

ZAMBIA: Message of AMECEA Bishops' Plenary Assembly

LUSAKA, July 9, 2008 (CISA) -Full text of a statement issued at the end of the AMECEA 16th Plenary Assembly of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA), held here from June 27 to July 7:

“You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world..” Matthew 5:13:14

1. Greetings

To our dear catholic faithful and all people of good will. We, the catholic Bishops of AMECEA Region (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and the affiliated members of Djibouti and Somalia) greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace be with you!

Concerned with the situation in our region, namely, the Darfur region and Southern Sudan, the conflict in Northern Uganda, the unprecedented crisis following the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2007 in Kenya, the recent tensions between Djibouti and Eritrea, the continuous crisis in Somalia, the political impasse in Malawi and the tensions existing between Eritrea and Ethiopia, we, the bishops meeting in Lusaka for the 16th plenary assembly from June 27 to July 7 2008, prayed together and discussed our present day circumstances in the region under the theme: “reconciliation through justice and peace”, in view of offering pastoral guidance³ to God’s people whom we are privileged to shepherd.

Although not in AMECEA region, we are greatly concerned with the crisis in Zimbabwe. Our hearts go out to the people of Zimbabwe who are facing hard times. We remain united with them in our prayers.

2. Evangelisation

We realize the challenges the Church in the AMECEA region is facing in its evangelizing mission. This is especially in bringing about reconciliation through justice and peace. The church does not have all the means to solve conflicts and tensions. However, we believe that in the midst of violent contexts referred to above, the church should continue to be prophetic, that is, an agent of justice forgiveness and reconciliation. As a prophetic voice the church will be vigilant, outspoken, informed by gospel values and the social teaching of the church. We challenge our theologians to develop a theology of truth and reconciliation that will enable the church to address and foster reconciliation through justice and peace.

3. Reconciliation from the heart

As shepherd, we believe reconciliation should be at the center of what the church does and should start from the heart of each person. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus set out his plan of action found in Luke 4: 18-19 which reads:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

As Christians we are all called upon to announce the Good News of Christ and denounce injustice wherever we are.

4. Mechanics for monitoring and evaluation of church performance

The Catholic Church in the AMECEA region acknowledges the ever changing socio-economic and political world. We therefore call upon catholic institutions in AMECEA region to develop workable strategies and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of our pastoral programmes.

We also call upon our catholic lay professionals laity to rise to the occasion and live their Christian

identity and witness in society. We call upon them to provide competent analytical data in order to help the church make informed and timely interventions.

5. Entrenchment of poverty in Africa

The gap between the rich and the poor is ever increasing. There are several factors that lead to high poverty levels in the countries of AMECEA. While we acknowledge the external factors such as unfair trade pacts with western and emerging Asian economies we also recognize local causes of this such as misplaced priorities, inequitable distribution of resources, bad governance, corruption and conflicts and scourge of HIV and AIDS.

We take note of and appreciate the efforts of some of our government that uphold the rule of law and principles of good governance. We further commend those governments that have resolved their conflicts through peaceful reconciliation.

6. Advocacy

Having deliberated on the need to accompany our parliamentary representatives in AMECEA region, we encourage our National conferences, where this is not yet done, to establish parliamentary liaison offices. These offices will be a means for permanent and constant dialogue between the church and parliamentarians, and will reduce the representational gaps and let the church contribute positively on constitutional and legislative issues.

In the same line, we commend efforts being made to seek for an observer status at the African Union (AU). AMECEA will seek similar status within the relevant regional organizations in order to engage them at policy level and ensure that decisions made do not disadvantage the poor majority.

7. Communication for reconciliation through justice and peace.

The communications media can truly be at the service of understanding among peoples and a means for promoting the unity of the human family. There is therefore, the need to improve communication in the church by ensuring that information with people in parishes and the small Christian communities.

To foster reconciliation through justice and peace catholic media will promote messages of hope. We urge communicators in the region to collaborate and network, hold meetings, training, share information, radio and TV programmes.

Acknowledging that formation is essential for developing and laying a solid foundation for the churches communications ministry, the church in AMECEA shall ensure that it has communicators who are properly formed in Christian values and ethics and not only professionally trained in communication techniques and technology.

8. Family

The church stands for integral relationships within the marriage and family. In order to achieve meaningful development, the family unit must be protected, strengthened and supported because it is the back bone of any nation.

The education of children, especially girls and empowerment of women in the region n still remains a great challenge. Nevertheless parents can and should do more to instill confidence and appropriate formation for the girl child at an early age.

9. New generation of leaders transformed by Gospel values.

We urge the church institutions to prioritize the formation of leaders at all levels of society who are transformed by gospel values and can lead by example in the pursuit of justice and peace in our region and in Africa as a whole. We are happy to note that several universities have been established and others are being planned in the AMECEA region. These universities should bear a catholic identity in their activities. In order to achieve great impact, catholic universities in the AMECEA region should create a network of collaboration.

10. Sacredness of creation

The environment is God's gift to mankind. All creation is sacred. While we are aware that some of the industrialized nations are responsible for most of the world environmental destruction, we have also realized that the local authorities are not doing enough to protect the environment. We deplore the degradation of the environment as this brings about adverse weather patterns. We, therefore, call upon all the people in our region to work towards safeguarding our environment.

11. Ecumenical and interfaith approaches

We realize that the area of justice and peace involves concerted efforts that include inter-religious dialogue. We appeal to all those who dialogue to always work towards reciprocal and conducive environments in order for peace to prosper. In this regard we need to link our efforts with organizations and individuals who are already making headway in this important field like the All African Council of Churches (AACC) and various national Ecumenical bodies and other religious bodies.

12. Positive efforts

We take note of and appreciate the efforts of some of our governments that uphold the rule of law and principles of good governance. We further commend those governments that have resolved their conflicts through peaceful reconciliation.

13. Cooperating partners

We thank our Christians in our region who continuously support the local church despite the difficulties that they experience. We also thank our cooperating partners for their generosity to our dioceses and institutions over the years. We appeal for continued collaboration and partnership in our social and pastoral programmes. Besides the material support we are drawn to fraternity that brings us together.

14. AMECEA golden jubilee

AMECEA members will be celebrating its golden jubilee in 2011. This celebration will coincide with the 17th AMECEA plenary assembly to be held at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi, Kenya from June 27 to July 7 2011. We thank God for inspiring the founding fathers of AMECEA to create this illustrious association of solidarity and pastoral collaboration.

We entrust our mission to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this Pauline year which has just begun. We ask the Apostle to the Nations to accompany us as we implement our action plans on the theme "reconciliation through justice and peace." May we find hope and encouragement in his own words:

"All things are done according to God's plan and decision; and God chose us to be his won people in union with Christ because of his won purpose, based on what he had decided from the very beginning. Let us, then, who were the first to hope in Christ, praise God's glory" Ephesians 1: 11-12.

15. Gratitude

Finally, we thank the Zambia Episcopal Conference and people of Zambia for their hospitality and their contributions to make this plenary a success. We join them in praying for President Dr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa SC. We are particularly privileged to be addressed by President Mwanawasa at the start of our deliberations.

May God bless the people of AMECEA and may reconciliation through justice and peace be realized and sustained. *Mary, Our lady of Africa intercede for us!*

Signed in Lusaka, Zambia, on July 6, 2008 by Tarcisio Ziyaye, Archbishop of Blantyre and AMECEA chairman on behalf of AMECEA bishops.