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Provisional translation

**God of life, lead us to justice and peace**

(Reflection by Rev. Dr Simon Kossi Dossou, Protestant Methodist Church of Benin)

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The World Council of Churches is preparing its next Assembly and so this is the right time to begin praying the Assembly theme « God of life, lead us to justice and peace. In the African context each of the major words in this prayer has a significance charged with meaning which I will evoke briefly here.

**God**

According to the Bible, “God” has several and different names: Yahweh, Lord, Eternal ... Christians speak of God or call on God through these words. In African tradition God is also called by other names which can complement our understanding.

**Olorun**

For the Yoruba and Nagos of Nigeria and Benin “*Olorun*” literally means “the proprietor of heaven”, the one to whom heaven belongs. Heaven is generally understood to be a place inaccessible to the human spirit, the place that is above the reality to which human beings have access. As a result God is seen as the Being human beings can only perceive by belief and through faith. Christians and non-Christians believe this in the same way.

**Olodumare** is another name for God used by the Yoruba; **Chukwu** is a name used by the Igbo in Nigeria and elsewhere. Both names show God “as the Being who of himself gives birth to all beings”. The Fons people of Benin also call God, **Gbêdoto**, which means the one who creates life or the one who gives life.

Most African societies consider God as the Great God. He’s also seen as the Unique, Almighty, Providence, Supreme, Eternal, Comforter. Similarly God is also seen as Spirit. In addition it is impossible to represent God by a graven image as this would constitute idolatry.

It is God, seen and experienced through these different names, who gives life, who creates the human race. So God is the author of life. This is why when we say “God of life” we are evoking the creator and author of life. God gives life and has authority to take life away by putting an end to human existence in the form which we know it and by calling us to forms of human existence which are in accordance with his will.

## **Lead us to ...**

The main supplication in the assembly theme implores God to “lead us to ...”; that God may lead us forth rather than that we lead ourselves towards. It is true that God has endowed us with faculties to undertake things and act for the good. But allowing ourselves to be led will set us in that good direction which is in accord with God’s will.

## **Justice**

In this supplication we ask God to lead us towards justice. Justice covers a huge range of areas in which divine intervention brings solutions: the disequilibrium of the distribution of food between rich and poor, resolving problems linked to health particularly of women and children, problems of youth unemployment, particularly those who are qualified but find no work. We implore God to inscribe his justice in the heart of those who are polluting the planet most and who refuse to do justice to those parts of the world suffering the dreadful effects of this pollution. Sooner or later, climate change will affect us all if the major polluters persist in their thoughtlessness. Justice is also about the question of good governance, so that those who have a modicum of power exercise it in a way that takes all into account, exercising their own leadership in the fear of God.

## **Peace**

Peace is that Shalom which is not only the absence of war but also and above all inner peace. It is also security for all, for the integrity of human beings wherever they may be. There cannot be peace without human dignity. Just peace implies that all human beings are equal, to be taken seriously, that no human being should be treated as an object, used against their will or left by the wayside once they are no longer of use. Alas, yesterday as today our world has many inhabitants who do not value human life. This is why in Africa our prayer implores God to lead us to peace, and justice, and also to dignity. May we cease to consider other human beings as objects to be used for our own egoistic needs. In this way we could begin to eradicate the sexual and economic trafficking of women and children, which is so common in nearly all our countries and particularly in Africa. There will be no true peace without justice and in the same way the world can only be a happier place if there is dignity for all.

May it be so, for the whole world today and forever, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen