



# *The African Christian Pulse*

A Bulletin of the All Africa Conference of Churches

May-June 2009



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**Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, after the meeting with the ecumenical delegation sent by the Monrovia Consultation on Climate change, Peace and Human Rights**



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# FROM WORD TO ACTION – WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE!

*by the African Christian Pulse*

**A**s the first six months since the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Maputo will soon have passed, it is our pleasure to share with you, precious sisters and brothers in Christ, some thoughts on where we are now as the AACC.

The Assembly in Maputo brought such a rich variety of recommendations for the Ecumenical Movement in Africa to work on during the period 2009-2013. This is indeed a true blessing. At the AACC Secretariat we started off in January by an intensive period of strategic planning and has now a condensed document explaining WHAT we want to do and HOW to do it.

WHAT we want to do could be summarized in four parts:

1) *Empowerment*: We want to see the Churches in Africa capacitated and being salt and light in their respective nations and regions. This includes both knowledge and skills so that words may lead to action and lasting change for the best.

2) *Theological foundation*: We want to see the words and actions by Churches in Africa founded in a thorough theological reflection.

3) *Peace*: We want to see the Churches strengthened in their identity and ministry as agents of

peace, ambassadors of reconciliation and prophetic voices on the continent.

4) *Stewardship*: As Churches we want to show responsible and exemplary leadership to this continent, including faithfully using the resources endowed to us.

HOW to do it? The *koinonia* of the Church calls us into a community that acts together, not alone. Therefore we have since April this year updated and signed a memorandum of understanding on the complementary roles between AACC and WCC that has enabled us to transform words into active collaboration exemplified by joint action in the last three months:

1) A joint mission was sent to Zimbabwe in May 2009 to listen to the plight of our sisters and brothers, share in Christian fellowship and discuss how the ecumenical family may accompany in reconciliation and reconstruction.

2) A joint mission was sent to Madagascar in June 2009 to talk to the ecumenical and political actors to encourage peaceful resolution to the present crisis.

3) A joint mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo is being prepared for July 2009 to

show solidarity to this nation and to encourage the churches in their important role for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction of hope.

Close collaboration with the sub-regional fellowships and the national councils of churches is also of paramount importance. We facilitated the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum with FECCLAHA in May and with FECCIWA, the AACC has just had in this month of June a joint consultation on Climate Change, Human Rights, Peace & Security in West Africa which brought together 60 Church Leaders. Strong regional and national ecumenical networks are truly needed to address the many challenges that need to be solved through cooperation across the borders.

Friends in Christ, let us join hands in prayer and action believing together that there is hope for peace, development and dignity for people in our continent. Let our unity in purpose and action help the world to believe that God is at work through His church and is here to reach out to His world in love and compassion, over and over again ■



# SOUVENIR AND GRATITUDE FOR AFRICAN HOSPITALITY

People in Africa and the rest of the world who attended the AACC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly are still remembering with gratitude the hospitality enjoyed in Maputo. This is why the President of the AACC, the Rt. Rev. Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa and the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. André Karamaga went to Mozambique from May 6-8, 2009 to express the gratitude of AACC and all those who attended the Assembly to the



*President of AACC handing over a gift as an expression of gratitude to H.E. Armando Guebuza, President of the Republic of Mozambique.*

government and the churches of Mozambique.

His Excellency the President of Mozambique and the churches in the country expressed happiness to see AACC back to thank them. They said they felt indebted to AACC for having chosen their beloved country as the venue of the Assembly. Indeed Maputo and Mozambique are now part of the vivid memory of the AACC and history will keep this event on its record ■

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## OUR SOLIDARITY WITH ZIMBABWE

An AACC/WCC team of four people has just returned from a three-tier mission to Zimbabwe where they met and interacted with church leaders from different backgrounds for four days.

The objectives of the team's visit were:

- To receive an update on the current situation in Zimbabwe;
- To hear the expectations of the Church in Zimbabwe of the Global ecumenical movement; and
- To be in solidarity with the Church in the difficult time of transition.

During the visit, the team headed by Bishop Aboagye-Mensah, the

AACC Vice President for West Africa Region and member of WCC Central Committee, received first-hand and eye-witness accounts of the deplorable social-economic and political situation which, has continued to afflict the people of Zimbabwe for several years. They reported on the inclusive government, which is the result of the global political agreement signed on September 15, 2008 and ushered in a Coalition Government which assumed office on February 11, 2009. The team appreciated the signs of hope reported in the country, among them the inflation rate now down to 3.4% from 231 million per cent - the world's highest recorded rate during peace time. Essential commodities are back on the

shelves even though people have no money for purchase thereof, because the Zimbabwe dollar has been suspended. The country is now using the American dollar, the South African Rand, Botswana Pula and/or the Mozambican Meticals.

Despite the positive signs, unemployment remains high at between 80-90%, most schools remain closed, hospitals lack drugs and life-saving supplies, and generally people have become more impoverished. In his description of the situation, Rev. Sikhalu Cele of UCCSA-Zimbabwe observed that "God moved from Jerusalem and is now resident in Zimbabwe". This, according to him, is the only reason

for the survival of the people of Zimbabwe.

### **National Healing and Reconciliation Committee**

The AACC/WCC team lauded the move by the inclusive government to set up a Healing and Reconciliation Committee of which the government has asked the Church to take advantage of, in order to speed up healing and reconciliation in the country. According to Mrs Mbari Kioni, the AACC Director for Peace, Healing and Reconciliation and a member of the team, the formation of the Committee is timely because the country is still hurting from a myriad of historical injustices such as the infamous Matandebele land massacre, operation Murabatsvina and other successive electoral-

related violence.

### **Strong Message of Hope**

The AACC/WCC unequivocal message to the church and the people of Zimbabwe was one of hope in the saving power of Jesus Christ. In his sharing, Bishop Aboagye-Mensah called on all Christians to hope in Jesus Christ saying, “we cannot afford to lose hope because God loves all His people”(2 Cor 6:7). He further reassured the Church in Zimbabwe of accompaniment by the African and the global ecumenical family.

### **Positive Developments of the Church in Zimbabwe**

It is notable that the AACC/WCC went to Zimbabwe on invitation of the Church in Zimbabwe and that the Zimbabwe Council of

Churches, a key partner of the AACC and WCC, is not only undergoing restructuring but also has a new leadership. Bishop N. Shaba is the new President while a new General Secretary will be in office as of July 1, 2008. The local church leadership was very supportive of the AACC/WCC team's visit.

Other members of the mission team comprised Rev. Mrs. Felicidade Chirinda the AACC Vice-President for Southern Africa and Mr. Doim Bangjoo, the Human Rights Coordinator for Asia-Pacific of WSCF South Korea. The four day mission from May 18-22, 2009 took the team to various parts of Harare and Bulawayo, 500km to the South-West of Harare ■

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## **AFRICA FORUM IN NEW YORK, USA**

*by Joe Owiti*

**T**he church remains the foundation of hope in Africa amidst the myriad problems that bedevil the continent. This was the observation of the General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Rev. Dr. André Karamaga to the participants at the Africa Forum on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2009.

The Africa Forum is a platform facilitated by Church World Service (CWS) to provide a common space for member communions to share and exchange information, knowledge and concerns, to build and enhance ecumenical networks that further its work, and to explore collaborative solutions through joint or collective efforts and advocacy actions related to the

Africa region.

In his address to the Forum, Rev. Karamaga expressed his hope in the continent but only if churches in Africa can come together and speak with one voice. For example, when the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was in chaos, it was the churches, together with other faiths that stood on moral authority and brought the civil society and conflicting parties together. The churches facilitated dialogue that led to the rebuilding of DRC.

His fear however is the legacy left behind by the colonial powers in dividing African along ethnic lines, which still causes conflicts today. This has left the continent with a heritage of fragmented and a divided entities. The continent has

about 2600 ethnic groups. Eruption of ethnic conflicts has been witnessed in a number of countries in Africa. In the Great Lakes Region, ethnicity culminated in genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Expressing his gratitude to the CWS for creating the Africa Forum, he lauded the move as a demonstration of their love for Africa and zeal to help.

He invited two representatives from Canada and U.S.A to participate in the annual Ecumenical Regional Group meeting which is made up of representatives of AACC, WCC, Sub-regional fellowships, national councils and two representatives from Europe ■

# LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORAL PROCESS

The AACC observer team to South Africa has given a nod to the process of the recent election that was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2009. It certified the elections as having been free and fair, adding its voice to those already expressed by the other observers, both from within South Africa and the international community.

Speaking to the *African Christian Pulse*, the AACC Director of Peace, Healing and Reconciliation, Ms. Mbari Kioni, who was part of the AACC observer team said the election process in South is a real model worth emulating by many African countries. She commended the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa for the elaborate and comprehensive way it prepared the electoral process that led to the smooth and expedient elections.

In a voter turn out described as very high where not even older women and men, some on wheel chairs, others walking with crutches were perhaps the veterans of the liberation struggle were to be left out, the elaborate and good management of the process by IEC was something to envy.

There were some unique factors witnessed in South Africa's elections that have been adopted by this young democracy. Special

Vote, which allowed people with special cases to exercise their democratic rights, was seen by the AACC observers as a resilient and unique arrangement. For two days from 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April, those would not be able to vote on election day were given the opportunity to vote earlier. This special group of people included the sick in hospital, women in advanced pregnancy, old people in remote areas and in homes, prisoners and the police who were to be on duty on the polling day. The procedure for special vote is that people apply to the electoral Commission offices close to them, and on the day of Special Vote election officials go to them. Another unique arrangement witnessed was the use of ballot papers in brail form for people with visual impairment to vote. The IEC had made provision for people in the Diaspora to vote on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April through all the South African embassies around the world. It is estimated that about 16,000 people in the Diaspora voted in the April elections, and another 100,000 voted during the Special Vote.

The use of technology facilitated the voting process. At hand were scanning machines to detect whether the ID holder wishing to vote was a valid registered South African citizen, hence a valid voter. In South Africa, even non citizens are provided with identity cards,

and the scanner will indicate that they are not legible to vote. This was something the observers saw as a very innovative process that should be replicated by other governments.

To avoid controversy over vote counting, the votes were counted at the polling stations and the results tallied and certified by all before being put in tamper-proof envelopes. From the polling stations, the tallied votes were then conveyed electronically to the provincial headquarters, where again all the results from different stations were tallied, scanned and then transmitted electronically to the Electoral Commission headquarters. Here the final tally was done by an independent firm of auditors, KPMG and not the IEC.

Also worth noting was the training of peace mediators for the South African elections. A total of 59 peace mediators were trained and deployed by the Electoral Commission in all the critical areas thought to need peace mediation during the electoral process. Ms. Kioni summarized the management of electoral process in South Africa as superb. South Africa is just a young democracy while most countries that have held many elections are still struggling with their systems ■

# THE SECOND GLEF SUMMIT

by André Karamaga

Two years ago the AACC, WCC and FECCLAHA decided to initiate a forum in which the problems and challenges specific to the Great Lakes regions could be reflected on and properly addressed. This is the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum in short GLEF. The Forum was launched in Bujumbura, Burundi on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2006 and now the second summit took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 19-21<sup>st</sup> May 2009.

The importance of the forum is that it has kept churches and church related organisations in the Great Lakes region together and engaged them through reflections and



*Participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> GLEF Summit, May 19-21, 2009 Kigali, Rwanda*

common actions especially with regard to peace, healing and reconciliation in this context where many hearts have been broken by wars and even the genocide.

The Kigali Summit resolved to conduct specific reflections on

ethnicity which becomes a damaging phenomenon when it is manipulated by selfish and irresponsible politicians, and we hope that theological response to it will be formulated at the end of the reflective process.

It has also been decided to appoint three focal persons; one for DRC, for Burundi and for Rwanda, who will form a team to coordinate the main activities of the forum. We have been impressed by the spirit of dedication and fellowship which characterised the Kigali Summit as a promising sign of potential cohesive and common engagement in consolidating peace and security in the region ■

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## TOGETHER FOR SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, hosted a unique meeting of over 60 men and women christian leaders from 11 countries in West Africa, from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2009. The meeting has been co-organized by FECCIWA (the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to focus on three very critical topics, namely: Climate Change, Human Rights and Peace & Security.

The meeting gave ample time to theological reflection on these



*Participants of the Monrovia Consultation*

pertinent issues affecting the West Africa region and on the identity of the Church as belonging to the Kingdom of God – a Kingdom of Peace, Justice and the Joy in the

Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

In the area of Peace and Security, the church leaders discussed the continuous scourge of small arms

proliferation in the region, women as agents of peace and how to create an ecumenical network of Early Warning and Early Response in West Africa.

In the area of Justice and Human Rights, issues concerning the right to food and water, how to fight corruption as well as the church response to the regional and global challenges of climate change were discussed.

The aim of the consultation was to choose an advocacy priority for the

West African Churches to work together during the coming years, both on local, national and regional levels.

The Liberian Council of Churches (LCC) and the local churches that opened their doors for the participants created a warm and hospitable environment with much joy, singing and dancing both during the Sunday service in the Lutheran Church and when the consultation was festively opened by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic

of Liberia, in the First United Methodist Church on Monday 15 June 2009. The key note speech by Rev. Dr. John McCullough, Executive Director of CWS, and the responses by Rev. Dr. André Karamaga, AACC General Secretary, and Dr. Nigussu Legesse, WCC Executive Secretary for Africa, set the tone that contributed to a fruitful and dynamic consultation ■

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**July 1-3, 2009**

A consultation by Faith Based Organizations with the World Bank on Poverty Eradication

**July 6-10, 2009**

Management course for newly elected church leaders will be held at the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Ecumenical Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. The course will be conducted by the Empowerment and Capacity Building directorate of the AACC

**July 8-15, 2009**

The WCC/AACC will undertake a Joint Ecumenical Solidarity visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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**WE INVITE YOU ALL TO SHARE  
YOUR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES  
THROUGH THE  
THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PULSE**

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**P.O Box 14205, 00800, Nairobi Kenya  
Email: [infodesk@aacc-ceta.org](mailto:infodesk@aacc-ceta.org)  
Website: [www.aacc-ceta.org](http://www.aacc-ceta.org)**