



ECUMENICAL GREETINGS

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure and honour to greet this august Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) gathered in Busan under the theme: **“God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace”**.

I greet you all on behalf of Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs), National Councils of Churches (NCCs), and particularly in the name of the Church in Africa, under the fellowship of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). We salute and congratulate the World Council of Churches for bringing all of us together in order to dream and celebrate together a great miracle.

2. LET US CELEBRATE TOGETHER A GREAT MIRACLE

During the first week of June 2013, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) brought together about 1,000 persons in Kampala, Uganda, for its Jubilee Assembly under the theme: **“God of Life, lead Africa to Peace, Justice and Dignity”**. These people came from each corner of Africa and beyond. We thank God because until recently Africa was considered as the most missionary field in the world. Now I can assure you that the Good news has reached each corner of Africa. From this Assembly we celebrate not only this miracle of the Gospel reaching each corner of Africa but also we reached a stage of a new understanding of African reality. For many times Africa has been considered as a continent of Pagans and some went up to qualifying its spirituality as Animism. This consideration was insulting because current studies especially the second edition of Prof. John Mbiti’s book *“Concepts of God in Africa”* proves sufficiently that Africans believe in one God from time immemorial. Indeed African Monotheism which is proved by the existence of a name of God in each African language has evidently influenced Judaic Monotheism if we take seriously the fact that Jews people spent 400 years in the African continent. One can go even deeper and say that people of Israel

could not become a nation if the Sons of Jacob had not benefited from African hospitality and given space for reconciliation. We want to express forgiveness to those who qualified us as Pagans and Animists. But from now this unacceptable prejudice has to stop.

We are here in Busan for the 10th Assembly and we are from each corner of the earth as the expression of this miracle, only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus commissioned 11 of his disciples with the mandate to take the Good News from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, he also commanded them that this Good News was to reach each corner of the earth. How can 11 persons achieve this Commission?

I wonder what should be the debate if this mission was given for the first time to this Assembly of more than 3000 people, many speaking more than three languages. I imagine that a number of persons could move motions commanding feasibility study and budgeting including big provision for communication and interpretation.

The same Jesus also told his disciples: "All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Mat 28, 18-19).

Whenever I attend an Assembly of WCC and this is the third I have privilege to be part of, I feel privileged to be part of generations which witnessed the miracle of seeing that the Good news has reached each corner of the earth. Therefore, our gathering from each corner of the earth is an eloquent expression of the reality of the Church today and we have all reasons and right to celebrate the achievement of this miracle.

This doesn't mean that the mission of the Church is no more necessary. The mission for spreading the Gospel has to continue but may be time has come to change the approach instead of moving from the center to each corner of the earth we may focus on moving from each corner of the earth towards a center which could be a space to experience together unity and fellowship.

It is also necessary to move from one corner to another in order to avoid self isolation because a corner of the earth or a denominational corner could become a prison.

When it comes to the center here we need to be careful because each corner could struggle to impose itself as a new center. Africans have a problem with this because some of our friends who want to please us keep on repeating that Africa has become the **NEW CENTER OF GRAVITY** of the world Christianity. This temptation is to be vehemently rejected because the center of gravity of Christianity is Jesus Christ.

We need not fall into the same temptation like the first disciples who invested much time debating on who is the first or the best forgetting that the first is the one who launched the Christian movement namely Jesus Christ.

But the center could also be a rotative space like Busan now where we meet after Port Allegro and Harare, and to organize that center space for fellowship is really the specific call of our worldwide Organisation, the World Council of Churches.

3. THE CHALLENGING NEED FOR UNITY

We also notice that Jesus who commissioned his disciples prayed for them and for those who will come after them so that they may be one for the credibility of the Gospel (John 17: 21). It is along this imperative of sharing faith and the Gospel message that, at each period in the history of the Church, the mission continued to reach new places and communities.

We all know how difficult it is to manage the extended family. We are many, we are diverse, but our unity is challenged by the success of the mission given to the disciples and missionaries of all the times. How can we manifest the unity for credibility for which our Lord prayed from the bottom of his heart and made meaningful our belonging to the common “Father who is with us”

At all times, the challenge of unity continued to be faced and the threat of division remained a reality.

4. THE GREAT VALUE OF COMPLEMENTARITY

Like other Regional Ecumenical Organizations, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) happens to have almost common membership as the World Council of Churches (WCC). The fact that we have worked together in choosing themes for our respective Assemblies has been appreciated by our common constituency in Africa. You have resolved to use the prayer: “**God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace**”. Consequently, we decided to use the common affirmation of: “**God of Life**” and ask Him to **lead Africa to Peace, Justice and Dignity**.

No one was surprised by the fact that we added “dignity” in our formulation. During the preparatory process, people of various ages in Africa were sensitized to the affirmation that “dignity” is not only a right, but also a gift from God who made everyone in His image.

Allow me to take this opportunity to ask this wonderful gathering to help us to bring to an end humiliating and general practice identifying and confusing misery, suffering and hopelessness with Africans by using images and photos of Africans while talking about this reality as if hopelensness leading in some cases to suicide doesn't exist in other parts of the world.

We continue to believe that our respective programmatic thrusts after our Assemblies will continue to be informed by our togetherness, including each other in the struggle for life with hope and dignity.

5. CONCLUSION

We have underlined the challenge of managing our diversities and the success of the mission which reached each corner of the earth. Called to be the salt and the light of the earth, we will continue to count on the coordinating leadership of the World Council of Churches. The interaction between our global and regional dimensions could be transformed into blessing and complementary. I want to ask WCC to receive our warm congratulations for a successful Assembly, rich in its dimensions, content wise and logistics. We are proud of you.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can grow together and make our unity of vision and unity of action a reality for the glory of God and for the credibility of the Gospel.

“God of Life, lead all of us to Justice, Peace, allow me to add Dignity nit only in Africa, but in the World “

Thank you for your kind attention.