

PREAMBLE

This strategic plan is one of the awaited results of the Conference of the Catholic Episcopate of the Great Lakes Region for Peace and Reconciliation held 19 to 21 October 2010 in Bujumbura. The corollary result to this is the putting in place of a coordinating commission charged with implementing that plan. By way of the coming together of these two interrelated results, the concerned Episcopal Conferences are invited to set in motion and to guide the synergy of action recommended by the conference in order to better contribute to peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes Region.

Here the observation of Archbishop Onaiyekan, the former President of SECAM, merits our attention: "...[the] problems of Africa are more and more taking on regional dimensions, as the Great Lakes situation has clearly shown....In such a situation, the Church in the region cannot but work together to bring peace across each others' borders."¹ Moreover, the II Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops strongly recommends such a synergy of action by inscribing it within a much larger pastoral framework. In effect, the Synod reminds us that "the Church is a communion which brings about an organic, pastoral solidarity" and that "Bishops...are the foremost promoters of communion and collaboration..." It then insists that "This communion of the Church is manifested particularly in the Bishops' effective and affective collegiality in their Ecclesiastical Provinces and at the national, regional, continental and international levels."²

The synergy of action for peace and reconciliation for which the Bujumbura conference unanimously called is a response both to an urgent need posed by the reality of the situation in the GLR and to the recommendation of the II Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Certainly, the Catholic Church in the GLR has been addressing the problems of its peoples for more than one hundred years. She makes her own "the joys and sorrows, the hopes and aspirations of our people," (cf. GS,1) without differentiation or discrimination. Many initiatives have been undertaken by the different Churches in the hope of bringing to an end the violence which causes so much anguish in the Region and of helping their people to reconcile and live in peace. But taking into account the cross-border and international dimensions of the conflicts and their consequences, the Churches could know no better way than to benefit from joining their efforts to confront together the challenges which arise and disrupt the peace.

As the Delegate of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace noted at the Bujumbura conference, the concerted and coordinated action which are being called for would help avoid duplicate or competing Church initiatives for peace building³ Moreover, such a

¹ Presentation given by Archbishop Onaiyekan on the occasion of the 3rd Catholic Peacebuilding Network Conference, Bujumbura, July 2006.

² Proposition 3, Message of the II Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops

³ B. MUNONO MUYEMBE, "*L'engagement de l'Église Catholique au service de la paix : quelle vision, quelles stratégies*" Presentaion given at the Conference of the Catholic Episcopate of the Great Lakes Region for Peace and Reconciliation held 19 to 21 October 2010 in Bujumbura

synergy of action would lead to a better understanding of the reality in the GLR which in turn would facilitate identification of durable solutions and more effective mobilization of people around the common search for peace and reconciliation.

The need for this synergy is even more evident in virtue of the unity of the Church itself and the importance of its presence in the GLR. By its nature, “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race...” (LG, 1) Therefore she has a fundamental mission to promote unity, always and everywhere. From this comes her duty to gather people of diverse origins into one, glorious family. She has been given the mission to make all people into brothers and sisters in order to put into effect the words of St Paul: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:27-28) To this effect the Church herself must serve as an example in her way of being and in the fulfillment of her mission. How, therefore, can she avoid the need to work in synergy for the advancement of peace and reconciliation when even on the political and economic levels the process of regional integration is definitively underway.

The dramatic situation of division and wars in the GLR countries challenges the Church to focus more on people who have been truly evangelized and less on the number of registered Christians. In effect, it shows that the Christian faith has not yet succeeded to keep in check the hatred and violence in peoples’ hearts, nor to inspire and guide the political decisions of Christians who hold positions of power. In this respect, it is necessary to deplore together with the Second Vatican Council the grave and culpable opposition imposed between the life of faith and the style of daily life. (GS, 43) The Churches of Africa have reason to beat their breasts since the time of the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops having confessed to not having done all in order for faith to play its full role in the decisions which Christians must make in their daily lives.⁴ There is no doubt that a collegial engagement of the Churches in the GLR for a synergy of action to promote peace and reconciliation would help also to find together the language and methods which are necessary to form communities in an active faith which brings about a social and political revival.

ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM

1. Background

⁴ MESSAGE, Special Synod of Bishops for Africa, 6 May 1994, No.33: “We have not always done what we could in order to form the laity for life in society, to a Christian vision of politics and economics. A protracted absence of the lay faithful from this field has led them to believe that the faith has nothing to do with politics.”

For the last half-century, the GLR countries have experienced a situation of instability characterized by recurrent wars and prolonged hostilities whose effects have spread to neighboring countries.

Among the most devastating consequences are the loss of millions of lives, the destruction of infrastructures, the presence of millions of refugees and internally displaced, and the plundering on a huge scale of natural and mineral resources with the accompanying destruction of the eco-system. Violence has reached a very high level of barbarity as witnessed in the cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and large scale massacres. The resulting long term disruption of local and regional relationships makes peaceful co-habitation very difficult.

In this environment women are victimized in many ways, with rape in particular reaching unprecedented levels. Beyond the assault on the woman's personal dignity, rape is used as a weapon of war to humiliate and undermine her community. The victimization of women who have been violated includes isolation, alienation, prolonged psychological trauma and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children.

The conflicts in the GLR have also had especially devastating effects on children and youth as well. The phenomena of child soldiers shows that not only are children victims but sometimes they are also perpetrators of violence, causing profound psychological wounds in them. The increased number of unaccompanied minors, orphans and street children is one of the more heartbreaking consequences of the conflicts. The general climate of insecurity causes studies to be interrupted, thus reducing possibilities for later employment. As a result the youth become easy prey for recruitment by armed groups and criminals of all sorts.

Moreover, the long term exposure of people to violence and the disruptions which accompany it have exacerbated their already precarious living situation thus upsetting their capacity to fully realize their dignity. With the destruction of their homes as well as that of health and sanitation infrastructures, people are exposed to the elements and to all kinds of diseases, including HIV / Aids. These horrendous conditions have caused the deaths of more people than the arms themselves.

Today, thanks to the many initiatives already undertaken, the level of hostilities has been reduced significantly. But true peace and justice have not yet been restored. Intermittent outbreaks of violent conflict continue to threaten regional peace and to negatively affect relations between the countries of the region and between people of different social and ethnic origins. The rebel groups which are still active in certain countries create constant fear of a reversal in the progress already made towards peace and reconciliation.

In short, the conflicts in the region seriously threaten economic development, democracy, social harmony and political stability. As a result, peace in the region remains fragile.

2. Analysis of causes

The fragility of the peace in the countries of the GLR has a number of different causes, among which one can cite:

- ❖ Political exclusion: the absence of political systems to ensure the equal participation of all citizens in the democratic processes and decision making leads to state violence and the systematic exclusion of selected categories of people. This creates frustration which sooner or later pushes those who have been excluded to organize themselves into armed groups and to undertake violent action;
- ❖ Ethnic division: the exacerbation and manipulation of ethnic differences has led to a ferocity of violence previously unknown in the countries of the GLR;
- ❖ Manipulation and interference by foreign powers to advance their economic and geo-political interests: the abundance of natural and mineral resources in our countries has increased the desire of certain regional and international powers to gain access to them. The irresponsible exploitation of these resources, which is made possible by the absence of effective state control and by the complicity of certain local leaders, feeds and exacerbates the conflicts in the region. It also disrupts the ecological balance, thus aggravating the impact of climatic changes in the region;
- ❖ Military interventions by foreign troops or mercenaries: countries of the GLR have been invaded by the national armies of neighboring countries; other armies have intervened as allies; elsewhere foreign mercenaries have intervened either as assailants or allies. These interventions undermine durable peace and reconciliation;
- ❖ Large scale movements of refugees and other migrants in the GLR: in addition to causing suffering and disruption in the lives of millions of people fleeing for their safety, such movements also carry ethnic and political tensions across borders. Illegal movements like those of armed militias raise serious concerns for security, while the poorly managed and long term presence of large numbers of refugees creates tensions with host communities on issues like economic hardship, environmental degradation.

3. Major Challenges

The persistence of violent conflicts in the GLR calls the Church to take urgent and concerted action which takes into account the following major challenges:

1. Bad governance which reveals itself in the veritable absence of a just State. Electoral processes are often marred by irregularities. The policies in place in most of our countries promote social inequalities and deprive the people of basic infrastructures. Human rights are violated with impunity and corruption has become endemic almost everywhere
2. Ethnic and tribal conflict which results from the manipulation of identities and which leads to cyclical violence;
3. Insecurity which is caused by the illegal trafficking of arms, people and drugs; by the phenomena of child soldiers; and by uncontrolled and highly mobile militias. In addition to causing profound trauma and the spread of HIV / AIDS, this insecurity has provoked the flight of refugees and displaced people;
4. Climate change, as well as the destruction of the environment and the pillage of natural resources which engenders misery and interminable land disputes.

To better address these challenges there is a need for an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Church's peace and reconciliation initiatives undertaken to date. That is the task of the next chapter.

ANALYSIS OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CHURCH

Specific Strategic Objectives

■ Strategic Objective 1

The citizens of the GLR enjoy better governance translated into politics which promote greater equity, provision of basic social services, respect for human rights, free, fair and transparent elections, participative decision making, as well as effective engagement of civil society.

■ Activities related to strategic objective 1.

The achievement of this objective will be realized by the strengthening of collaboration of the Catholic Church with with political actors both within and outside the region. To this effect,

- The National Episcopal Conferences will create Parliamentary liaison offices in each country of the Great Lakes.

- The Catholic Episcopate in the region will undertake steps to assure the representation of regional Church organizations in the intergovernmental bodies (CEPGL, East Africa Community, etc.) with observer status. It will also put in place a Christian commission for good governance in the GLR.
- The Justice and Peace Commissions in collaboration with other Church commissions and services will organize seminars for politicians with the goal of increasing their awareness of the values and principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church

■ **Strategic Objective 2**

Citizens have identified common interests and shared identities and are able to resist efforts by political leaders to mobilize them for violent ends.

■ **Activities related to strategic objective 2**

Taking into account the political realities of each country, the Church will increase its participation in national and regional processes to promote peace and reconciliation.

- The Catholic education services, in collaboration with the Justice and Peace commissions and those responsible for formation of the lay, will develop and put into effect a program of education on moral and civil values focused on peace, mediation and reconciliation ;
- The Justice and Peace commissions will create or strengthen forum for communal dialogue and reconciliation in all the countries of the region ;
- The national and regional Episcopal Conferences will enhance collaboration in their lobbying and advocacy efforts with other groups engaged in promoting peace and reconciliation ;
- The Church will organize forum for Christian witness to reconciliation and fraternal love that overcomes barriers and divisions arising from ethnic, tribal, social, economic, religious affiliations, etc. at the diocesan, national and regional levels, with a particular emphasis on the lived experience within the Church itself.

■ **Strategic Objective 3**

The people of the GLR countries, men, women and children, live in security and are able to engage in the process of healing from past experiences of violence

■ Activities related to strategic objective 3

To achieve this objective, the Church, having first taken into consideration the security situation in each of the countries of the region, will assess its strengths and weaknesses and its available human and cultural resources. For this:

- The Episcopate of the GLR will request the Catholic Universities of the GLR to do a study on the current security situation and on the root causes of the insecurity in the region. This work will also propose solutions which will highlight the role of the Church, with particular emphasis on the role of women, in peacebuilding.
- The Catholic media will develop and implement public awareness programs on respect for and protection of the person, tolerance, and peaceful cohabitation with particular stress on their cross-border dimensions.
- The Episcopate of the GLR will undertake joint advocacy efforts in solidarity with the Churches of the countries concerned to promote security in zones harboring groups that cause insecurity.
- The national and regional Episcopal Conferences will increase their involvement in the different processes of transitional justice underway in the countries of the region, as well as in other social processes for post conflict reconstruction and socio-economic reintegration, notably by making available its facilities and human resources.
- The Episcopal commissions concerned with the youth, in collaboration with other Church commissions and services, will create / increase opportunities for cross-border exchanges and dialogue among the youth, and develop together other forum to accompany them in their lives.

■ Strategic Objective 4

The impact of climate change and mismanagement of natural resources on the residents of the GLR, especially the poor, is reduced

■ Activities related to strategic objective 4

The Episcopal Conferences will put in place a joint strategy for public awareness and lobbying and advocacy to promote transparent and responsible management of the environment and natural resources. To this effect,

- The competent Episcopal commissions (J&P, Caritas...) will henceforth integrate in their work issues concerning the transparent and responsible

management of natural resources and the environment ; and they will develop and implement a common program of in depth education on this matter for the population in general.

- The Episcopal Conferences will organize a team of experts drawn from among their Christians to support the Episcopate and the above mentioned commissions in the elaboration of strategies for the Church on this matter and in the preparation of well informed positions at the national and regional levels ;
- The appropriate services of the Church will identify and maintain innovative initiatives in the realm of environmental protection, (reforestation,...), technologies to reduce energy consumption, and move in the direction of renewable energy;

■ **Cross-cutting Objectives**

In order to achieve the four specific objectives listed above, it is necessary to take into account two cross-cutting objectives which will lay the foundation for effective action on the part of the Church.

■ **Cross-cutting Objective 1**

The Catholic Church in the GLR has strengthened its capacity to promote peace and reconciliation through research, education and sharing of information.

■ **Activities related to cross-cutting objective 1**

The Episcopate and the technical services of the Church will strengthen their institutional capacities, their capacities for advocacy on urgent issues in the region, and for work for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

- By way of the competent commissions, the Episcopal Conferences will organize formation programs to be offered at different levels ;
- The Catholic universities of the region will organize regular exchanges between researchers from different peace institutions and experts on pertinent themes like peacebuilding, healing of memories, reconciliation, advocacy and analysis of the root causes of conflicts;
- The Catholic universities will collaborate with other universities from outside the region in doing academic research on matters of peace and reconciliation ;

- The Episcopate of the region will develop and maintain a permanent capacity to analyze the situation in the GLR with the intent of undertaking proactive initiatives for the transformation and prevention of conflicts. To this effect it will organize a competent team, a system for documentation and sharing of information, and an online site for the sharing of resources and creation of virtual libraries ;
- The Justice and Peace commissions will acquire adequate human and institutional resources.

■ **Cross-cutting Objective 2**

The Episcopal Conferences will work in synergy through coordinated efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in the GLR

■ **Activities related to cross-cutting objective 2**

The Episcopal Conferences of the region will enhance their solidarity in initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation by:

- Creating a mechanism of coordination at the regional level to improve coordination between the concerned Episcopal Conferences ;
- Organizing exchange meetings between the different Church structures under their jurisdiction to facilitate the harmonization of the roles and tasks entrusted to them;
- Developing and putting in place a forum for lobbying and advocacy at the regional level ;
- Integrating the questions of Sudan and CAR in strategies developed at the regional level to promote peace and reconciliation ;
- Strengthening their solidarity with sister churches from other regions of Africa and from other continents.

REGIONAL COORDINATING MECHANISM

In line with the recommendation to set up a mechanism which is at the same time effective and simple, this chapter proposes its mandate, its composition as well as its mode of operation and renewal.

Mandate

The regional mechanism is a working forum whose mandate is:

- To enhance coordination and collaboration among the national and regional Episcopal Conferences in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan for regional peace and reconciliation initiatives;
- To organize workshops aimed at converting the objectives / activities of this strategic plan into operational plans and concrete projects;
- To discuss pressing peace and reconciliation issues confronting the GLR and to analyze their root causes in order to help the respective Episcopal Conferences to have a regional perspective;
- To make proposals to the respective Episcopal Conferences for specific regional peace and reconciliation initiatives within the framework of this strategic plan;
- To seek funds for the functioning of its permanent secretariat, for its own meetings and activities as well as for specific regional initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation.

Composition

- Delegates to the regional coordinating mechanism would be appointed by each of the concerned Episcopal Conferences from among existing actors involved in their respective peace and reconciliation initiatives (e.g., Justice and Peace Commissions, Caritas, peace institutes, and pastoral programs). Hence the composition of the mechanism would stand as follows:
 - The presidents of Justice and Peace Commissions of ACEAC and AMECEA;
 - One delegate from each regional Episcopal Conference;
 - One delegate from each national Episcopal Conference;
 - A permanent secretary;

Mode of Operation

- The regional mechanism is accountable to the concerned Episcopal Conferences;
- It is jointly chaired by the Presidents of the Justice and Peace Commissions of the regional Episcopal Conferences;
- For its daily functioning, a permanent Secretariat will be put in place and located in Bujumbura for an easy collaboration with the Executive Secretariat of the ICGLR;
- The two chairpersons of the mechanism appoint a permanent secretary after consultation with the concerned Episcopal Conferences;
- The regional mechanism will meet at least once per year;
- The sites for the meetings will rotate among the countries of the participating Episcopal Conferences;

- The permanent secretariat of the mechanism will organize the meetings in collaboration with the hosting Episcopal Conference;
- To broaden awareness and enhance the impact of the work of the regional mechanism the permanent secretariat will ensure that its activities be communicated to the public through appropriate means.
- The first meeting should be scheduled as soon as possible after the approval of the strategic plan and the putting in place of the regional mechanism. It is suggested that CECAB host the first meeting.
- Because of the sensitive, difficult and profoundly spiritual nature of the work of peace and reconciliation, it is envisioned that the first meeting will begin with a retreat for the members of the regional mechanism. The duration, site and retreat director will be determined by the co-chair persons.

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The following items are proposed for inclusion in the agenda for the first meeting:

- Amendment / ratification of the guidelines for mode of operation proposed above;
- Assignment of responsibilities;
- Choosing of name for regional mechanism;
- Formation of committees as deemed necessary, (e.g., peace education and research; cross-border exchanges; Justice & Peace, including lobbying and advocacy, media);
- Plan of action for coming year

Revision / Renewal of Composition / Mandate of Regional Coordinating Mechanism

An international conference on peace and reconciliation in the GLR similar to the 19-21 October 2010 conference would be planned by the regional mechanism at the end of the approved five year strategic plan. The existing strategic plan, as well as the mandate and composition of the regional mechanism would be evaluated in light of the experience gained and necessary changes would be made to both for the coming five years.

During its implementation period of five years, changes to the approved strategic plan (including the composition and mandate of the regional coordinating mechanism) would have to be submitted to the participating Episcopal Conferences for their approval prior to being put into effect.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION STRATEGY

The implementation of this strategic plan is incumbent on the Episcopal Conferences concerned and not on the only regional coordinating mechanism. Each of those conferences will translate it into action plans and concrete projects with its own resource mobilization strategy in order to then communicate them to the regional coordinating mechanism. The latter will inform all the others while forwarding its own action plan and strategy to them. The following proposal deals with that aspect.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the coordinating mechanism will have to look for funds for the functioning of its secretariat, the regular holding of its meetings and the implementation of its projects.

The mobilization of financial resources requires the following:

- The steering committee forwards the narrative and financial reports of the October 2010 Conference to the partners who co-funded it, thanks them for their contribution and reminds them of the commitments made on that occasion;
- The same committee sends a letter to the *CRS President*, submitting the budget of the six (6) months preceding the setting up of the regional coordinating mechanism and asks him to fulfill his/her promise of funding;
- The Committee identifies the potential partners likely to adhere to the initiative;
- The secretariat of the regional coordinating mechanism sends the approved strategic plan to the partners identified;
- The regional coordinating mechanism draws up its action plan and projects and determines the budget thereof ;
- It organizes a roundtable meeting of the partners/donors who have adhered to the strategic plan for an allocation of the budget shares to finance and of the other types of support to provide;
- Each Episcopal Conference undertakes to give a minimum financial contribution determined by mutual agreement.

CONCLUSION

For the first time in its history of more than a century, the Catholic Church in the GLR has before it a working document –the strategic plan proposed in the preceding pages –with the possibility to enable it to unite all of the resources at its disposal in the countries of the six Episcopal Conferences which have prepared it in order to make a concrete contribution to the construction of a society which makes its own the benefits of peace and reconciliation.

Technically speaking, the strategic plan presented above is not very different from those related to projects presented by numerous associations and organizations which were born and have multiplied because of the conflicts which regularly bloodied the countries of the GLR since their independence.

What characterizes and makes unique this strategic plan elaborated by the Catholic Church for peace in the GLR is that it envisions a peace which goes far beyond just the silencing of arms. At the same time, the peace to be born of the Church's action does not require the creation of any criminal court, whether international or specific to each of the countries concerned. It will rather broadly open to pardon and reconciliation. Moreover, the peace envisioned by this strategic plan of the Catholic Church in and for the countries of the GLR does not depend solely on its genius or organizational capacities. In effect, reconciliation and forgiveness are divine graces which each follower of Christ is called to welcome in faith in order to build, in collaboration with his / her brothers and sisters, Catholic Christians or not, a society which is completely peaceful and reconciled.