



ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES CONFERENCE DES EGLISES DE TOUTE L'AFRIQUE

www.aacc-ceta.org • Tel.: 254 - 20 4441483, 4441338/9 • Fax: 254 - 20 - 4443241, 4445835 • E-mail: secretariat@aacc-ceta.org
General Secretariat: Waiyaki Way • P.O. Box 14205 • 00800 Westlands • Nairobi • Kenya

THE 45TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN & PEOPLES' RIGHTS (ACHPR), 13TH - 27TH MAY 2009, REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

Statement on Climate Change and Human Rights

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates at the 45th Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights;

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) thanks you all most sincerely for allowing us, on behalf of its members, to address this important gathering.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates, as you may be aware, humanity faces a critical, viral challenge due to increasing warming of the atmosphere, primarily caused by climate change. A subject shaping international diplomatic and political interactions, climate change, is a challenge of our times, threatening to reverse gains so far achieved to reduce poverty and attain sustainable development.

For a continent which relies on rain-fed agriculture and natural resources for the survival of its people, Africa is the most threatened region of the earth. All the Assessment Reports of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as well as other authorities reports projects that Africa will be the most impacted region due to the adverse effects of climate change.

Indeed, Mr. Chairman, it is not projections. Seemingly, the impacts projected by scientists to happen in 20 – 50 years have come earlier than anticipated. Climate change is at our midst.

The prevailing famine in many African countries, which has sometimes resulted in despair starvation and death, sometimes occasioning food riots is a clear indicator of what awaits us. Floods in other countries, drying up of rivers, shrinking of our valuable lakes, bleaching of coral reefs in some coastal areas and depletion of our heritage – tropical rain forest - should send warning that we can no longer do business as usual.

This is why we want to draw attention to the following as tellingly grim pictures of our future as a result of climate change, borrowing from what science tells us:

(a) Floods and food security

Regional Office: Togo: B.P. 2268 • Lome • Telephone (000228) 21-59-24 • Fax: 215266 • E-mail: cetatogo@netcom.tg

AACC is a fellowship of 173 member Churches and Christian Councils in 40 African countries
La CETA est une communauté de 173 églises et conseils chrétiens dans 40 pays d'Afrique

PRESIDENT: The Most Rev. Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa • **GENERAL SECRETARY:** Rev. Dr. André Karamaga

IPCC reports that by 2020 many African countries could have their Agricultural productivity reduced by as much as 50%. These negative impacts on Agriculture will compromise food security and worsen the cases of malnutrition (IPCC Synthesis Report, 2007: 10).

Most African countries have been threatened by food insecurity as they struggle to reconstruct their infrastructure that was destroyed during the El-nino flooding of 1998-99. In 2000, Mozambique experienced severe floods on the back of three cyclones, resulting in 700 fatalities and destruction of infrastructure and loss of 250,000 homes

(b) Drought conditions

The current IPCC Synthesis Report (2007: 10) states that by 2020 between 75 and 250 million people, in Africa, will be exposed to extreme water stress. It is projected that by 2080 there will be an increase of 5-8% of arid and semi-arid areas. In 2004, parts of Eastern and Southern Africa were affected by severe drought conditions. In the Greater Horn of Africa, the rainy seasons were much shorter resulting in the continuation of a multi-dry season in the region.

In some parts of East Africa, the March-May rains ended prematurely exacerbating the drought caused by the several seasons of poor rainfall. Irregular rain falling patterns in the Horn of Africa has caused recurrent droughts, but also floods, shortages in drinking water as well as for agriculture; in Southern Africa increased frequency of droughts has resulted in widespread starvation and economic hardship. It has been projected that in the next five years, some countries will change from being water surplus to water deficient country.

(c) Human health

Diseases linked to climate change have been on the increase. They include Meningitis and Malaria. Meningitis commonly found in areas of low humidity had previously been confined to Central Africa. However, of late, the disease has become common in Eastern Africa, especially in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Malaria on the other hand has spread in many countries to high altitude areas. These highlands have been warming up, thus allowing comfortable conditions for the disease vector – the female anopheles mosquito - to thrive. The new strain of Malaria is commonly referred to as 'highland malaria'. Malaria continues being the cause of the highest number of deaths in Africa; especially amongst vulnerable categories of populations.

(d) Drying up of some lakes and rivers in the continent

Some lakes in Africa have shrunk down from their original capacity. Examples of these include Lake Chad and Lake Baringo in Chad and Lake Nakuru in Kenya. Lake Nakuru, famous for its huge compliment of flamingos and various other bird species is now threatened by the impacts of climate change. As the lake's capacity reduces, most of the flamingoes have started relocating to other lakes. This affects tourism in the region and

by extension the economic conditions of local people who rely on tourism for their livelihood.

(e) Conflicts over natural resources

There are increased cases of conflict linked to climate change. The conflict in the Sahel Region linked to the spread of the desert and movement of the nomadic populations southwards is already fueling tensions in Northern Africa.

In Eastern Africa there is increased tension amongst nomadic communities as they fight over scarce pastures. There are many other examples in Africa of clashes over grazing land.

Climate change should be a central component of any social-political decision our leaders take in the foreseeable future. The global community has risen to the occasion, and the momentum raised so far to deal with climate change as a threat to sustainable development should inspire African leaders to follow suit.

Climate change is no longer an isolated environmental issue, but a broader sustainable development and poverty reduction issue with equity and justice demands. At the centre of the ongoing international dialogue for the suitable post-2012 climate change treaty to succeed Kyoto Protocol is justice and equity demands by vulnerable communities from poor countries, who are not responsible for the concentration of Greenhouse Gases into the atmosphere, but who are on the receiving end of the vagaries of climate change.

As Africa seeks reparation and compensation from industrialised countries, the role of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights cannot be gainsaid. As the human right organ of the AU, ACHPR should not only play advisory role, but should also be at the forefront of mobilising the African voices so as to be heard at international forums.

The climate-constrained future doesn't allow us to remain passive, and the All Africa Conference of Churches has taken the first step in joining the global community in the search for the most sustainable way to deal with this challenge of 21st century. We are ready to work with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, together with other like-minded citizens of Africa, to ensure that the future climate change regime works for the sustainability of life in the continent.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman



Rev. Dr. André Karamaga
General Secretary

Nairobi 14th of May 2009