

## **One hand cannot tie a package**

*Europe must be an effective partner for Africa in the effort of strengthening continental unity and institutions that enable free expression and meet development challenges*

Archbishop Gabriel Anokye

As a witness to the joys and pains of a progressing Africa, the Catholic Church in Africa considers the EU-Africa Summit on 2-3 April to be an important milestone in the relationship between the two continents. “One hand cannot tie a package,” goes an old African saying; Africa’s and Europe’s progress will be helped by co-operation.

We remind our African leaders attending the summit that you have a duty to work for the common good of all our people. The Earth is a gift from God to all humankind to be used fairly and judiciously. Manage Africa’s natural resources transparently and justly so that our people can enjoy their benefits and so that future generations can also enjoy their fruit!

Corruption has become a cancer in almost all the African countries and affects the economic system, administration, the job market, health, education and the judiciary. Many governments are conscious of this problem and are making efforts to combat it. Unfortunately, personal interest and the frantic quest for gains – fuelled by narrow profit-seeking of those flooding Africa from Europe and other parts of the world in search of the most lucrative contract to exploit our natural wealth – have become stronger than the sense of the common good. Leaders must abandon the strong desire to hold on to power at all costs and work together to pave the way for democratic transitions to a new political order that is legitimately founded on a transparent, free and fair electoral process and the respect of democratic principles.

We remind EU leaders that it is not enough to talk about principles, to state intentions and point out injustices in Africa. These words lack meaning unless accompanied by a change to policies that contribute to too many of Africa’s problems. We welcome the work of our partner CIDSE, the alliance of Catholic development agencies, which, together with others in the European civil society, strives to ensure that the EU keeps the interests of African people front and centre in its internal and external policies.

The efforts made, through the EU’s transparency and accounting directives, to bring transparency to the financial dealings of extractive and timber companies with public authorities are important. We still need to see this translated into real change on the ground and extended into transparency requirements about the financial, human rights, environmental and other impacts of all companies on our peoples’ lives. Key for this is full country-by-country financial and non-financial reporting legislation, and a legal obligation for companies to check their supply chains to ensure mineral purchases do not finance conflict or human rights abuses. The EU also needs to act to make sure that the \$41.9 billion (€30.4bn) that disappears from Africa each year does not end up in its banks. It needs to put in place a financial transactions tax that would help stabilise the financial outlook of our whole world and raise much-needed money to fight against hunger, disease, the impacts of climate change and other scourges that prevent many of our brothers and sisters from living a life of dignity.

A lack of democratic space and a contempt for human rights have served as fertile ground for political protests and crises in Africa today. Dialogue between the state and local communities is still weak and local communities cannot participate effectively in the decision-making processes, leading to weak public action, while civil society is perceived as a political rival. The EU must raise the issue of an enabling environment for civil society and complement this by supporting the strengthening of African

civil society so that it can work hand-in-hand with democratic institutions.

A final message to all leaders at the Summit: Look differently upon strangers. They remain a brother or a sister beyond state, political, tribal and religious borders. When we work together for the common good we will succeed in building a Kingdom of justice, respect for the dignity of persons and their rights, a Kingdom of truth, unity, forgiveness, political tolerance, service, free and fair elections, good national ethics, good media, solidarity, peace and good stewardship of God's creation.

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