



Africa and Europe shall breathe as one with both lungs AFRICA AND EUROPE SHALL WORK AS ONE FOR THE YOUTH OF OUR CONTINENTS

Joint Statement of COMECE and SECAM ahead of the AU – EU summit in November 2017 in Abidjan

The fifth summit of the African Union and the European Union is due to take place in Abidjan on 28 – 29 November 2017. The Commission of Bishops' Conferences in the EU (COMECE) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the mission of which is to promote a continental vision within the Church and to accompany political institutions and organisations on their respective continents, welcome this event and the decision to focus on 'Youth' as its central theme. Youth is also the theme of the next general assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church scheduled to take place in October 2018 in Rome. At this particular moment in the history of the long-standing relations between Africa and Europe, the summit presents the political leaders of both continents with the unique opportunity to initiate an authentic mutual partnership. For this reason the bishops of COMECE and SECAM want to make their voices be heard together and jointly issue the following statement:

Africa and Europe have common roots

Africa and Europe share common roots, which originate in the earliest days of human history. Long-standing relations bind us. A genuine and long-term partnership, which also induces the correction of economic and social imbalances, summons us into the future. We therefore call for a strong partnership agreement as an appropriate tool for a joint development on the basis of a shared interest. It

should include a major and intercontinental « human dignity initiative » to support those who are concerned and engaged for the respect of the dignity of the poorest, and especially of migrants in need.

Such an agreement could also become an instrument for promoting the global common good. By working together more closely, African and European countries could increase their influence and better achieve their objectives in global organizations like the United Nations.

We acknowledge the past and present conflicts and injustices. Inter and intra-continental healing of memories and reconciliation through joint research programs and regular conferences are necessary. They should bring to light different forms of disillusionment, especially among the youth, and identify ways of addressing them in a spirit of mutual respect for persons and for different cultures. We further acknowledge the challenges faced by the youth today, in the context of the modern ubiquitous media. Coherent answers must be provided for the youth as they face new, wayward ideologies regarding culture, the sanctity of human life, marriage and the family, and loss of spirituality in a world where a materialistic culture is dominant.

Africa and Europe are geographically connected

With Africa and Europe geography also matters. Urbanisation changes the face of both of our continents. The geographical closeness of Africa and Europe, however, may provide economic opportunities for both. It can favour the creation of jobs, especially for young people, who many times deserve our admiration in their use of new technologies for astonishing development projects. Nevertheless, in order to make use of opportunities, education and training for all - for boys and for girls - need to be strengthened and redesigned in view of newly needed communication and technology skills.

Public policy should also allow private investment to flourish and major infrastructure projects need intercontinental or at least continental planning and coordination. We call for justice and equity in trade in goods and services, but especially with regard to natural resources, which are taken each year from Africa. New local industries and sustainable development of agriculture may furthermore help to reduce the stress which forces young people to leave their homeland and diminish the phenomenon generally known as 'brain drain'. With regard to migration we observe very different narratives on both continents. It is considered a solution or a burden. Indeed, looked at from different perspectives, it is either

one or the other or both at the same time. Notwithstanding, migration has always been a constant feature of human coexistence in society. It will not go away. In particular, young people will continue to choose to migrate out of professional reasons.

It is the responsibility of the political leadership to make sure that migrants are treated with dignity and protected against criminal exploitation. We therefore hope for a strong statement by the participants of the AU - EU summit on migration and especially the fight against human trafficking. Furthermore, we would expect the EU to reinforce its commitment for sustainable development programmes on the occasion of the summit.

Africa and Europe are destined for a common future

Africa and Europe are destined for a common future but we also note that many of our youth are lacking trust in current political and private institutions in both Africa and Europe. To gain or restore trust, participation and a sense of belonging are key. Effective participation demands transparency and accountability from all parties. At the Abidjan summit, opportunity should be given to young Africans and Europeans to share their hopes and expectations about an adequate environment for sustainable development. Conflicts, corruption and climate change are challenges for people living north and south of the Mediterranean Sea. We therefore affirm that peace, justice and care of creation are the guiding principles for long-term policies and strategies designed to prepare our common future.

Africa and Europe are united in prayer

The Christian faith has developed over the centuries through theologians, martyrs, saints and simple believers from Africa and from Europe. Thus, Christianity has become an essential part of Europe's and Africa's religious heritage. Europe, as a matter of fact, was built on Christian traditions.

The Catholic Church is deeply rooted in both continents and as bishops we wish to address the spiritual expectations of people, and especially the youth. It may be more than a pure coincidence that the theme of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2018 in Rome has also chosen 'Youth' as the central theme. It is also, for this reason that we are looking with high expectations to the outcome of the AU-EU summit. It may help us to address the pressing question of the evangelisation of the youth in both continents.

Finally, we acknowledge our responsibility for inter-religious dialogue and we recall that freedom of religion is a fundamental right and a basic principle of public

policy, especially in view of current threats of religious and political extremism. Our political leaders will soon gather for the fifth summit of the African Union and European Union in the capital of Ivory Coast. Legend has it that the name, “Abidjan” is the result of a misunderstanding between an African and a European. May the summit be an occasion for a clearer understanding of each other’s concerns, lead to concrete and helpful decisions, and thus, become an important step towards an authentic partnership between our continents.

We pray for this and we also make the commitment to solve perceived injustices in the name of our collective and common liberating faith. In the preparation of future EU-AU summits, we propose to set up a dialogue between political and religious leaders. As COMECE and SECAM, we would be happy to participate in such an open and transparent dialogue.

Finally, we hope and pray that - with the wisdom of our elders, the energy of our youth and the help of God - Europe and Africa may learn to work as one for the youth of our continents.

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