



**CONFERENCE OF THE CATHOLIC EPISCOPATE
OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION
FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**
“God has entrusted us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor 5, 18)

FINAL DECLARATION

1. We, the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay delegates of the National Episcopal Conferences of Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, as well as of the two regional Episcopal Conferences ACEAC and AMECEA, joined together from 19 to 21 October 2010 at the King’s Conference Center, Bujumbura, Burundi. The reason for coming together was to hold a conference with the goal of looking for ways and means to work together in order to better contribute as Church to peace building and to promote reconciliation in the Great Lakes Region. The theme of the conference was *Conference of the Catholic Episcopate of the Great Lakes Region for Peace and Reconciliation: “God has entrusted us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor 5, 18)*
2. As we had hoped, the conference was blessed by a spirit of communion with the Holy See and the Universal Church thanks to the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio of Burundi, H.E. Archbishop Franco COPPOLA and three delegates, respectively from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and Caritas Internationalis. It was also graced by the presence of delegates from partner agencies from the United States, specifically USCCB, CPN and CRS; from Germany, AGEH, Missio and Misereor; and from the Netherlands, Cordaid. From beginning to end, the conference also benefited from the logistical support of the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region whom we wholeheartedly thank.
3. After the official opening by His Excellency Pierre NKURUNZIZA, President of the Republic of Burundi, to whom we give our esteem and gratitude, the delegate of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace,

Msgr. Bernard MUYEMBE MUNONO, reminded us of the vision and strategy of the Church in its commitment to the service of peace and reconciliation. Ambassador Liberata MULAMULA, Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region who also honored us by her presence, spoke eloquently on the contribution which she awaits from the Church for peace and reconciliation in the region. In the light of her analysis and that of the contribution from the delegate of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, we sought to arrive at a shared understanding of the problems of peace and reconciliation in our region. And inspired by three reflections on the theology of reconciliation; the ethics of political reconciliation; and their relationship to the mechanisms of transitional justice, we attempted to discern the major challenges to be addressed in order to achieve peace and reconciliation in our region.

4. As a result, we identified the following four major challenges: bad governance; ethnic and tribal conflicts; widespread profound trauma; and plundering or uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources together with the subsequent destruction of the environment. At the same time we noted the following three related cross-cutting challenges: underutilization and insufficient awareness of the Church's unique potential to promote peace and reconciliation; the lack of pertinent information on the underlying causes of our problems; and insufficient coordination of the Church's initiatives for peace and reconciliation.
5. With this done, we proceeded to formulate guidelines for the elaboration of a common strategic plan with the intent of aiding our respective Episcopal Conferences to work in synergy in order to better address the challenges identified. Then, having agreed to reinforce the present Steering Committee for the conference by adding three competent persons, we entrusted it with the mandate to elaborate this plan and submit it to those with the authority to approve it. We also requested the committee to propose a functional mandate for a regional coordination mechanism taking into account the directives agreed upon in the conference deliberations to employ the minimum formal structures possible while ensuring the mechanism will be able to perform the follow-up and coordination necessary to put the strategic plan into effect.
6. Well beyond our expectations, the work of this conference reinforced within us the conviction that peace and reconciliation are at the same time a gift from God and a mission that God has entrusted to the Church. Moreover, it helped us to evaluate what has been already achieved in the fulfillment of this mission. While doing this, we became aware of the urgent need to develop a comprehensive and more dynamic strategic plan, in order to respond more effectively and in a lasting way to the challenges of peace, justice and reconciliation. Likewise, we have realized that we must extend our Church's solidarity to Sudan where they are preparing

for a referendum on independence for the south and to the Central African Republic to which the rebel group LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) has exported its devastations from Uganda.

7. As a result of the conference, we are more determined than ever to move from word to action. Therefore, we make the following proposals to the Episcopal Conferences which have delegated us:
- a) To agree upon a common strategic plan within six months after the expanded steering committee for this conference will have submitted it to them for approval;
 - b) To create a mechanism for regional coordination for peace and reconciliation based upon the proposal which will be submitted to them by the expanded steering committee;
 - c) To commit themselves to the mobilization of the necessary resources for the functioning of that mechanism;
 - d) To promote synergy between the institutions of the Catholic Church in the region by way of a close collaboration between universities, research centers, Justice & Peace Commissions, various levels of Caritas, social communications services, etc.;
 - e) To engage in constructive collaboration at the ecumenical and interreligious levels;
 - f) To ensure that the follow up work of this conference entrusted to the expanded steering committee is carried out until the proposed mechanism of coordination is put in place.
8. Happy to have been able to work together with enthusiasm in an atmosphere of sincere and encouraging conviviality, we thank all those who, in so many diverse ways, whether from near or far, have contributed to this graced moment. Through the intercession of Mary, the Queen of peace, may God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, bless us together with all the partners of our Churches, and make us good instruments and zealous ministers of reconciliation.

Done in Bujumbura, October 21st 2010

On behalf of all of the conference participants,



★Simon NTAMWANA
Archevêque de Gitega
President of ACEAC



★Emmanuel OBBO
Bishop of Soroti
AMECEA President's Delegate