

THE FIRST AFRICAN FORUM ON RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT (AFREG) HELD IN ABUJA, NIGERIA FROM 25TH TO 28TH JULY 2006

AFREG I ABUJA DECLARATION

From July 25 to 28, 2006, about 200 Christian women and men representing church and public sector leadership from 27 African countries and from the African Diaspora in the United States of America met in the first African Forum on Religion and Government (AFREG I). There were other participants from the United States and Iraq. The forum was held in Abuja, Nigeria. We are grateful to God for the presence, encouragement and challenging words of His Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and His Excellency President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi and his wife Madam First Lady Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza.

The atmosphere surrounding AFREG I was very clear; the time has come for change in Africa. The current state of affairs in Africa is characterized by:

- being the wealthiest continent in terms of natural resources and yet having the poorest people on planet earth.
- being known as incurably religious people and yet having a serious lack of authentic spirituality, morality and integrity in all spheres of life (in church and society).
- the threat of religious intolerance and conflicts to peace and stability in Africa.
- the identity crisis in which African values and Western values are often confused.
- the need to strengthen the proactivity of the church vis-à-vis issues of development, governance and justice.

In response to the above realities, we as representatives of African leadership, expressed our deep sense of dissatisfaction for the current realities on the continent, and resolved to make the necessary contributions for positive change on the continent. We engaged in prayer, critical reflection, and discussed necessary action plans. Given our general agreement that the African challenge is primarily one of leadership, our deliberations were guided by the following purpose and objectives:

Purpose:

To build a movement of African leaders of integrity who are committed to transforming Africa into a First World continent (a continent characterized by excellence) shaped by God-centred values.

Objectives:

- Develop deep spirituality among African leaders that is God-centred and relevant to the African context.
- Develop a moral vision for Africa based on deeply personalized spiritual values.
- Develop a framework for Africa's development that is holistic.
- Develop a framework for freedom of religion in Africa that ensures a democratic environment characterized by peace and stability.

We are gravely concerned about the gap between what we profess and our actions vis-à-vis what is happening on the continent and have a passion to do something about it. Inspired by the keynote address of Dr. Delanyo Adadevoh, and other presenters, the participants (including government Ministers, Parliamentarians, Judges, Church leaders, Traditional Rulers and other

community leaders) took on the challenge of working towards a movement of African leaders of integrity who are committed to making a difference in Africa by being salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

Signs of hope and common concerns

As participants reflected on the situation on the continent, we had cause to celebrate many signs of hope. The signs of hope include Christians responding to the calling to be in active politics with the value of integrity, and the commitment to making a difference. The Church is also emerging as the key platform for peace and reconciliation in all spheres of life. The African Union is taking initiatives that hold great promise for Africa's development. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has provided a common economic plan for Africa's development. The African Peer Review Mechanism also promotes integrity in leadership and governance in Africa.

We are grateful to God for the key role played by H. E. President Olusegun Obasanjo in making the vision of AFREG I a reality. We are also grateful to God for the full participation of H. E. President Nkurunziza. His testimonies regarding steps that he is personally taking towards integrity, justice, peace and development in Burundi are inspiring signs of hope.

We also shared common concerns about the challenges that face the continent. We noted that Africa has suffered much from settling for mindsets that prevent her from moving forward. Africa needs to move beyond these mindsets to those that are closer to the will of God. Thus there is a critical need to pursue shifts in mindset from:

- mediocrity to excellence; “only the best is good enough for Africa.”¹
- corruption to integrity.
- lack of confidence and initiative to confident, original and constructive creativity.
- limited supply mindset to abundance mindset.
- ethnocentrism to inter-ethnic communality.
- exclusivity on the basis of gender to inclusivity and partnership in development.
- favouritism to meritocracy.
- mindset of intervention and fatalism to the principle of sowing and reaping.
- the tendency to adjust to the *status quo* to change leadership.
- consumption to production mindset.
- focus on raw material production to value added product economies.
- ignorance to knowledge of the true value of Africa's resources.
- under-utilisation to maximization of African resources for development.
- charity dependence to fair business mindset.
- dependence mindset to responsible interdependence.
- self serving leadership to sacrificial leadership.

Values

Participants agree that change and transformation is very necessary, very urgent, and possible to achieve in Africa through the power of God. Such change is not merely cosmetic. It ought to be radical beginning from the changes which take place in the lives of individuals who form the churches and Christian communities, and is expressed in how the individuals become the salt and light of our communities and nations. We agree that the desired change will be possible when the following values are embraced:

¹ This is a famous quote from Dr Kwagir Aggrey, first African Vice Principal of Achimota College, Ghana.

- God-centredness
- Sacredness of human life
- Positive self-identity
- Personal and public integrity
- Ubuntu²
- Freedom and human rights
- Communality
- Sacrificial service
- Dignity of labour
- Responsible interdependence
- Justice for all
- Excellence

Commitments and actions

These call for some direct commitments on the part of leaders at various levels.

1. As participants in AFREG I, we commit ourselves to
 - disseminate in our various constituencies the vision, objectives and passion of AFREG including the declaration and action points.
 - promote a spirit of oneness and cooperation between Africans on the continent and the Africans in the Diaspora.
 - foster a climate of working with people of other faiths in order to have peaceful communities that will enable us to address the many challenges facing the continent without compromising our faith.

2. We commit ourselves to, and call upon African churches to commit themselves to
 - more proactive and collective leadership in addressing holistically the issues of development, governance and justice.
 - foster Christian unity on the continent and move beyond divisions that have plagued churches and church organizations.
 - sponsor and insist on the development of theologies that speak from and to African expressions of Christianity.
 - develop theologies and ministries that liberate Africans from spiritual superstition, deception and oppression.
 - promote global missions from Africa as a move from being a missionary receiving to a missionary sending continent.
 - include issues of leadership, development and governance at all levels of church education, paying particular attention to mentoring and empowering women and youth.
 - encourage those who are called to engage in public politics and help in the building of their capacity to do so with the highest level of integrity as models to the entire society.
 - utilize the gifts of all members without discrimination on the basis of gender or age.
 - engage in activities that combat HIV/AIDS.

² *Ubuntu* describes a wholesome person who has integrity, moral values, and compassion, and can relate constructively in community. It is an African concept particularly found among the Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Baswati) and other people of southern Africa.

3. We commit ourselves to, and call on all leaders of African Governments to
 - put the needs of the citizens of the nations first, and to seek the welfare of the nation rather than their own benefits.
 - commit themselves to accountability and the eradication of corruption.
 - partner with churches for the development of our communities.
 - commit more resources to the education, health and food security of their peoples.
 - ensure the independence of the judiciary.
 - foster communities in which people of different faiths live together with mutual respect.
 - develop and involve women in leadership at all levels.
 - develop a positive sense of African identity as well as bridge the communication gaps among the Anglophone, Lusaphone, Francophone and Arab African countries by promoting one African language as an official language of Africa.³
 - sponsor and/or partner with institutions engaged in combating HIV/AIDS.

4. We commit ourselves to, and call on all African Christians in leadership and in Government to commit themselves to
 - excellence and integrity in how they carry out their responsibilities.
 - act as role models to other politicians as well as other Christians aspiring to become politicians.
 - be principled when they have to be pragmatic and to avoid the absolutist trap.
 - invest wisely where it matters for the development of their communities and nations.

We acknowledge that God is at work in Africa creating something new. Our commitments are best carried out in the spirit of prayer and dependence on God. Believing that God is with us, and the Holy Spirit empowers us, we in AFREG I assert that transformation can and will happen in Africa. We are committed to doing our part to bring this transformation about. With God, all things are possible!

³ Kiswahili has been approved by the African Union as an official African language. African leaders need to implement policies that will ensure the learning and usage of Kiswahili or a preferred alternative across the continent.