



Communiqué of the VII. German-African Bishops' Meeting (Munich / Berlin, Germany, March 28 – April 2, 2011): African Migration to Europe

1. For almost 30 years, we – bishops from Africa and Germany – have been meeting regularly for an exchange of views and prayers to fill the global Catholic community with life and in order to learn from encounters with each other. In the past days, we have come together in Munich and Berlin on the occasion of the VII. German-African Bishops' Meeting: bishops from Germany as appointed by the German Bishops' Conference and bishops from all parts of Africa sent by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). Daily celebrations of the Holy Eucharist as well as the Prayers of the Hours were shared with many of the faithful and formed the heart of our meeting. A service on the „Holy Mountain“ of Bavaria in Andechs and Holy Mass with African Catholics at St. Matthew's Church in Berlin illustrated the cultural diversity of the Universal Catholic Church – a diversity which meanwhile has also become characteristic of the church in Germany.
2. The topic of our meeting of bishops was contemporary migration, especially from Africa to Europe. Our discussions focused on the church's responsibility for refugees and migrants. We engaged in a dialogue with scholars and representatives of church relief organisations from both continents to gain a deeper and shared understanding of the complexity of the topic. Furthermore, we sought an exchange of views with important representatives of the German government. We are particularly grateful to the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Christian Wulff, for having received our delegation and for an extensive and constructive discussion. On several occasions, political leaders and state officials voiced their interest in a continued exchange with the Church in Africa. It is an invitation we will gladly take up.
3. In our considerations we are guided by the firm conviction, which is rooted in our faith, that man was made in the image of God. He is endowed with inalienable dignity which must be respected in all fields and under all circumstances: in the way we treat each other, in the economic and social structures of nations and no less in international relations. We all belong to one human family. We all are entitled to inviolable rights. Wherever and

whenever the fundamental rights of a human being are jeopardised or disregarded, the Church must raise her voice.

4. The reasons for the recent increase in migration of Africans to Europe are complex. After-effects of the colonial period play a role here, just like the dramatic differences in living conditions. The African participants in particular emphasised the failure of local élites to develop their countries.
5. Contemporary migration entails tremendous suffering for many of those concerned, and it is often associated with considerable societal and economic problems both in the sending and the receiving countries. Nevertheless, we must not ignore the fact that migration has been a phenomenon throughout human history. Migration is a driver of social, cultural and religious progress. All too often, there is a tendency to overlook the important positive contributions made by immigrants in the societies that receive them, but also in their countries of origin (e.g. through remittances). As bishops we know that migrants also enrich the life of the Church.
6. Refugees are among the weakest and most vulnerable members of the human family. All governments are legally and morally obliged to protect them. Therefore we are deeply concerned by human rights issues associated with the practice of protecting Europe's external borders (including by FRONTEX). We demand that asylum applications be admitted and reviewed in an appropriate manner. Also, the deportation of those who, from a legal point of view, are not entitled to reside in Europe must follow humanitarian standards.
7. In addition, individuals who dare to search a better future for themselves and their families in Europe must not automatically be subject to suspicion and defamation. Europeans in particular should remember how many of their ancestors have emigrated to all parts of the world in centuries past and after World War II. However, it is also true that labour migration must be managed in a prudent and equitable fashion in order to avoid negative consequences in the sending as well as in the receiving countries. Accordingly, European governments should increasingly consider models of temporary or circular migration which can serve the interests of the involved countries and of the individuals concerned.
8. The long-term objective must be to avoid involuntary migration resulting from plight and lack of perspective. To this end, globalisation must be based on solidarity. It must not first and foremost be based on the profit interests of individuals or corporations but must instead promote opportunities for the development of individuals and nations. Europe and Africa need a partnership of equal rights – an ambition which has not yet been achieved in the field of political cooperation.
9. The Church will have to pay even more attention to the situation of migrants in its pastoral work. As members of local churches, Catholic immigrants have the same rights as all other members in the receiving country. They are entitled to express their religious and cultural identity in the life of the Church. Pastoral care workers must be prepared for this di-

versity during their training and continued education. Church curricula and textbooks should be adapted accordingly.

10. In its support for migrants, the Church does not distinguish between regular and irregular residence, even though she is aware of the problematic nature of irregular immigration. Everyone is entitled to pastoral care. Therefore, the Church expects government authorities to ensure that possibilities of extending pastoral care to irregular migrants will remain unrestricted.
11. To be able to fill the Universal Church with life and do justice to the legitimate claims of migrants, the Church is dependent on the involvement of foreign priests, members of congregations and lay people. We therefore ask that governments allow for their presence in host countries and take a favourable view of their activities in the respective church institutions.
12. We are aware of the worries and fears of those to whom it is as yet unfamiliar to be living together with strangers and who need to be given some time to practice. Any problems must be discussed openly without any populist exploitation of prejudice. A wise and sensitive approach is needed here. We, the bishops from Africa and Germany, have reaffirmed our determination to stand up against racism and xenophobia everywhere in the world. It is the only way to secure a good future for all of us.

Berlin, April 1st 2011

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President of the Commission for
International Church Affairs

Polykarp Cardinal Pengo, Daressalam
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other episcopal participants from Africa

Théodore Adrien Cardinal SARR (Sénégal), Vice-President of SECAM

Archbishop Gabriel MBILINGI (Angola)

Erzischof C. Gabriel PALMER-BUCKLE (Ghana)

Archbishop Simon NTAMWANA (Burundi)

Archbishop Maroun LAHHAM (Tunisien)

Bishop René-Marie EHZU (Bénin)

Bishop Marc Benjamin RAMASORON, c.m. (Madagascar)

Bishop Sithembele SIPUKA (South Africa)

other episcopal participants from Germany

Reinhard Cardinal MARX (München-Freising), Vice-President of the Commission for International Church Affairs

Bishop Dr. Heinrich MUSSINGHOFF (Aachen)

Bishop Norbert TRELLE (Hildesheim), President of the Commission for Migrants

Auxiliary Bishop Dieter GEERLINGS (Münster)

Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Bernhard HAßLBERGER (München-Freising)

Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Hans-Jochen JASCHKE (Hamburg)

Auxiliary Bishop Matthias KÖNIG (Paderborn)

Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Maria RENZ (Rottenburg-Stuttgart)

Other Participants

Archbishop Paul CREMONA (Malta)

Rev. Fr. Duarte DA CUNHA (St. Gallen), CCEE

Rev. Fr. Piotr MAZURKIEWICZ (Brüssel), ComECE

Guests

Archbishop Dr. Jean-Claude Périsset (Berlin), Nuntius

Bishop Dr. Gerhard Ludwig MÜLLER (Regensburg)

Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Matthias HEINRICH (Berlin)