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Moving quickly to end months of internal turmoil and stem the loss of experienced staff, the governing board of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) today removed the president of the organization and formed a search committee.

Leaving his position as ADRA president is Rudi Maier, head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's major humanitarian aid agency since October 2010. Maier, who holds a Ph.D. in international management and previously taught at church-sponsored Andrews University for nearly 20 years, had been counseled to resign by ADRA board chair Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president of the General Conference, in a June 6 letter, but refused to do so. Maier asked for and was granted the opportunity to address today's ADRA board meeting, and was present for questions and discussion. The board subsequently voted overwhelmingly to remove him from his role.

The board also moved to ask a retired senior General Conference administrator to serve as acting president of the agency. Confirmation of his acceptance is pending.

A search committee of seven individuals, comprising ADRA board members, an ADRA International employee, and an ADRA network representative, will begin immediately to seek a permanent successor. The committee has been tasked with conducting an international search to "recruit a sizeable and diverse pool of well-qualified nominees and applicants," according to the terms of reference voted for the panel.

"We had a serious trend with the leadership of ADRA, which warranted the board's intervention," said Mbwana, who along with vice-chair Ella S. Simmons, also a general vice president of the General Conference, has been attempting to stabilize the aid agency. A surprise February 2011 reduction-in-force initiated by Maier roiled the organization by terminating 16 employees out of a workforce of 88. Another 14 employees have resigned or found other employment in the last 16 months.

"It is certainly disappointing anytime you have to make a change in the leadership of a dynamic organization," Mbwanana continued, noting that it is not ADRA board policy to publicly discuss reasons for employee removal. "I'm encouraged to witness again the ADRA board's total commitment to continue delivering its service with skill and excellence on an international scale. The ADRA board is focused on keeping together the team of professional and dedicated employees it has spent so long assembling."

Mbwana also pointed out that the constituency that ADRA serves - the poor, the hungry, the widow, the orphan - that we must stay attentive to in doing our work. As our Mission Statement affirms, 'the agency's work seeks to improve the quality of life of those in need. ADRA invests in the potential of these individuals through community development initiatives targeting Food Security, Economic Development, Primary Health and Basic Education.'"
organization came near the end of a specially called Sunday, June 24, ADRA board meeting. The agency's governing board of 36 is composed of representatives from 14 countries, and includes individuals involved in global non-profit administration and humanitarian aid.

A report from one independent media source offered information supportive of Maier's protests about his impending removal. Significant inaccuracies in that report, including the claim that ADRA board leadership had unauthorized meetings with ADRA staffers, have added to the confusion surrounding the agency in the last two weeks.

Maier's refusal to resign with counsel resulted in the call for the special board meeting. ADRA employees were informed June 14 that the meeting had been scheduled.

Established in 1984, ADRA International is the successor to Seventh-day Adventist World Services (SAWS) and several development and humanitarian organizations sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is actively involved in relief and social service projects worldwide, and was noted for its relief efforts after the 2011 earthquakes in Haiti and Japan.

ADRA International revenues in 2010, the last year for which figures are available, showed $74.7 million in total revenues and $55.4 million in project costs. The organization spent $8.7 million on employee salaries and benefits, and an additional $5.4 million on its extensive fundraising program. ADRA International offices are located in Silver Spring, Maryland, and manage a federation of country-specific ADRA organizations that obtain and administer aid grants from governments and entities around the world. According to ADRA statistics, more than 6,000 persons are engaged in implementing ADRA projects in more than 120 countries where ADRA or its affiliates operate.