

Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (D.I.D.)

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

Consultative Workshop for Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue in Africa and Madagascar

At the initiative of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, we, the coordinators of the **Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue**, along with **Pastoral Agents** involved in this field across the African continent, gathered for a **Consultative Workshop** in Nairobi, Kenya, from **April 9 to 10, 2024**, on the theme: “*Christianity in Dialogue with Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR): Challenges and Opportunities.*”

We gathered and prayed together to support one another in our role of coordinating the Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue and to send a message to the people of Africa that religions can play a greater role in building a culture of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity. We believe that we can do this through education and engagement in interreligious dialogue.

In the course of our discussions, we explored ways and means to implement the words of Pope Francis: “At a time when various forms of fundamentalist intolerance are damaging relationships between individuals, groups and peoples, let us be committed to living and teaching the value of respect for others, a love capable of welcoming differences, and the priority of the dignity of every human being over his or her ideas, opinions, practices and even sins” (*Fratelli Tutti*-FT 191, cf. *Africae Munus*-AM 94).

We recognize the diversity of the African continent. Our religious, social, and cultural values emphasize relationships, hospitality, solidarity, conviviality, and the inclusion of all religious ideas and worldviews (cf. AM 92, *Ecclesia in Africa*-EA 42-43). This innate religious disposition of African people can serve as a common ground for building a culture of peace with all people. We further recognize that “Intolerance and lack of respect for indigenous popular cultures is a form of violence grounded in a cold and judgmental way of viewing them. No authentic, profound, and enduring change is possible unless it starts from the different cultures, particularly those of the poor. [...] The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society” (FT 220 & 271).

We are concerned over the increasing polarization, tensions, conflicts, and religious radicalization in certain African countries, particularly in West, Central, and East Africa that can be attributed to various socio-economic as well as local and geo-political factors. This situation worsens when some individuals and groups instrumentalize religions for parochial political gains. These elements weaken “the human family’s innate vocation to fraternity” (FT 26) and undermine conviviality among diverse social and religious groups. They also hinder the African Church’s efforts to promote constructive interreligious dialogue.

We are conscious of God’s mission entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ through the Church (cf. Mt 28:18-20) as the “seed and beginning” of the Kingdom (cf. *Lumen Gentium*-LG 5) as we put into practice the Church’s magisterial teachings, especially the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011), and the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). The Church regards with great respect the moral and religious values of the African traditions. For us, interreligious dialogue is an effective means to root out ignorance about other religious traditions, promote mutual respect and preserve the values that foster religious and cultural diversity and the dignity of every human being.

We are convinced that “...(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God’s plan with her methods of presence, respect, and love towards all persons” [...] Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level and not mutually exclusive, are authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary [...] All Christians are called to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church, namely proclamation and dialogue (cf. DP 39, 77 & 82; cf. EA 65-67). “For us, the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, ‘for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all’” (FT 277). The goal of evangelization in Africa is “to build up the Church as the Family of God” (EA 85), where we acknowledge and accept each other as sisters and brothers, and faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus while reaching out to the people of other beliefs and all people of goodwill (cf. Lk 2:14, *Laudato Si*-LS 3& 62) for the Kingdom of God.

We declare that the African continent can achieve an integral and sustainable development if it can encourage a culture of peace and fraternity founded on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, respect, and solidarity, a culture that respects human rights and dignity and rejects violence through dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation. In this regard, religious leaders have a great responsibility to foster harmony and educate their respective followers to live as brothers and sisters. To realize this, the creation of an Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue is necessary in each African Episcopal Conference to promote various expressions of interreligious dialogue.

We, therefore, commit ourselves to:

- Continue discussing the characteristics of the African cultural environment and identity that enable constructive dialogue guided by the light of the Gospel and the Church’s magisterial teachings.
- Emphasize the importance of interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic environment by promoting education that is open to synergies and to the new challenges of our time and that rejects the isolationist attitudes that generate intra-religious and interreligious tensions and conflicts.
- Involve political decision-makers, religious leaders, NGOs, women, and young people in innovative strategies that promote dialogue at local, national, and continental levels.
- Explore various opportunities that can enhance diverse forms of interreligious dialogue.

We express our gratitude to the Holy See’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue for organizing this important event. We also thank the Apostolic Nunciature in Kenya and the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism (CIRDE) of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) for their cooperation.

Donum Dei-Roussel House, Nairobi, KENYA
April 10, 2024