

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AMECEA PLENARIES 2005 AND 2008

Following a request by the AMECEA General Secretary, the Uganda Catholic Secretariat has put together a brief report of what has so far been implemented from the resolutions of the two AMECEA plenary meetings which took place 2005 and 2008.

AMECEA PLENARY ON HIV/AIDS: 2005

Under the theme: *“Responding to the Challenges of HIV/AIDS within the AMECEA Region”* the scourge of HIV/AIDS was discussed by AMECEA Plenary. Since that time Uganda Episcopal Conference has taken the following steps:

1. The National Focal Point for HIV/AIDS which had been established long before the Plenary has now been raised to the level of a Commission. It advises the Conference on issues of HIV/AIDS, policies, programming, resource mobilization, networking, advocacy etc.
2. Diocesan Focal Points on HIV/AIDS have been established in all the nineteen Catholic Dioceses of Uganda.
3. The Conference has partnered with the Interreligious Council of Uganda (IRCU) on HIV/AIDS prevention, management and Programs to care for the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs). It facilitates the IRCU/USAID partnership where 22 Roman Catholic institutions are assisted with grants to carry out HIV/AIDS work all over the country. Further partnerships have been established with CRS and AIDS Relief organizations. The Conference further collaborates with numerous HIV/AIDS Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as well as the HIV/AIDS sector Government institutions.
4. Following the findings that HIV/AIDS prevalence was getting higher among the married couples, a Program entitled “Faithful House” has successfully been piloted in four dioceses and is set to roll out to the rest of the dioceses in the country.
5. HIV/AIDS has been streamlined into other departments and other Church Programs both at the national level and at the diocesan level.
6. The HIV/AIDS National Focal Point carries out non-clinical interventions in the dioceses. These include behavior change Programs and peer education initiatives for the adult, youth and children.
7. Community based organizations e.g. Kamwokya Caring Community and others are assisted to carry out HIV/AIDS Programs.
8. With the help of the partners and local support, the Conference has Programs that support Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) both at national level and in the dioceses. They are school fees, scholastic materials, clothing and other requirements. Caregivers and guardians are given skills in entrepreneurship so as to raise resources to maintain the orphans and the sick.
9. The Conference participated in an interfaith top religious leaders HIV/AIDS Conference organized by the Interreligious Council of Uganda April 13–15, 2010

under the theme: *“Shared Responsibility for Common Challenges”*. In the wake of new evidence showing increase in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS infections, the worsening situations of maternal mortality rates and gender-based violence, the faith leaders committed themselves to take action to improve the situation. They also suggested recommendations for action by the government and the development partners.

AMECEA PLENARY 2008.

Theme: *“The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”*.

Implementation of the resolutions of the AMECEA Plenary 2008:

1. Laying the ground for implementing the AMECEA Plenary resolutions on peace and reconciliation:

The different departments and projects at the Uganda Catholic Secretariat have streamlined peace and reconciliation in all their Programs. They have also reviewed their structures, re-skilled their staff and put in place tools and guidelines to ensure their Programs deliver on peace and reconciliation in the short and long term. At their annual meetings and other general meetings the national departments sensitized their diocesan leaders on the urgency of prioritizing peace and reconciliation.

2. Sensitizing the communities on the importance of peaceful co-existence and reconciliation:

- a. Preparing the ground for the implementation of the AMECEA Plenary resolutions entailed sensitizing the communities on the importance of peaceful co-existence and reconciliation as preconditions for development. This was especially timely as the country was in the process of preparing for the national elections in 2011. The pulpit and the media especially the Catholic owned media houses and institutions were extensively used to urge the people to value and promote peace, dialogue, tolerance, respect and accommodation of the viewpoints of other people.
- b. Consultations on the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the *Lineamenta* in preparation for the Special Synod on Africa were carried out from the grassroots in the dioceses to the national level. The Religious carried out consultations through their national umbrella Association (Association of the Religious in Uganda–ARU). The process increased the awareness of the faithful on peace and reconciliation issues. They discussed the potential and existing conflicts in their areas and the causes and gave recommendations for conflict resolution and sustainable reconciliation.
- c. The Conference together with the interfaith religious leaders (IRCU) were deeply involved in sensitizing the parties and the communities involved in the peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). As the parties in Juba were struggling with the contentious issues of accountability and the ICC, the religious leaders held a consultative

conference (2007) and raised their voices on the meaning of the dialogue, how the accountability should be carried out and the role of the ICC vis à vis the traditional justice systems.

- d. In an effort to further contribute towards promoting sustainable reconciliation in Northern Uganda, the Conference took part in the interfaith religious leaders' nationwide research (2008) on the complementarities between religions and the traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution. Useful insights and recommendations were given on how the two would be used to bring about peaceful co-existence.

3. Peace Education

- a. With the help of the partners (AVSI and UNESCO) peace education was initially piloted in the Catholic founded schools in Gulu and Kampala Archdioceses and later carried out in schools in the northern region of Uganda. The Program is set to cover the whole country. It aims at planting a culture of peace among young people.
- b. In 2007 with the help of UNESCO, through its Department for Catholic Education the Conference published the following books to guide peace education: *“Peace Education through Peace Clubs. A Guide for Primary Schools in Uganda”* and *“Peace Education through Peace Clubs. A Guide for Secondary Schools in Uganda”*. These are being used to promote peace building in school communities.
- c. The Youth Department in partnership with the department of Social Communications sponsored by the Vatican and AMECEA attended two peace and reconciliation workshops one in Nairobi, Kenya in April 2009 and the other in Arusha, Tanzania in May 2010. As a follow up the Youth Department has been running community peace sensitization Programs on radio and training youth leaders in different parts of the country. This Program has played a significant role in persuading the youth to work for peace. This was especially so in the national elections (2011) period where the youth would have been used by politicians to form youth brigades that perpetrate violence in the communities.
- d. Peace building is one of the major concerns for the interfaith efforts in Uganda. In 2008 the Uganda Episcopal Conference together with the interfaith partners (IRCU) published guidelines for patrons of peace and human rights clubs in institutions of learning in Uganda.
- e. In 2007, through its department of Justice and Peace, the Conference published a Peace Building Training Manual. It is being used by peace building practitioners and for peace education.

4. Human Rights

- a. The UEC has renewed its commitment to the human rights-based approach in its ministry. The different departments of the Secretariat both at national and

the diocesan level have streamlined human rights promotion into their work. They are running Programs for the promotion of the rights of children, the women, the men, the poor, people with disabilities and others. Specific projects have been designed and are being implemented in northern Uganda and the Karamoja region.

- b. In 2010 the Conference launched a special national advocacy campaign against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) which is rampant in many communities and often denies the vulnerable children and women their human rights. The Program is sponsored by Trocaire and Irish Aid.
- c. The Conference together with the interfaith partners (IRCU) contributed to the advocacy against contentious issues in the Domestic Relations Bill and domestic violence. It works closely with the Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention and the Uganda Human Rights Commission.

5. Conflict Resolution:

- a. As an agent of reconciliation the Church promotes peaceful conflict resolution. Although the guns of the Northern Uganda insurgency have fallen silent, numerous inter community conflicts remain and the Catholic Church has continued to promote dialogue and encourage peaceful conflict resolution. Conflict resolution Programs are running in Bunyoro region where ethnic conflicts have existed for quite some time. The discovery of oil in the region has brought with it new fears and concerns. In the northeast of Uganda the Karimojong armed with automatic firearms are perennially in conflict with their neighbours, the government and among themselves.
- b. In 2007, the Conference through its Justice and Peace Commission and with the help of Cafod carried out a research on "The search for alternative initiatives for sustainable livelihoods, peace and development in Karamoja region". It was conducted in the northeastern districts of Moroto, Kaabong, Kotido, and Nakapiripirit. This is the area occupied by nomadic pastoralists where development is very scanty. The study identified issues of concern and suggested recommendations for action by the stakeholders. It guided the Conference's recent interventions in the region.
- c. The departments at the Secretariat together with the dioceses in the region have Programs for conflict resolution, advocacy, small arms/disarmament, human rights and sustainable development initiatives in the communities.
- d. Through the Justice and Peace Commission the Conference carried out a survey on "The impact of investment policies on security of the citizens' lives and property in Uganda". It involved the districts of Buliisa, Hoima, Kibaale and Masindi. Oil reserves have been discovered in this region. The findings were published in October, 2009. On top of long standing ethnic and land

conflicts in the region, new conflicts are beginning to emerge as a result of the oil discovery in the area. The Conference through its concerned departments has ongoing Programs to empower the community leaders with conflict resolution and advocacy skills so as to mitigate the challenges observed in the survey and promote sustainable reconciliation in the Bunyoro region.

- e. Local and international partnerships have proved a useful resource for peace and reconciliation in Uganda. Together with the interfaith partners (IRCU) the Conference is in partnership with the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation (CJR) from the Netherlands. At the last partnership meeting of December 2008, the religious leaders revisited the conflict issues landscape and the efforts being applied to resolving the different conflicts around the country. Recommendations for further action were agreed upon including a framework for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of reconciliation activities undertaken by the religious leaders.

6. Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda.

- a. The Interfaith religious leaders in their regional umbrellas in the northern, eastern, northeastern, the Bunyoro region and at national level through IRCU and UJCC played a very important role in advocacy for dialogue. In 2007 Uganda Episcopal Conference together with the other faith groups under IRCU held a national conference and in their pronouncement titled "Voices of Religious Leaders on Accountability and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda" tried to contribute to the then ongoing peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Juba, Southern Sudan.
- b. The Conference through its departments of Caritas, Justice and Peace, Education and Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau and the dioceses in northern Uganda played a major role in ensuring that the LRA and the Government stop fighting and talk peace. The Conference took part in the whole process from the cease fire to the cessation of hostilities and accountability. The ceasefire has held and after more than twenty years in IDP camps people are going back to their homes. The different departments of the Church both from the national secretariat and the dioceses are contributing in the rehabilitation and resettlement process. This includes provision of material needs such as household requirements, roofing materials, farm implements and spiritual and psychosocial support.

7. Civic Education

- a. In the run up to the general elections of February 2011, the Conference planned and carried out civic and voter education Programs all over the country. They used the media, held workshops, conferences and consultations.

- b. In 2009–2010 the Conference joined hands with the Interreligious Council of Uganda (IRCU) and participated in interfaith civic and voter education throughout the country. These efforts had the effect of reducing election related violence and helping the voters to make informed choices.
- c. In 2009-2010 the Conference contributed in putting together the government approved “Civic Education and Voter Mobilization Hand book for Religious Leaders” The handbook was very instrumental in the nationwide civic education by the religious leaders.
- d. The Conference has been a source of inspiration to the political leaders in Uganda. It issued two land mark pastoral letters to guide the national general elections. In 2005 their letter titled “Towards a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good” after more than fifteen years of single party rule, gave very useful guidance on the transition to a multiparty system of government. In 2010 they issued the pastoral letter entitled “Building a Peaceful, United and Prosperous Uganda through Free and Fair Elections: Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda”. It helped the citizens and their leaders to better understand their roles and responsibilities in the process of the 2011 general elections.
- e. Two other exhortations are Conference publications on the Good Governance series prepared by the National Commission for Justice and Peace and have contributed immensely to civic education and these are: “*A Call to Justice and Integrity*” April 2009 (an Easter message). This was followed by “*A Call for Sustainable Constitutionalism and Rule of Law in Uganda*”. This was published in November 2009.

8. Advocacy

- a) Empowering the faithful to engage in active advocacy for good governance and reconciliation:
 - In 2010 the Justice and Peace Commissioners and communities were sensitized on new bills and laws and they were able to make constructive input before they were passed into laws. They are using the skills gained to follow ongoing parliamentary debates.
 - In the same year (2010) a national constitutional education workshop was conducted for diocesan coordinators and staff of the Uganda Catholic Secretariat to enable them know the constitution making process and how the Acts of Parliament are made and how the communities can contribute.
 - In 2009–2010 the Diocesan Coordinators and other Community leaders were equipped with skills in government expenditure monitoring and tracking so that they may be enlightened enough to empower the

communities to demand accountability and advocate for the proper use of public resources.

b) Initiating and streamlining advocacy and lobby structures.

- In 2009, with support from the South African Episcopal Conference and AMECEA, the Uganda Episcopal Conference set up and got Parliamentary accreditation for a Catholic Parliamentary Liaison office. It still continues to partner with the Uganda Joint Christian Council Parliamentary Liaison Office as it previously did. The Parliamentary Liaison officer attends session Committees and gathers information for advocacy. He organizes the advocacy processes for the Conference. Useful input has been made on a number of bills both by the Catholic Church individually and jointly with interfaith partners and civil society. The liaison office also publishes a Parliamentary and social issues bulletin to facilitate advocacy.
- Some of the advocacy issues in which the Conference is so far involved include: Good governance, Gender-Based violence, Environmental preservation, HIV/AIDS, Equitable distribution of natural resources (Oil), Dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution, Access to Justice, Homosexuality, and the legalization of abortion.
- In 2010, the Conference put in place an advocacy team of Bishops to research and process advocacy issues and draw advocacy strategies for the Conference.
- Since numbers mean a lot for the success of advocacy and lobbying, the Conference draws strength from participating in joint advocacy with interfaith and interdenominational partners namely Uganda Joint Christian Council, the Interreligious Council of Uganda as well as other likeminded non-governmental organizations both local and international.
- The Uganda Episcopal Conference has started the Parliamentary Chaplaincy to take care of the spiritual needs of the legislators. It provides a platform for the formation and solidarity of the Catholic Members of Parliament. The Chaplaincy pastors not only the Roman Catholics but has also attracted other Christian denominations and faith groups as well.
- The Conference took part in a national reconciliation advocacy training workshop (April 2008) for senior religious leaders. This was a collaborative effort between the interfaith religious leaders under IRCU and the Centre

for Justice and Rehabilitation (CJR) from the Netherlands. The workshop was intended to build and strengthen the capacities of religious leaders and institutions in Uganda to act for peace and reconciliation.

- The Conference participated in a baseline survey on access to justice. The case study done by IRCU in 2010 was carried out in the eastern Uganda districts of Bugiri, Busia, Iganga and Mayuge. The findings indicated the lack of trust the people have in the judicial system especially the lower magistrates courts and the widespread lack of knowledge of judicial processes. An access to Justice Program in the mentioned districts has been put in place by the Interreligious Council of Uganda.
- Achieving the millennium development goals is one of the challenges Uganda is facing. Service delivery and public governance as a whole leaves a lot to be delivered. The interfaith religious leaders (IRCU) held a dissemination, sensitization and advocacy meeting on the millennium development goals in March 2008. The religious leaders observed numerous challenges and noted that the country needed to do more to achieve the goals by 2015. They suggested some solutions and pledged to be part of the process in the implementation.
- In 2009 the Uganda Episcopal Conference convened a workshop to assess the progress and impact of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the input of the Roman Catholic Church. Useful resolutions were made on the enhanced input of the Church if the MDGs are to be achieved in time.

9. Poverty Eradication:

- The plight of the poor and the marginalized is a key concern of the Conference. Even as the national economy is said to be growing, more than 30% of the population still live below the poverty line, the rich are becoming richer and majority poor getting poorer and the number of the unemployed keeps rising. This continues to sow fruits of discord in the population. Programs in agriculture, small scale businesses and microfinance are being implemented in all the dioceses. This is contributing to assisting the disadvantaged majority to meet some of their urgent needs.
- The Conference through the Caritas department has partnered with the Anti Corruption Coalition of Uganda (ACCU) and the Interfaith Action for Ethics and Integrity (INFOC) to empower the communities to monitor especially the government's poverty alleviation funding allocations and other forms of public service delivery to the districts.

10. Environmental Protection:

Environmental degradation is taking its toll in many parts of the country. Many areas are turning into semi desert due to poor farming practices and deforestation. Some of the effects e.g. landslides have already had devastating consequences. With the help of the Northern Partners the Conference through its Caritas Department and others both at the national and the diocesan level has embarked on a tree planting Program so as to contribute to the preservation of the environment.

11. Mission to the refugees and the displaced.

Uganda has been the destination for numerous refugees from the surrounding neighbours. Through its Caritas Uganda department, the Conference provides them with material support, skills training and supports them to start small scale businesses and industries.

12. Social communication at the service of peace and reconciliation. The Conference is increasingly using the media and other sources of communication in the work of evangelization in Uganda. The Catholic media institutions have been very instrumental in promoting justice and peaceful co-existence.

- The Catholic Church in Uganda owns seven radio stations spread out all over the country and one television station. All these are sponsoring peace and reconciliation Programs in their communities. They continue to be used to broadcast messages and Programs for justice, peace and reconciliation by the dioceses and the national secretariat departments. They are also instrumental in promoting reconciliation Programs from other bodies and organizations both local and international.

- The Conference has held workshops to empower its communicators with skills and structures to ensure adequate output in the promotion of justice and reconciliation Programs. An effort is being made to form an association for the Catholic Media professionals.

Additional equipment has been procured to boost the coverage of Radio Sapientia, the FM station owned by the Uganda Episcopal Conference, by up to five hundred kilometers into the south west of the country.

13. Interreligious dialogue and ecumenism

Although there is no open religious confrontation, the relationship between faith groups and denominations has never been most cordial. The UEC has initiated some Programs to promote the spirit of tolerance and peaceful co-existence among religions, these include:

- As Members of the Interreligious Council of Uganda and the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the Catholic Church in Uganda continues to play an active role in promoting interfaith initiatives.

- Through Community Theatre Program Outreach using music, dance and drama, the Conference sensitizes and educates society about the importance of respecting diversity for peaceful and harmonious co-existence.
- Through radio jingles/ spot messages, communities have been mobilized and sensitized about mutual respect and harmonious co-existence between and among religions and cultures.
- In an effort to enhance and deepen mutual collaboration between and among Christian denominations, the annual organization and participation in the Good Friday Public Way of the Cross is carried out jointly.
- The Catholic Church in Uganda is actively involved in organizing and participating in the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and the International Women's Day of Prayer as opportunities to strengthen ecumenical cooperation and collaboration between and among Christians.

14. National Reconciliation Consultative Conferences:

- In September 2009 the UEC spearheaded a multisectoral stakeholder consultative conference under the theme " Search for Sustainable National Reconciliation, Justice and Peace at all levels". Although it was interreligious based it also brought on board the political and cultural leaders, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the private sector, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the International partners, and the diplomatic community. The core objective was the 'promotion of peace building/sustainable reconciliation as a foundation for sustainable development and peaceful co-existence irrespective of ethnicity, faith and political affiliation'.

Some of the issues which dominated the three days consultation included: domestic violence, corruption, ritual murders, resurgence of ethnocentrism, politicization of ethnic differences and deteriorating standards in public leadership. Key resolutions included raising the awareness of the citizens and empowering them on their rights, holding annual conferences on national reconciliation, justice and peace, intensifying the fight against corruption and moral decadence and mobilizing the people to improve their livelihoods. Above all they committed themselves to lobby the government to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In his closing speech His Excellency the President of Uganda promised to promote the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He made a contribution to the expenses of the conference.

- The second reconciliation conference took place in December 2010 and was organized jointly with the interfaith partners under the auspices of the Interreligious Council of Uganda. The theme, *“Just, Free, and Fair Elections”* was meant to give guidance towards the national elections which had been planned to take place in less than two months in February 2011.

15. Participation in the Great Lakes initiative:

The Conference participated in the preparatory meetings in 2008 - 2009 as well as the main conference in 2010. The Vice Chairperson and the Executive Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission were appointed to the regional Steering Committee of the Great Lakes Interreligious Network (GLIRN). A regional strategic plan to address regional peace and reconciliation issues was made and is now awaiting adoption by the Episcopal Conferences in the region.

16. CARITAS AFRICA-SECAM Meeting:

Uganda Episcopal Conference was represented by the National Director of Caritas Uganda at the Post-Synodal Consultation meeting which took place at Mumemo, Maputo, Mozambique from 23rd to 26th May, 2010.

Conclusion

Justice, peace and reconciliation are basic foundations in the mission of the Good News. The Uganda Episcopal Conference has so far put deliberate effort in its work towards the implementation of the resolutions of the two AMECEA plenary meetings while waiting for the Apostolic Exhortation of the Second African Synod.