

AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM IN ZAMBIA MUST BE SHARPENED, SAYS JCTR

“It is undisputed that good governance is necessary for development and respect of human dignity and rights. Most development problems of rural underdevelopment, failure to promote and protect human rights, weak debt management systems, poor trading patterns with local and international players, and poverty are a result of bad governance,” says Dominic Liche of the Church Social Teaching Programme of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (*JCTR*).

We at the *JCTR*, having worked for social justice in the past 20 years in Zambia and Malawi, would like to see governance systems improved to efficiency levels.

Whilst it is commendable that our government signed on to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in January 2006, we feel that if the APRM is to significantly contribute to the improvement of governance in Zambia, the process should be sharpened. Key to a successful APRM is widespread and intelligent citizens' participation. This participation can only be guaranteed if the process makes it possible for citizens to know about the process and how to participate. Also, different key groups representing the citizens must be included in the National Governing Council of the APRM. Mr. Liche further comments that “We are seeing a situation where government dominance and political interests seem to be more prominent than involvement of key stakeholders and citizens themselves.”

Together with other Civil Society Organizations working on the APRM through the Civil Society APRM Secretariat, we have highlighted ways that this process can be made more effective. *JCTR* reiterates serious concerns here, especially on the nature and composition of the National Governance Council (NGC), a body that oversees the whole APRM process. These concerns include: i) that the number of members on the NGC, 47, is too large and not representative of major civil society and church groups; ii) that the way the chairperson of the NGC was selected was contrary to the APRM guiding principles and examples from pioneer countries that have gone through the APRM process; iii) that having a chairperson (Mr. Akashambatwa Mbikusita Lewanika) who is an active politician could very easily jeopardise the integrity of the process; iv) that the conditions of members of the NGC is associated with huge costs (K500,000 per person per sitting) that can easily raise controversies similar to those relating to the National Constitutional Conference (NCC); v) that there is lack of gender balance with only 11 women; and vi) that there is government dominance in the NGC, making voting almost always biased.

According to Mr. Liche, “These concerns should be seriously considered and addressed even if it means disbanding the NGC for a smaller NGC that is much more representative. Sometimes there is a myth that a fully representative body must be a big one, but it is possible to have a smaller NGC that is really representative of key stakeholders as is the example of Ghana's NGC.”

It would be a waste of resources to have a process that will not really work for Zambia due to government dominance and political interests. *JCTR* would not want to see a situation where this process will just be a “window dressing” exercise.

It is disappointing that despite raising these concerns through the media and communication with the APRM Focal Point (Ministry of Justice), no adequate response has been given to our concerns.

As we begin the New Year, *JCTR* would like to see an APRM that is effective, transparent and inclusive with more education of the citizens on the process by government. We eagerly await the next steps of our government.