

International leaders in German churches – wishful thinking or reality?

Two UEM General Secretaries from the Global South in dialogue

(Wuppertal, May 13, 2025) In a remarkable dialogue, two leading theologians of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) met: Dr. Andar Parlindungan, Secretary General of the UEM since March 2024, and his predecessor, Dr. Fidon Mwombeki, who led the UEM for nine years from 2006. Both come from the Global South, namely Indonesia and Tanzania, and talk in an interview about opportunities and challenges for international leaders in the German church.

Structural hurdles for international leaders

Parlindungan emphasizes that German churches are theoretically open to leaders from the Global South, but in reality there are numerous structural hurdles. The problem is that requirements are often tailored to German standards and do not take international perspectives sufficiently into account. Mwombeki also sees major challenges here. Although every organization can decide for itself whether it is ready for international leadership, the theologian believes that there is currently a lack of internal willingness to implement this openness structurally.

Concern about growing nationalist tendencies

Both leaders see the current rise of nationalist and populist movements in Europe and around the world as a threat to global cooperation and diversity. "We are experiencing a growing retreat into nationalism, even within the churches. But the Christian faith is international, and we can only survive together," warns Mwombeki. Parlindungan adds: "Today more than ever, churches need global structures and leadership in order to take a credible stand against exclusion and racism."

Interculturality needs more than good intentions

Both emphasize that credible internationalization requires time, structural reforms, and broad diversity in personnel. Individual appointments from the Global South are not enough. "As long as international leaders are considered exceptions, they remain vulnerable to racism and prejudice," says Parlindungan. The full interview in German can be read [here on the UEM web-site](#).

About „UEM“

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) with offices in Wuppertal, Indonesia and Tanzania is an international, equal community of 39 members, including 32 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia as well as six Protestant churches and the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel in Germany. The UEM consistently pursues a holistic understanding of mission. This includes improving the living conditions of suffering and disadvantaged people while respecting their personal dignity and taking their cultural context into account.

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