

**SPEECH BY THE
ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT,
THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE LUNGU,
BISHOP OF CHIPATA.**

**AT A MEDIA BREAKFAST
ON THE AMECEA PLENARY 2008**

**THEME: RECONCILIATION THROUGH JUSTICE AND
PEACE.**

16th April 2008

INTRODUCTION

- Very Rev. Fr Joseph Komakoma, Secretary General, Zambia Episcopal Conference.
- Rev. Fr Paul Samasumo, ZEC Spokesperson and Executive Director, Catholic Media Services
- Mr. Martin Kabwe, AMECEA Coordinator, Zambia Episcopal Conference
- Brothers and Sisters of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

At the last meeting held in Uganda, the Bishops of AMECEA unanimously chose Zambia to host the AMECEA Plenary Assembly of Catholic Bishops. On behalf of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, let me put on record how greatly privileged and honoured we are to host the prestigious 16th AMECEA Plenary. The 16th AMECEA Plenary Assembly will be held at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre here in Lusaka from the 27th June to the 7th July 2008.

The AMECEA Plenary Assembly is held every three years. This Plenary Assembly provides an opportunity for Catholic Bishops to introspect and at the same time engage with the wider society to see how as Catholics and Christians we can continue to make the Church more relevant to society. This is the third time that Zambia is hosting an AMECEA Plenary Assembly. In this regard, I would like to inform you that Zambia has successfully hosted two plenary assemblies in 1970 and 1992.

- ✓ AMECEA stands for “*Association of Member Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa*”
- ✓ It comprises the following member countries: Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Somalia and Djibouti are associate members.

- ✓ The total population of the AMECEA region is estimated at 254 million. 40 million of these are Catholics.
- ✓ The Secretariat of AMECEA is based in Nairobi, Kenya and is headed by a Secretary General.

More than 250 delegates made up of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and their supporting staff will converge on Mulungushi International Conference Centre for this plenary. The Programme of the AMECEA Plenary Assembly will include a day's retreat for the Bishops. This will be a day devoted to prayer and reflection. On the second day, there will be an opening Mass at the Cathedral of the Child Jesus, three days of a study session looking at topics of war and conflict, Church and politics, poverty, justice and reconciliation. These are important issues which should resonate with everyone, whether Catholic or not.

Thereafter, the delegates will proceed into business meetings whereby they will receive and consider reports from various AMECEA institutions and bodies. ZEC plans to issue daily media briefings as and when important issues, to be shared with the wider public emerge. The 16th AMECEA Assembly will end with a closing Mass at which a communiqué will be issued by the In-coming Chairman of AMECEA.

In readiness for this Assembly, the organising committee has produced a commemorative Chitenge material and a musical CD is being produced.

At the end of the AMECEA Plenary Assembly, some of the delegates will stay on to visit places of interest in Zambia. The AMECEA Plenary Assembly, therefore, provides a favourable opportunity for the country to extend its warm hospitality and to showcase what it has to offer in form of tourism.

The theme for the forthcoming 16th AMECEA Plenary is **Reconciliation through Justice and Peace**.

This theme cuts across all sectors of society regardless of creed, race, gender and so on. The AMECEA Plenary of Lusaka will honestly assess whether the Church has indeed been relevant and credible in its task of integral evangelisation. The churches of Zambia and Malawi, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti are all challenged in so many ways to be signs of hope and promoters of love.

The relevance of the African Church and its role in influencing society for better has for a long time been tested. Africa continues to witness unrest, conflict, wars, ethnic conflicts, electoral disagreements, tribalism, corruption and many others. In some parts of Africa, on the other hand, there is peace, but these are the same countries that are bearing the brunt of providing haven to refugees.

We all know that Zambia has been blessed with 44 years of independence without any war or ethnic conflict. Thanks be to God, Zambia has not experienced the tragic dynamics that cause people to flee their homes. In many ways, we are a shining example of be emulated.

Given the fact that peace remains precarious within the AMECEA region, mediating conflicts and reconciling people especially in the Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes need concerted efforts by all key players including the Church. In the past Catholic Bishops from AMECEA have led, for example, peace missions to countries of the Great Lakes.

Through the forthcoming AMECEA Plenary Assembly, it is the wish of the Bishops that all people in the member countries re-dedicate themselves anew to the processes involved in reducing conflict, and move away from fear and anger towards peace and development. We should all embrace peace as a way of life. It is in this vein that we commend President Levy Mwanawasa's initiative in trying to find a solution, through SADCC, to the aftermath of the recent elections in Zimbabwe.

You no doubt have heard the saying that, *Peace is not the absence of war*. Similarly, Reconciliation is not simply made of shaking hands and making some correct and fine speeches. Reconciliation entails in part, conflict management that brings about Justice and peace. In the Catholic tradition, Reconciliation has emerged in the social teaching of the Church since the Second Vatican Council. Reconciliation enhances mutual understanding. The willingness of people to reconcile forestalls explosive situations. With the AMECEA Plenary Assembly, it is hoped that Reconciliation will not end with the Bishops but will be embraced within the various levels of the Church; permeate down and be manifest throughout societies within AMECEA. Moreover, the late Pope John Paul II further initiated dialogue between the Catholic Church and other Churches and religions, even calling for a dialogue between civilizations. This positive move by the late Pope had the effect of burying differences that various groups may still have harboured.

Another important issue to face in our quest for Reconciliation through Justice and Peace is our response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. As a Church in Zambia and throughout Africa we must recognise that the challenge of HIV and AIDS is not exclusively a medical issue i.e. providing more ARVs or a behavioral change approach. It is also a developmental and social justice issue. In our view, Reconciliation through Justice and Peace includes issues of education, health services, status of women, non-discrimination, political decision-making structures, housing, environment, water and sanitation, employment,

recreation facilities, etc. The Church must speak out and promote this more holistic approach to meeting the HIV and AIDS crisis.

From a pastoral point of view, Zambia has very strong grassroots programmes within the Catholic Church structure that work for Justice and Peace. Our Caritas Zambia is not only strong at a national level but also has very committed foot soldiers in almost all corners of Zambia where the Catholic Church is to be found. Similarly The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) has over the years made us proud with very revealing analyses of both economic and social indicators of this nation. Our communication ministry in Zambia has grown. Through our Catholic radio stations and the Catholic Media Services of ZEC, the Catholic Church is continually engaging the Zambian people on what the late Pope John Paul II said in his message for the 2002 World Day of Peace when he said, “There can be “no peace without justice”.

It is our earnest prayer as, Catholic Bishops that the 16th AMECEA Plenary will strengthen the Church’s prophetic voice in the region by speaking out for reconciliation, justice and peace. It is also our great wish that the majority of Catholic faithful in the region will espouse peace and justice as integral to the evangelisation mission of the Church. We must never again ask where the Catholics and the Christians are when corruption is occurring; when genocide is happening; when post election violence is taking place. We must start to ask the hard questions if our Christian faith is to become relevant to ourselves and to the world.

In conclusion, I would like to place on record, on behalf of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, profound gratitude to our lay people who have always come forward in the time of need to assist the clergy by conducting services where there are no priests, praying and sustaining the Church in Zambia through volunteering of their time and support in

financial or material form. The Catholic lay faithful are the backbone of the Church. It is for this reason that we call upon the Catholic faithful and all Zambians of good will, once more, on this occasion to join hands with the Zambia Episcopal Conference in preparing for this important Assembly. We appeal to you to give of yourselves and assist us in looking after the guests who will be coming to Zambia. ZEC has secured some money for hosting the Assembly through donations from countries in the AMECEA region, Faith Based Organisations, partners and from within the country. As can be expected in organising such a mammoth event, there is always need for more money. We therefore appeal to people of good will in Zambia to come forward and help the Church.

I thank you.