



Press Communiqué

New Beginning for Zimbabwean Churches and International Partners

Geneva, 29 September 2009

Leaders from some of Zimbabwe's largest church organisations, representatives of international ecumenical organisations and church-related development and advocacy networks have held a two day meeting in Geneva to reflect on the human rights and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe one year after the signing of the controversial Global Political Agreement (GPA) by the country's three major political parties. Hosted by the Zimbabwe Advocacy Office (ZAO), the meeting was called by the Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network (EZN), an informal network which brings together Northern-based Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical and Zimbabwean Diaspora groups committed to advocacy, prayer and solidarity action in support of churches and people in Zimbabwe.

In addition to a detailed analysis of the successes and failures in the implementation of the Global Political Agreement, the meeting focused on the healing and reconciliation process, impact of serious military-perpetrated human rights abuses associated with the mining of diamonds in Marange district in eastern Zimbabwe, feedback report on the 29th Ordinary Summit of Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) leaders held on September 7 and 8, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo and the debate over 'sanctions' /targeted measures and international re-engagement with the Government of Zimbabwe.

The meeting noted that despite stabilisation of the humanitarian situation, sustainable peace in Zimbabwe remains threatened by a continuing undercurrent of anarchy. Of the major pillars of the Global Political Agreement only two have been semi-fulfilled, namely, unconditional access to humanitarian aid and commitment to macro-economic stabilisation. There has been no satisfactory progress in relation to crucial areas such as restoration of the rule of law, commitment to democratic process – freedom of assembly, speech – as evidenced by resurgent targeted arrests, persecution and harassment of opposition politicians and civil society activists - and clear lack of commitment to constitutional reform and timely, free and fair elections.

The Convenor of the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe, Rev Dr Levee Kadenge, told the meeting that churches in Zimbabwe must not wait for politicians to lead the process of national healing and reconciliation as many of them were directly involved in inciting and perpetrating the violence that rocked Zimbabwe in 2007 and 2008. In fact many Zimbabwean families, particularly in rural communities have already begun local initiatives where perpetrators are asking for forgiveness from their victims and their families. There is an urgent need for Zimbabwean churches to seek reconciliation amongst themselves before leading the nation in this process.

Rev Dr Solmon Zwana, the newly appointed General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches also addressed the meeting emphasizing that the ZCC is going through a transformational process and is committed to work together with other church groups and regain its role as a force for non-partisan social change. Dr Zwana thanked international partners who remained supportive of the ZCC throughout its difficulties and underscored the continued need for international advocacy for Zimbabwe.

The General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation and Representatives of the General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation shared their organisations' long-standing commitment to supporting the churches and people of Zimbabwe in their quest for unity and common action. The WCC and AACC also thanked the organisers for helping to create a 'safe space' where church leaders from the recovering nation can come and speak openly to one another and their international partners. They pledged to join the roundtable meeting of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches in October 2009.

At the close of the meeting, members of the Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network resolved to consolidate their working relationships with churches in Zimbabwe and ensuring that the EZN becomes more inclusive and open space for other church organisations which were not represented in the Geneva meeting. The focus of the network's advocacy actions in the coming year will be focused on the conflict diamond campaign, implementation of the Global Political Agreement, enforcement of EU targeted measures and advocacy at the African Union, SADC and UN.

The next meeting of the Ecumenical Zimbabwe Network will be held in Geneva from January 21-22, 2010.

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