

CONFRONTING POVERTY AND INJUSTICE IN AFRICA

A Message from the LWF Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, 4th to 8th September 2006.

We, representatives from LWF member churches in Africa and partners in mission met in Arusha, Tanzania from 4th - 8th September 2006, for a Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa. Gathered under the theme, ***“that the poor may have hope and injustice shut its mouth (Job5: 16)”***.

We;

Critically reflected on the self-understanding of the church in the context of the impoverishing conditions in Africa from biblical and theological perspectives, and our Lutheran heritage and what it means to be a church in such a context;

Were challenged by various presentations and experiences shared about the dehumanizing conditions posed by poverty and the negative impacts of economic globalization;

Experienced, and were saddened from field visits, how impoverishment continues to endanger people's lives and communities and destroy environments;

Affirmed with the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation in Windhoek, Namibia (from 9th-13th Nov 2005), that Africa is endowed with enormous wealth of natural and human resources, diverse cultures and therefore not poor. We reaffirm that there can be no justifiable reason for the excruciating poverty and all kinds of human made sufferings persistently experienced in Africa;

Acknowledged that many meetings were held and statements adopted in the past concerning poverty in Africa. However, we were disturbed that most of these plans and promises have not effected significant change of the unjust situations facing those who are the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies.

Therefore, we confess that we have sometimes neglected the plight of the poor in our midst, and failed to speak the truth and confront the policies and powers perpetuating injustice and suffering.

Do hereby declare as follows,

- In a time like this, the sinful forces that perpetuate poverty must be denounced and opposed. Such forces continue exploiting our lands and robbing millions of people of their God-given right to daily bread and decent life. These forces include unjust economic system, the escalation of conflict and violence, and the forced flight of people from their ancestral lands. The spread of HIV and AIDS is exasperated by poverty. Human beings are compelled to live under bridges, forced to search in dumps for their daily bread. Men, women and children have no more tears, are robbed of their rights, gifts and potential.

The numbers of young peoples who lack jobs and whose hope for the future is cut off, alarmingly continue to increase. In nearly every impoverished situation, the burden borne by women who continually groan in constant travail is overwhelming. Such crushing conditions are intolerable, and sinful.

- That in the face of these seemingly hopeless realities of suffering, we celebrate God's presence in worship and communion and stake our faith especially in the crucified and risen Christ. As the body of Christ in the world today, we are empowered through the Holy Spirit to protest, resist, and seek to change whatever compounds injustices and results in untimely death. Our resurrection faith defies and goes against what is often alleged that; Africa is hopelessly poor. Instead we insist that Africa has been blessed with abundant resources for life. Furthermore, we proclaim: Africa is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Ps 24: 1 paraphrase) ***such that poverty in Africa is a scandal!***

We further state that being church in Africa today is not only a privilege but also an obligation.

Having been so empowered, we therefore will speak out and act more boldly as churches in concert with others, by witnessing against all forms of social and economic injustice, corruption and bad leadership that perpetuate poverty and work for the liberation of the oppressed for a continent where there is justice, peace and dignified human life.

We shall seek to accomplish these by the following, and activities outlined in the Arusha Action Plan (AAP):

- Exploring all means of promoting discussion and joint action especially at local levels;
- Working in critical solidarity with stakeholders in church, government and civil society;
- Training for more people-centered and empowering styles of leadership
- Renewing our worship, theological understanding, diakonia, church structures and practices in ways that liberate and empower all the members of the body of Christ for God's transforming mission in contexts of poverty and injustice

THE ARUSHA ACTION PLAN

A coordinated strategy for confronting poverty in Africa:

- Provide guidelines for participatory research in understanding and addressing poverty in Africa. A team of 5 persons accompanied by the LWF shall work to facilitate this process. The team shall submit a draft proposal at the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation in 2007.
- To set up a team of 3 persons from the sub regional expressions accompanied by the LWF, to explore avenues for possible collaboration with the World Bank and related international organizations in addressing poverty in Africa.
- To engage the AACC in order to explore the possibility of launching an ecumenical campaign against poverty by 2008.
- To call upon the Inter Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) to deal more actively with poverty and commit ourselves to greater participation in IFAPA

We commit ourselves and our churches to the pursuit of the vision herein, in the Name of the Triune God. Amen

Word of gratitude

Finally, we express our gratitude to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania for hosting the consultation in warm and safe conditions. In addition, we thank the government of the United Republic of Tanzania, and in particular the Hon. Mizengo K. P. Pinda (MP) Minister of State, PMO, Regional administration and local government for his presentation and frank sharing on the role of government and civil society in reversing poverty.