

**TANSANIA**

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June 2014

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## Peace Building, Democracy and Development in Africa: A Call for Active Citizenship Sub-Sahara Africa

INTERNATIONALER INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN TANZANIA



**From 5 - 8 May 2014 religious leaders from Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania convened in Dar es Salaam for an international interreligious dialogue focusing on peace-building, democracy and development in the region. The conference was jointly organized by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Tanzania country office, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Lutheran World Federation.**

Much as these countries have long standing experiences in peaceful interreligious coexistence, they have recently been facing some challenges regarding interreligious relations across the midst of manifold societal changes. Furthermore, in order to deepen the understanding of relations across Sub-Sahara Africa, the organizers invited contributions from the Project on Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), Kenya. In attendance were also representatives from Tanzania's four major political parties: Chama cha Mapin-

duzi (CCM), Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), Civic United Front (CUF) and NCCR-Mageuzi. Tanzania's National Committee on the Prevention of Genocide was also represented in the conference.

The main objective of the conference was to explore how religious and political leaders could strengthen active citizenship and thereby contribute to peace and sustainable development. The detailed objectives included (1) to explore the constitutional framework that guarantees citizenship rights; (2) to strengthen practices of good governance and democracy; (3) to highlight poverty alleviation as preconditions for peace and development; (4) to analyze tensions between different communities and promote tolerance; and (5) to issue a joint call from religious leaders that affirm joint values, concerns and commitments and suggest proposals for concrete action points.

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### Peace as buzz word

The conference was graced by His Excellency Dr. Mohammed Gharib Bilal, Vice – President of the United Republic of Tanzania who underscored the government’s commitment to work together with all religious leaders to maintain peace, good governance and to promote sustainable development.

Dr. Bilal observed that in today’s world, peace has become a buzz word mostly because of altered interreligious relations triggered by several factors. “We are guided by less and less facts and more by negative perceptions about others. We are forced to watch what we say; how we say it; when we say it; and where we say it!” he said, warning that if we do not act now this situation could degenerate into disturbances and even riots.



H.E. Dr. Bilal, the Vice President greets Prof. Juma Mikidadi of the Muslim University of Morogoro

The Vice President reminded those present that the joint efforts will demand trust; tolerance; transparency; time; energy; commitment; open and timely communication as well as monetary and non-monetary resources. Equally important, he added, the joint efforts require a mind-set change. Dr. Bilal informed the participants that political and religious leaders are serving the same community. In this regard, he went on, political and religious leaders have to jointly take ownership and leadership of peace building.

In his welcoming notes, Dr Alex Malasusa, Chairman of Christian Council of Churches in Tanzania and the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

World reported that religion was one of indelible tools in shaping our identities. “It does not matter whether you are African, European, Asian, American or Australian, you will witness how conflicts involving religious beliefs last very long, take many lives, destroy hopes for life and are difficult to resolve”, he noted. He reported that one of the objectives of the conference was to analyze the root causes of injustices and promote the involvement of people in decision making and poverty alleviation. Poverty, according to Dr. Malasusa has been suspected and proven to be a fertile ground for divisions, ignorance and hopelessness saying it was one reason why most young people in Africa who are trapped into religious and political violence come from poor background.

### Respect each other

Bishop Malasusa reminded the participants of the need to respect each other given their diversity, saying we must count ourselves as God’s creation. “We are all believers in one God in many peculiar ways”. He asked them to break down prejudices that are alarming in their daily encounters with each other saying sometimes conflicts have unnecessarily erupted because of intentionally or unintentionally provoking others who worship differently. “We should be ready to respect and to learn from what others are doing, so that we can mirror ourselves with what we are and what we believe”.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Resident Representative in Tanzania, Stefan Reith told the conference delegates that KAS was happy to be involved in an international conference, which aims to build bridges among different religious affiliations. He stressed the importance of religious tolerance saying communities were shaped in many ways through religious teachings. He said religious and political leaders shared the responsibility to promote peace; unfortunately however, religious leaders were being misused for political goals while in some cases politicians were equally being misused to achieve religious goals. Reith praised Tanzania for its political stability noting, however that of late several chal-

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Challenges were emerging exemplified by intolerance in the ongoing constitutional making process. Mr. Reith observed that politics and religions were interrelated hence there was need for their leadership to commit themselves to peace.

**Support needed**

Sheikh Suleiman Lolila, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA), Chairman of Tanzania Interfaith Partnership (TIP) and Board Member of the Interreligious Council for Peace Tanzania (IRCPT) expressed his appreciation to the Government of Tanzania for its recognition of the role of religious denominations in peace building in Tanzania. He reminded those present that Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) played a crucial role in nation building all over the world. Given such a central role they played in neutralizing tensions globally, Lolila noted that if such organizations were supported, the world shall be in peace.

In his welcoming notes, the Zanzibar Chief Kadhi, Sheikh Khamis Haji Khamis, demanded that all faith-based organizations do their utmost to maintain peace. He thanked those who supported the initiative to organize and sponsor the Interfaith Dialogue on Peace – Building, Democracy and Development.



Sheikh Khamis (left) and Sheikh Lolila

After the official opening session, Father Dr. Raymond Saba, Secretary General, Tanzania Episcopal Conference and Sheikh Prof. Juma Mikidadi, Muslim University of Morogoro were asked to comment on the keynote speech delivered by H.E. the Vice-President Dr. Mohammed Gharib Bilal.

**Good governance as key**

Dr. Saba noted that one must also note what the reality on the ground is, for example is Tanzania an island of peace? When compared to other countries, the answer is yes but what is peace? The danger here is to lose even the meaning of the concept peace for how do you explain corruption, uneven distribution of resources, religious leaders preaching hatred and the looming poverty! What comes first, peace or development? To me peace is a sign of good governance but not a source of good governance, Dr. Saba said. Likewise, development without peace is like having no development. Good governance is the key to peace and good governance is the key to sustainable development.

Saba stated that politicians and religious leaders have the duty to act together to spur and sustain development. The Vice-President was inviting political and religious leaders to join him in promoting peace but such joint efforts require a change of mindset among politicians who want religious leaders to remain apolitical. Similarly, religious leaders require a change of mindset to not get involved in speaking out wrong on the mish-mash of politics. Religious leaders need not to be invited to join forces to build peace. Fundamentalism is a threat to peace and development especially when it springs from religious leaders.

**Understanding**

Sheikh Mikidadi reminded the participants that the Vice-President had invited them to join the spirit of togetherness. But questioned: Are religious leaders together (in solidarity?). Experience has shown that if a Sheikh or Bishop is attacked, the tendency is to let him sink or swim. It is important that we maintain solidarity instead of working individually. Faiths are just colours. We should not force anyone to change his or her faith because that is going against the reality in which the one, who is doing so, will be punished by God. We read in the Holy Quran, chapter two, verse 3 not to force or compel people to change their faith. God says anyone doing so is a sinner and

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will be punished. Furthermore, you cannot preach peace when you are not a peaceful person; you cannot preach democracy when you are not a democratic person. There is a great need to understand each others faith and its culture in order to avoid unnecessary stigma as this will allow us to cooperate and move together. We should not discriminate against ourselves.

Following the comments, renown scholars presented papers on topical issues including: National Constitutions and the Freedom of Religion in Africa; Current Developments in Christian- Muslim Relations in Africa; Religious Leaders for Democracy and Good Governance; Poverty Alleviation-A Precondition for Peace and Development; and Creating an Infrastructure for Peace: Successful Interfaith Initiatives.



Dr. Helen Kijo-Bisimba, LHRC

### MAIN ISSUES BROUGHT OUT

Conference delegates raised several issues which can be summarized as follows:

There is a growing tendency of political leaders in the disruption of peace through an intrusion in religious institutions for their political gains; there is need for concerted interreligious efforts to fight against politicians who misuse religious platforms for their vested political interests;

Religious teachings provide a strong motivation to overcome violence and hatred, and to build trust and solidarity among different people which enables us to live peacefully with others, it is the role of religious leaders to strengthen such commitment to peace;

Peace is a result of economic justice, good governance and a clean environment and everybody has to strive for peace;

Political empowerment and inclusion are the pillars of democracy since they ensure the effective participation of members in the political processes of a country;

The inbuilt warning from politicians that religious leaders should not get mixed up in politics is nothing but mere opium to the people. There is the need to remove that veil that separates politics from religion because essentially politics is everything concerning people's daily life;

Poverty should be seen as an outcome of the breakdown of relationships. Income indicators are useful but poverty is basically the indicator of a relationship breakdown. Without the restoration of the relationships poverty cannot be dented.

In many African countries people get to power not to serve the people or the common good, but to serve themselves and their families;

The emergency of radical social groupings such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Shabab in Kenya and Somalia is a result of social marginalization and stratification;

There is an urgent need for intra-Muslim engagement as well as inter-Christian engagement in order to find solutions related to peace and conflict;

One way to move forward with a peace building agenda is to use the media in publicizing what religious leaders are doing so as to pacify their followers and the general public at large;

The role of religion in poverty denting is critical because where there is more poverty there is more religion. Conversely, where there is less poverty there is less religion;

Without a common perspective for an African theology, it will be very difficult to get out of the poverty. There is an urgent call

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for resistance against everything bad such as corruption and bad governance;

There will be no peace without justice. Likewise, there will be no peace with corruption;

Religious leaders are more than ordinary leaders so they need to recognize their proper place in society. They are responsible for taking God's word to the people (in other words, they are ambassadors of God);



Archbishop Timothy Ndambuki, Kenya

Religion is an effective tool to help build peace and good governance and hence sustainable development. Tanzania needs development to dent poverty;

Much as most African countries claim to have their economies growing at the fastest rates, many of their people are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty, there is need for explanation;

Africa has resources that remain unexploited, but leaders are looting everything. Time has come for politicians and religious leaders to see sense and forge common position;

Poverty in Africa manifests itself very glaring in rural women, that means any poverty denting attempt must be centred on rural women;

In Tanzania, religion is seen as a compliment to the government rather than taking the mission on their own. Religious leaders should not see themselves as supplementing government work but stand on their own;

Religious leaders are God chosen hence they have to be sincere to God, to themselves and to the people they serve. They have to be proactive and never allow themselves to be misused by politicians for their political ends;

Africa has been a place where religion was never used to persecute anybody; instead it was used to host religious refugees fleeing from persecution in their home countries. However, the irony today is that Africa no longer receives religious refugees but makes refugees who must seek asylum outside Africa.

**CLOSING**

The conference closed with various delegates expressing their satisfaction with and appreciation of the manner in which the conference was conducted and specifically the bringing together of leaders of the various faiths to discuss a pressing agenda on peace building in a continent checkered with a history of conflicts, mismanagement of resources, corruption and poor leadership. It was equally appreciated to have representatives from political parties on board as these were key pillars of democracy.

KAS on its part expressed its readiness to continue working with religious leaders and other stakeholders in peace building in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**FINAL CONFERENCE DECLARATION**

At the end of the three days conference, delegates came up with the "Joint Interreligious Declaration on Peace Building, Democracy and Development".

The leaders committed themselves to:

- (1) Inspire people to become active in building peace, democracy and development and promote gender equity in our communities
- (2) Encourage the members of our communities to build bridges of understanding among religious people and to engage in interreligious relations



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(3) Cooperate with political leaders to work for socio-economic justice as a prerequisite for peace building and to address religious tensions before they become violent

(4) Resist all attempts by any individual or group to misuse religion and/or politics for personal or partisan political benefit

(5) Identify and/or condemn all violent acts against any community or society

(6) Demand governments and all stakeholders to respect the letter and spirit of the constitutions and guarantee freedom of religion

(7) Assume our role as religious leaders in advocating good governance

(8) Build and sustain interreligious platforms at all levels to foster peace building, democracy, development and poverty alleviation

(9) Promote interreligious awareness in the formal training for religious leaders

(10) Promote continuous and consistent interreligious engagement and hospitality.



**Impressum**

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