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SECAM POSITION PAPER

GOVERNANCE, THE COMMON GOOD AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN AFRICA:

"Investing in peace and the role of EU in supporting peace in Africa."

Introduction

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), which brings together the pastors of the Church in Africa, has taken note of the various political situations which are obtaining in Africa. While political stability or at least democratic change is being noticed in some countries, there is still a lot more that needs to be done to enhance credibility of some elections as well as the processes that govern them so as to promote peace and stability on the Continent.

This paper brings out the Church's contribution to the promotion of good governance and democratic transitions in Africa and how the European Union (EU) can support African capacities to manage security on the continent. Being neutral, regarding partisan politics, the Church wishes to humbly propose the values which will lead to justice, liberty, and the fundamental respect for human dignity in Africa. These are essential values in the creation of a just social order.

Governments in Africa, today, ought to prioritise human security. Human security which focuses primarily on protecting people while promoting peace and assuring sustainable continuous development, aims at aiding individuals by using a people-centred approach for resolving inequalities that affect security. The broader meaning of security means far more than the absence of conflict. It encompasses areas such as education and health, democracy and human rights, protection against environmental degradation and the proliferation of weapons.

The Prophetic Mission of the Church

For the past fifty years, the Catholic Church has been a witness to the joys and pains of a progressing Africa. In fulfilling her prophetic mission, she has often taken very bold initiatives to protect God's given dignity and integral development of all the people on the continent, and in favour of reconciliation, justice and peace.

In Africa, the Church continues to play the role of being the voice of the voiceless, denouncing corruption, being the politically independent observer of elections and counsel for the deprived litigants. In short, the Church has remained very attentive to everything that affects the day to day political, economic and social lives of her people.

Good Governance in Africa

Africa still remains a poor continent. The abundant wealth in natural resources is in sharp contrast with the pervading poverty of the vast majority of the African population. Many African countries are producers of oil and other minerals, yet there is no clear evidence in the improvement of the quality of life for the majority of the people in spite of this wealth. Africa remains a prey of foreign multinational companies which continue to plunder the continent of its resources. Africa also suffers adverse impacts of unfair rules of trade and finance, and imbalances in global governance.

More than fifty years after the independence, the continent is still rocked by endless violence. Illegal armed groups continue to threaten the safety of the people causing crises such as the displacement of people.

Democratic governance is still far from being fully realised in Africa. In many countries, this is mainly due to the absence of coordination and cooperation between different actors. Today, dialogue between the State and local communities is still weak. There is limited opportunity for the local communities to participate effectively in the decision-making processes. For this reason, public action also remains weak, while civil society is still perceived as a political rival.

The Concern of the Common Good

The Common Good is defined by Pope John XXIII as *"the totality of social conditions that contribute and foster in human beings the integral development of the person"*¹. For the Church, the principle of the Common Good requires that all social, political, economic and cultural structures, systems and processes be accessible to all.

The Principle of the Common Good shows that the earth is a gift from God to all humankind and it should be used fairly and judiciously. Africa owes herself the duty to apply this principle through a rational, responsible and provisional management of its natural resources, through defining of the legal and structural frameworks, to guarantee current and future generations, their right to these same goods.

It is in this sense that SECAM calls upon the European Union (EU) to continue the reform of its policy and action regarding the area of company transparency, tax cooperation, natural resource governance, global governance reform and trade reform. These measures will help to create the space that Africa needs to develop. It will then be up to the public leaders in Africa to consider political action as requiring openness and dialogue to create or strengthen social cohesion.

The Scourge of Corruption

The development of our countries in Africa is strongly mortgaged by corruption. Corruption has become a cancer in almost all the African countries and affects vital sectors such as the economic system, day to day administration, the job market, health, education, and the judicial system. We are aware that many governments are conscious of this problem and are making efforts to combat it. Unfortunately, personal interest and the frantic quest for gains have become stronger than the sense of the Common Good.

SECAM calls for the support of the EU to ensure that it does not contribute to the problem directly or indirectly in its policies and actions. E.g. by taking steps to increase European company transparency to end tax havens in EU jurisdictions and in encouraging African leaders and the general populace to uphold moral integrity, honesty and sincerity in all their dealings. Honesty and integrity are very important values throughout the Bible. SECAM believes that, "Integrity makes a nation strong, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

¹ Jean XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), No.65

Peaceful and Democratic Transitions

The political landscape in Africa should create new transitional opportunities. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI says that, '...elections represent a platform for the expression of a people's political decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power. They provide a privileged opportunity for a healthy and serene public political debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political groupings.'² The Pope encourages political leaders to respect the outcome of all credible elections. Credible elections can then become the process that creates peace and harmony in all countries.

The Church is aware of the key role credible elections can play in the task of nation building. Where an opportunity which can bring about real democratic transition is missed, we simply have one repressive government replacing another. Slowly, the situation becomes untenable. We therefore see our role as Church as that of facilitating dialogue, encouraging participation by all, and promoting reconciliation when disputes arise.

One of the major universal principles of democratic governance is that rulers are chosen by and are accountable to the people. Put differently, people must have the opportunity to elect a government of their choice.

Unfortunately, the occasion of every election has become a very dangerous moment in Africa, with an increasing risk of social unrest or civil war. The strong desire to remain in power has rendered constitutions precarious, which are changed at will by power holders in order to preserve the selfish interests of some rulers. Political manoeuvrings are at work almost everywhere to prevent change, to perpetuate a political party, a person's or a family's grip on power.

SECAM notes with sadness the problem in the Central African Republic (CAR). We hope that illegal armed groups will stop their atrocities and that an open and inclusive dialogue will be organized at all levels for a true reconciliation that will take into account the healing of past traumas. SECAM is also deeply worried about the situation in Nigeria. It is our hope that peaceful democratic changes will be the outcome in most of the States in North Africa. It is our prayer and hope that peace will return to Eastern Africa, in such countries as South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

We therefore stress the need for EU to take serious steps to ensure that none of its policies are derogating from the strengthening of democracy and good governance principles in Africa that will support the African continent to embrace democratic and good governance principles that will lead to true justice, to peace and reconciliation.

Conditions for Peaceful and Democratic Transitions

Democratic transition is the political process that allows a state to move towards a new political order, which is legitimately founded on a free and fair electoral process and the respect of democratic principles.

The lack of democratic space and the contempt for human rights have served as a fertile ground for political protests and crises. The refusal of political change by most ruling regimes complicates the quest to establish a democracy that responds to the aspirations of the peoples. The true love of our motherland and of our continent must force us to prefer a transparent and responsible management of power, and to hand over that power smoothly. This presupposes a strict respect for national democratic constitutions.

A Call to Political Leaders and Governments

In its Final Message, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops noted that Africa is rich in human and natural resources but "many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and

²Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus*, No.81

conflicts, crisis and chaos. These are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good..."³.

SECAM calls upon political leaders and governments in Africa to listen to the wisdom of the Synod and fathers and begin to rectify the actions that perpetuate poverty and misery. SECAM acknowledges and encourages efforts of the African Union which is the result of the willingness of Heads of State to put in place a process of political integration for quicker social development of the continent and to work towards the promotion of democracy and human rights.

The Role of European Union in Building a United African Continent

SECAM calls for support from the EU to ensure policy coherence for development and to urge African political leaders to see poverty eradication as a priority by using proceeds from the continent's natural resources, such as land, and forestry for the development of African countries for the benefit of the whole continent and all its citizens. SECAM urges the EU to help and play a complementary role, by supporting the development of a robust African Civil Society as well as African governments to reflect deeply on the issue of elections bearing in mind that elections need to be free, fair, transparent and peaceful.

"*One hand cannot tie a package*", says an African proverb. Today, it is imperative for the EU be a genuine partner with Africa. In this regard, the EU should do all that it can to ensure that it supports Africa in its policies and actions. SECAM together with our civil society partners in the EU is more than willing to offer its advice or services in this regard to ensure that the EU and the African Union (AU) work as genuine partners on this vision.

SECAM invites the EU to support the African people to adopt a new look at the stranger who remains a brother or a sister beyond the State, political, tribal or religious borders. Every citizen is invited to participate in consultations affecting their own society. Democratic practice must prevail at all times. Citizens must ensure that democratic practice is not compromised at all.

Conclusion

SECAM wishes to say to the EU that it is not enough to talk about principles, state intentions, and point out injustices in Africa; these words will lack real weight or meaning unless they are accompanied by a greater awareness of personal responsibility and through effective action by all. It is too easy to throw back on others the responsibility for injustice, if one does not realise how each one of us is involved in it. This is why personal conversion is needed first. The Christian's hope for a better society comes primarily from the fact that we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is working with us in the world⁴.

It is our hope and true belief that 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.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XIV says: 'It is incumbent for the Church to strive that every people may be the principal agent of its own economic and social progress... and may help to bring about the universal common good as an active and responsible member of the human family...'⁵.

Note: This Position Paper is based on the SECAM Pastoral Letter: "**Governance, the Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa**", Accra, February, 2013. It is approved by Most Rev. Gabriel Yaw Justice ANOKYE, Archbishop of Kumasi, and 2nd Vice President of SECAM in charge of the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development.

³ Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops: *Final Message*, No.5.

⁴Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, A Call to Action, No. 48

⁵Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus* No.79