

**Greetings to the AACC Jubilee Assembly
Kampala, Uganda
8 June 2013
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary, World Council of Churches**

Mr President,
Your Eminences, Your Graces,
The outgoing and the newly elected AACC leadership, General Secretary,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

The World Council of Churches joins you in this celebration of fifty years of the All Africa Conference of Churches. Together we celebrate your joint work for justice, peace and the dignity of all. The AACC has united churches in Africa in faith and witness as you do these days here in Kampala in a marvellous way. The AACC represented the prophetic voices of the churches that have steadfastly spoken truth to power; the AACC has offered solidarity since the period of African independence and nation-building; and the AACC contributed to the African identity and fellowship in new periods through faith in the God of life. Many look to you and listen to you for signs and words of truth and hope. Your prayers and faithful accompaniment have been a source of endurance for those whom others would categorise as “the least of these”.

There is a strong link between the theme of the cross 50 years ago and the theme of this assembly. Churches in Africa together have served and still serve as inspiring examples of what it means to bear witness together to the cross of Christ and the power of his resurrection fifty years ago and today. The cross unites us as the sign of God's love and solidarity with us in any circumstance. The cross shows us that injustice, sin and abuse of power will not have the last word because the cross is always pointing to the resurrection, and life in dignity given to us by the God of life. Those who resiliently and faithfully carry the most-heavy cross give also the strongest sign of solidarity and hope.

At this moment in history, your brothers and sisters in the faith from around the world give thanks to God for your witness and assure you of our continued prayers.

Africa needs you. The world wide fellowship of churches also needs you. As we appreciate your 50 years, with you, we ponder upon your mission in the years to come. The Christian faith plays a stronger role in the daily life of people here than in many other continents. Africa is at the centre of the growth of Christianity. With this role and this growth comes added responsibility: What kind of witness to Jesus Christ comes from the churches together from you? In other parts of the world, secularism seems to be at an all time high; yet, here in Africa the role of faith and religion and their place in the overall society are very central. The global ecumenical movement looks to the All African Conference of Churches to learn from your expressions of unity and straight forward common witness. In your message from this assembly you describe the many challenges you are facing. Hardly any continent is facing such challenges as you do; hardly any continent has churches of such high authority and influence in your societies as you have.

Africa and the worldwide church needs the spiritual resources and wisdom of the churches in Africa. How will you give direction to the journey, the pilgrimage for justice, peace, and dignity? We hope that you will lead in creating just and inclusive communities and help to make the church a true reflection of what God desires, where all are welcome and equally valued and all gifts can be shared within the community. I do hope - particularly after listening to your message yesterday - that you will refocus on the role of women giving birth to the life of your continent, and that you will work for

a just community of women and men in the church and in your societies. You have strong participation here from young people; they are representing a significant majority in this continent, looking to the churches for education and empowerment. The church has always been a fellowship of all generations, offering dignity to one another from the youngest to the eldest.

I hear you expect that we, the WCC, continue to live out that ecumenical calling together with you. We will do so. This AACC assembly's theme was inspired by the WCC 10th Assembly theme, "God of Life, lead us to justice and peace." Yours adds to the prayer the plea that God lead us to dignity as well. This formulation has a theological depth that is apropos for the present and is in keeping with the heritage of the ecumenical movement, such as the Programme to Combat Racism and the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) program to overcome stigmatisation and to build a HIV/AIDS competent church in Africa.

The spirit of the human right principles and the churches' commitment to fight for these values must be constantly renewed. The remaining witness from South Africa that it is possible to fight racism to establish justice and dignity peacefully and that the churches together can take a lead in this work continues to be an inspiration to all of us. Now, Africa and the world need a joint and renewed commitment to the dignity that is a right from God.

Both the AACC and WCC themes assume a common journey, a pilgrimage that is not done alone but in community. Our common pilgrimage is determined more by what we bring and what we seek than the journey's end. Justice and peace are conditions for a life together in dignity. Unity requires justice and peace; but, the work for justice and peace also requires that the churches are united. The ecumenical movement has taught us that no church is church alone. We belong to a community, the body of Christ, where nobody can say to the other, "I do not need you." Thus, we pray that the God of Life does not just "lead me" but "leads us."

You even say in your theme: Lead Africa. Church unity is not only about the church but also the church's unity in life as a whole. To be one in Christ is not to be one against the others but for the other, for the justice and peace for all, so that the world may believe.

Throughout Africa's history, there have been sterling examples of peoples of different faiths living together in community in relative peace. Given this history, it is all the more troubling to witness that, like other parts of the world, parts of Africa have become arenas for conflicts presented as conflicts between religions, even if they are not. Threats often come from radical militant groups supported from outside the continent. Threat comes also from within the church if we develop bitter language to describe what you see as a deeply polarised and competitive situation.

We certainly need to understand the threat that some of our Christian brothers and sisters feel they are under and to offer Christian solidarity. But, we as Christians, are called to find a way forward that leads to peace among different peoples of faith. A joint Muslim-Christian delegation trip to Nigeria last year led me to believe that this is possible. Together we saw and heard the abuse, injustices and horrors to which people are being exposed, whether they are Christians or Muslims. We now are working to find how to read our own scriptures - Muslims and Christians - to establish a common vision for today of what we mean by justice and peace, and dignity.

The African churches have been steadily increasing their demand for the practice of ethical democracy, to find a way for African citizens to protect and promote their common interests. This might be one of the signposts on the pilgrimage to justice, peace, and dignity to which AACC may step out and move toward. I was reminded of this when I visited recently South Sudan. In South Sudan, building a new nation poses enormous challenges and expectations. I am deeply inspired to

see the expectations to how the churches and their leaders can help ensure that truth and justice will build the country. It is easy to believe that just peace is won when fighting has subsided and an independent nation is established. But there is the need to establish a common vision of a just peace, establishing truth, reconciliation, sharing of resources, and the human rights to build a nation in peace.

I understand the particular concern for many Africans is the focus on “prosperity gospel” in a situation where so many people are struggling to find a solid economic base for the whole of nations and the continent. We need formation of faithful discipleship based on solidarity with the cross of Christ and caring for the needs of others in a spirit of mission and diakonia. We know that Africa is a continent rich in resources. Sadly, many of these resources have been exploited, offering little benefit to the sons and daughters of Africa in comparison. The struggle for economic justice for and within Africa must continue and be strongly supported by the global ecumenical movement.

In the time ahead of us, the world and the church needs the influence of Africa's Christian voices, as we have been strengthened by examples of strong leadership, from women and men, coming from Africa. Neither you nor the world around you can afford to see Africa only as an object of aid. Africa's experiences of life from the inside are a great source of wisdom and guidance to find justice, peace and dignity.

May the God of Life lead you on your journey toward justice, peace, and dignity for all in the next 50 years! God bless the All African Conference of Churches! God bless Africa!