

## **Confronting Poverty and Injustice in Africa**

### **A message from the LWF consultation on poverty and the mission of the church in Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, 4-8 September 2006**

We, representatives from LWF member churches in Africa and partners in mission, met in Arusha, Tanzania, 4--8 September 2006, for a consultation on poverty and the mission of the church in Africa.

Gathered under the theme, “So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth” (Job 5:16) we:

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

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

Experienced and were saddened by field visits during which we witnessed how impoverishment continues to endanger people’s lives and communities and destroy the environment.

Affirmed along with the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Conference in Windhoek, Namibia, 9-13 November 2005, that Africa is endowed with considerable natural and human resources, diverse cultures and is therefore not poor.

Reaffirmed that there can be no justifiable reason for the excruciating poverty and human-made sufferings persistently experienced in Africa.

Acknowledged that many meetings have been 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 in the unjust situations facing the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies.

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

We hereby declare that:

In times like these, the sinful forces that perpetuate poverty must be denounced and opposed. Such forces continue to exploit our lands and rob millions of people of their God given right to daily bread and a decent life. These forces include unjust economic systems, 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 and forced to search in dumps for their daily bread. Men, women and children have no more tears and are robbed of their rights, gifts and potential. The number of young people who lack jobs and hope continues to increase alarmingly. In nearly every situation of impoverishment, the burden borne by women, who groan in constant travail, is overwhelming. Such crushing conditions are intolerable and sinful.

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 injustice and results in untimely death. Our faith in the resurrection defies and goes against what is often alleged, namely 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 paraphrased) such that poverty in Africa is a scandal.

Being church in Africa today is not only a privilege but also an obligation. Having been so empowered we will speak out and act more boldly. In concert with others, we will witness against all forms of social and economic injustice, corruption and bad leadership, all of which perpetuate poverty. We will work for the liberation of the oppressed and for a continent where there is justice, peace and a dignified life for all.

We shall seek to accomplish this by the following activities outlined in the Arusha Action Plan:

Exploring all means of promoting discussion and joint action, especially at the local level

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:

Providing guidelines for participatory research in understanding and addressing poverty in Africa. A team of five 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.

Setting up a team of three persons from the sub-regional expressions, accompanied by the LWF, to explore avenues for possible collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and related international organizations in addressing poverty in Africa.

Engaging the All Africa Conference of Churches in order to explore the possibility of launching an ecumenical campaign against poverty by 2008.

Calling upon the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) to deal more actively with poverty, and committing ourselves to greater participation in IFAPA.

In the name of the Triune God, we commit ourselves and our churches to the pursuit of the vision herein. Amen.

#### Word of gratitude

We express our gratitude to the ELCT for hosting the consultation in warm and safe conditions. In addition, we thank the government of the United Republic of Tanzania, in particular the Hon. Mizengo K. P. Pinda, for his frank presentation on the roles of government and civil society in reversing poverty.