get angry when someone discriminates against me, because I know that God loves and needs me. I'm getting older, so I'd like to marry soon and have my own child – to have some kind of support in my old age. But it's very difficult to find a Christian woman who would marry a blind man; Muslim women are more willing to do so. They believe that marrying someone with a particular disability increases their wages before God. God has given me many gifts. I sing in the church choir and I am a member of the youth group in the church. I face various forms of discrimination. I am excluded by people who don't know me well. I try to be open to others, to take care of myself and accept my condition. Everyone where I live knows me and respects me. **I'd like to be an ambassador of the church who encourages other people with disabilities.** I would like to discuss our problems, hopes, and expectations with the church, and talk about how to deal with people with disabilities so that they too can feel that they deserve respect. «

## Neema Elia Shole

» I am 27 years old and have been paralysed since I was 14. I dropped out of school at that point and only briefly attended a dressmaking school. The school did me good and helped me get a wheelchair. **Sometimes the young people in the church forget that I'm one of them too.** For example, I am not invited to seminars and events that have to do with my life and my generation. Most of the time I follow the services through the media because I cannot enter the church building unassisted. I want to help and support other people who have the same problems as I do. I would like to be independent and self-determined. «



Rev. Prof. Dr. Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka,  
Advocacy Officer at the  
Regional Office of the UEM  
in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

## GERMANY

# To Educate and to Sensitize: On Overcoming Racism in German Churches and Society

SARAH VECERA

**In recent years we have seen the rise of the #metoo, Black Lives Matter, and Fridays for Future movements, especially in white-majority societies. People are campaigning collectively and comprehensively for less discrimination and more equality of opportunity. The churches in the German region are currently engaged in a particularly intensive and self-critical discussion about racism. We realized very quickly that we could not look at racism in a vacuum: as a church, we are not free from other mechanisms of oppression such as patriarchy and capitalism. Here are the reasons why the church and German society as a whole have become so focused on the issue of racism right now.**

After the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, many white-majority societies around the world began confronting racism much more overtly. This has also been the case in Germany, where people who actively position themselves against racism and/or are affected by racism have joined forces and become more vocal. The UEM receives numerous requests for workshops, seminars, and lectures every week. We have noticed that there is great interest in this subject as well as great curiosity. We do not purport to have all the answers at the UEM, but we have been trying to expose and overcome racism for twenty-five years: in 1996, the General Assembly of the UEM decided that all members from Africa, Asia, and Germany would have the same rights regarding financial and political decisions within the organization. This decision triggered a complete overhaul of the UEM organizational structure, with the goal of overcoming old colonial patterns.

But we are still not free of racism, even in 2021. Thanks to our many years of experience and our special expertise on the topic of racism and its many manifestations, however, we have established a body of knowledge that we want to share. We want to educate and sensitize others on the subject of racism. And that is exactly what we are being called to do.

Racism in Germany is a structural problem. It is less about person-to-person interactions than it is about racist structures and decision-making processes. Routines and norms have been designed in such a way that Black people and People of Colour (POCs) are implicitly disadvantaged. Media reports and surveys, such as those conducted by Mediendienst Integration, often present examples of structural racism occurring in schools and in law enforcement. But churches contribute their share as well. For example, the proportion of POCs at both leadership and congregational level in the churches is significantly lower than the average in our society. Even Jesus himself is now presented as white, although historically and geographically he was also a person of colour.

We increasingly lack perspectives from people who are themselves affected by racism in the church space in the German region. In the UEM we have these perspectives and have been learning for many years that it is necessary to listen to each other, to take other perspectives and to question the »normal« of a white-majority society. Education and pastoral care are important in addressing the issue of racism. Black and white people suffer from this system in different ways. But we also suffer together as a Christian community, and that can be our strength as

&gt;



## PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

The blessing of the children (pictured here) is one of the many illustrations that Anna Lisicki-Hehn drew for the children's Bible. ▶

- > Christians. The Black woman pastor in Germany who is subjected to racist insults in her own congregation suffers. The white partnership chair who was active in the anti-apartheid movement and is now confronted with accusations of racism suffers too. Both of these people suffer differently. Of course, the white person benefits from the racist system. And both – the Black pastor and the white partnership chair – actually want the same thing: a world free from oppression, where Christians build the kingdom of God. In a world marked by racism and sexism, neither person has chosen their role.

At the UEM we try to enter into a dialogue through various formats, all of which are necessary in the current circumstances. Our monthly introductory seminars on racism and the church, for example, take place via Zoom and are regularly fully booked. We also present a podcast where we illuminate different topics from different perspectives. We have about 800 listeners every four weeks. What's more, we are currently working with a group of experts to develop an anti-racist faith course for congregations. We also have a blog that covers racism and the church at [www.rassismusundkirche.de](http://www.rassismusundkirche.de), where you can read various articles, access educational material, and contact speakers or exchange ideas in the forum.

### A children's Bible for all

Discriminatory patterns and ideas become entrenched in early childhood. When three-year-olds role-play, for example, the classic archetypes are usually already evident. The situation is similar with racist imprinting, as has been revealed in »projective doll interviews« in which children are asked to impute characteristics to dolls or figures of varying skin colours. The automatic positive perception of white subjects as beautiful and good and the automatic perception of Black subjects as bad or evil has been shown to be formed at a very early age.



It became clear at the very beginning of our anti-racist education work that we could not start exclusively with adults, but rather must also shape new images among children in order to break through entrenched narratives and stereotypes. When we looked at children's Bibles in German-speaking countries, we noticed that marginalized groups were hardly visible, nor were their problems represented as important. People with disabilities only appear in children's Bibles as in need of healing, rather than being represented as a normal part of society. Women are shown in their classic roles; there are no fat people in children's Bibles; Jews are »the others«; and Jesus himself is ultimately depicted as white, Christian, and Eurocentric. In some Bibles, even the almighty God appears as an old white man. These images lead children to adopt these ideas about God, even in kindergarten. And children who themselves suffer from exclusion see themselves portrayed in the Bible as the problem, when they are portrayed at all.





This is why we have been working since autumn 2020 with a team to create a children's Bible that is sensitive to gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, and appearance. The team has already defined a canon for the children's Bible, developed criteria for the language of images and texts, and selected an illustrator and author from numerous candidates. We hope to publish this new children's Bible in autumn 2022. ■

**YOUR  
DONATION  
HELPS!**

Your donation helps!

The project in Germany:  
An anti-racist children's Bible

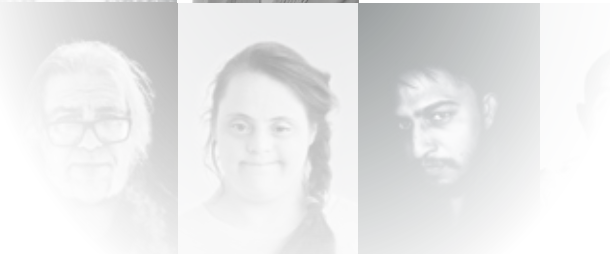
Words and pictures ensure that:

- Children and their adult carers feel that their various experiences, family cultures, skin colours, gender identities, and bodies are included
- The variety and diversity of humanity is represented in all its aspects

Please support this project with your donation so that children can learn how diverse God's creation is!



Sarah Vecera,  
Coordinator for Global Learning  
in Ecumenical Perspective and  
Deputy Head of Department of the  
German Region of the UEM



Anti-racist children's Bibel: a joint project from  
The Evangelical Church in the Rhineland  
The Evangelical Church of Westphalia  
Institut für Ev. Theologie, TU Dortmund  
Religionspädagogisches Institut beim Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat  
der Evangelischen Landeskirche Baden  
United Evangelical Mission

## WORSHIP SERVICE AND DEVOTION

# Thoughts on James 4:11-12

SABINE HÜBNER

IRMA RIANA SIMANJUNTAK

KAMBALE JEAN-BOSCO KAHONGYA BWIRUKA

**B** “Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?”  
(James 4:11-12)

The end has no full stop, but a question mark. A curved, dynamic punctuation mark, inviting one to think ahead at the end of the sentence instead of pausing there. “Who are you to judge your neighbour?” For the second year running, this question headlines the Human Rights Campaign Against Discrimination and Exclusion. It comes from the Epistle of James, which deals in astonishing detail with what it means when people devalue and judge one another.

The Epistle of James uses the impressive image of words as poison (*James 3:8*), and in so doing offers an unsparingly honest analysis of what drives people apart in society and the church. There are words that hurt, words that do harm, even words that have deadly consequences. And these are not just boisterous and disparaging comments and tweets, but also subtler overtones and almost unremarkable glances. There are sentences that sound well-meaning, even as they push a person into a place they have no desire to be, or fingers that point reproachfully at people, fingertips that tap aggressively on a keyboard.

“Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another!” (*James 4:11*) urges this above all, and the author sees this as requiring communities to exchange freely with one another.

Even today, people in the churches are directly or indirectly excluded because there is supposedly something wrong with their religiosity, their sexuality, their bodies, or their views.

Churches in Africa have reported on the indirect exclusion of people with disabilities who are not finding appropriate conditions in church structures, organization, or even discourse, and are not receiving adequate treatment. They are often ignored, giving them the impression that they do not belong to the Christian community.

Another form of discrimination is the everyday racism in German churches, such as when a church member is still being asked about his or her origins after years of membership in a congregation. People who face such discrimination often experience that their negative encounters are not noticed and that subtle conflicts go unmentioned.

In many places in Asia, Christians belong to a minority and are frequent victims of discrimination and exclusion. But the local Christians also experience how the churches themselves can effect discrimination. Women will be rejected as decision-makers, for instance, or their options will be limited. The exclusion of LGBTQIA+<sup>1</sup> people is also widespread, and they have almost nowhere to seek support.

The author of the Epistle of James addresses this subject. He recalls that judging and devaluing a person goes against Old Testament law and the call to love one’s neighbour as oneself (*Leviticus 19: 16-18*). A person who holds themselves above the law in this respect not only devalues the law, but also attacks God

<sup>1</sup> LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual and asexual people)

## Who am I?

himself. One who judges and disdains others damages their own relationship with God in the process. A more fundamental justification for the responsibility to love one's neighbour and for solidarity among all people is inconceivable.

At the end there is the question: "Who are you...?" The question is not just a linguistic style choice; to the contrary, it is a serious invitation to turn my gaze inward, upon myself. What is my identity? What has shaped me in my life? How has that influenced what I say and think about others? "Who am I...?" It takes courage to come to grips with my own thoughts, actions, and feelings. This applies to the personal sphere, but also to where we as decision-makers are responsible for structures in companies, communities, and organizations. God provides us with everything we need for this.

- I was created as a unique individual and accepted by God as such (*James 1:18*). This is not only for me to recognize, but for all others to as well, and thereby does God help me to make new each day.
- As a Christian myself, I have only just arrived into the community, into God's covenant with Israel (*Romans 11:18*). I can remember this when I myself have exclusionary thoughts and exclude other people because of their origin, their gender, their skin colour, or their religion.
- I rely every day on wisdom and patience that I need not produce myself, but which God promises me as a gift (*James 1:17*).

James does not tell us to be silent. The opposite of devaluation is not silence and looking the other way, but thoughtful reflection and solidarity. This is why the epistle decisively calls out the exploitation of cheap labour as a problem (*James 5:4*) and thus places itself in the tradition of Old Testament commandments that helped the excluded to gain their rights.

The spirit of God urges us on to be more free, more loving – and to be ready for life's question marks. ■



Rev. Prof. Dr Kambale Jean-Bosco  
Kahongya Bwiruka,  
Advocacy Officer at the  
Regional Office of the UEM  
in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Sabine Hübner  
Theologian, Assistant  
Department of Justice,  
Peace and the Integrity  
of Creation of the  
UEM, Wuppertal,  
Germany

Irma Riana Simanjuntak,  
Advocacy Officer at the  
Regional Office of the UEM  
in Pematangsiantar,  
Indonesia



## Prayer

**God,**  
I dream of a loving world  
where we see each other  
with your eyes.

I dream of a resourceful world  
where we cherish the unique gift  
of each other.

I dream of a hopeful world  
where we recognize the power of your grace  
to transform and make new.

I dream of peace.

»Prayer from the Caribbean« © Claire Annelise Smith, from:  
In God's Hands: Common Prayer for the World, edited by  
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# #againstdiscrimination – What can I do?

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- Organize initiatives against discrimination and exclusion or take part in them yourself
- Comment on our articles and get the conversation started
- Support our human rights campaign with your donation



## Your contact at the UEM Human Rights Campaign

Dr Jochen Motte  
UEM Management Team

Department for Justice, Peace  
and the Integrity of Creation  
Rudolfstrasse 137  
42285 Wuppertal

☎ +49 (0)202 890 04-168

☎ +49 (0)202 890 04-179

[jpic@vemission.org](mailto:jpic@vemission.org)

[www.vemission.org](http://www.vemission.org)

You will find the materials for the UEM Human Rights Campaign 2022 on the website of the UEM [www.vemission.org/humanrights2022](http://www.vemission.org/humanrights2022)

- brochure with programmes and projects on the campaign and devotion material
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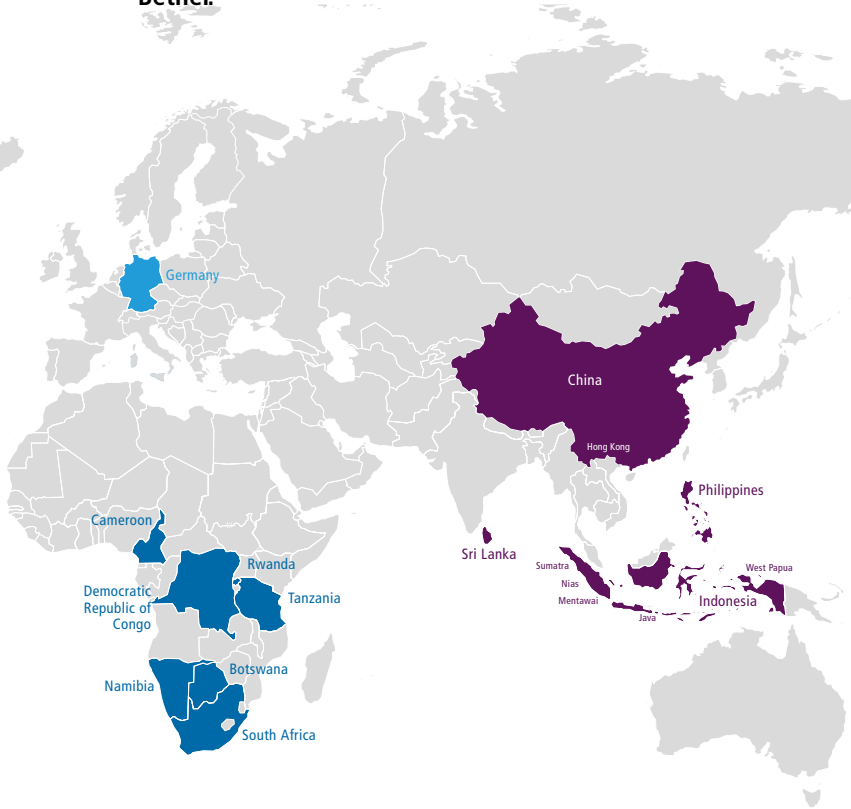
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We live in a world torn apart. Some live in abundance, others have fewer rights and not enough to live on. People become isolated, relationships and community are lost, and the social and natural foundations of our lives are increasingly destroyed.

Knowing that we are all members of the body of Christ, we follow his example and invite people into a learning, serving and praying communion across continents and cultures. In following him, we work for a more just, peaceful world, the integrity of creation, and the sharing of the Gospel so that all people may enjoy life in abundance.









United Evangelical Mission  
Communion of churches  
in three Continents

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### Text

Sabine Hübner, Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka,  
Jochen Motte, Irma Riana Simanjuntak, Sarah Vecera

### Editor, Translation

Casey Butterfield, Brunhild von Local

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**But who are you  
to judge your neighbour?**

James 4:12

**Against Discrimination and Exclusion.  
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