



“For we know that things can change.”

Laudato Si’, §13

**Joint Statement of COMECE and SECAM
ahead of the AU – EU Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on 21 May 2025**

As shepherds of the Catholic Church in Africa and in Europe, we, the bishops of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), speak today with a voice formed by the lived realities of our people – farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, women and youth – whose lives are shaped by the land, and whose hope depends on justice, peace, and dignity. We welcome the convening of the joint African Union–European Union Foreign Ministers’ Meeting as an opportunity to examine not only shared ambitions but the very nature of our partnership. As SECAM and COMECE have already stated five years ago, *“we are firmly convinced that Africa and Europe could become the engines for a reinvigoration of multilateral cooperation by reinforcing their longstanding ties marked by our common roots and geographical proximity [...] towards an equitable and responsible partnership that puts the people at its centre”*.

We are, however, deeply concerned about certain developments in this partnership over recent years. We have witnessed a profound shift in European priorities – away from solidarity with the most fragile regions and communities, and from development cooperation aimed at eradicating poverty and hunger, towards a more narrowly defined set of geopolitical and economic interests. Notwithstanding the commendable intention behind some projects promoting human development at the grassroots, certain initiatives supported under the EU’s Global Gateway – while presented as mutually beneficial – too often seem to replicate extractive patterns of the past: privileging European corporate and strategic aims over the real needs and aspirations of African people.

Land, water, seeds, and minerals – the very foundations of life – seem to be once again treated as commodities for foreign profit rather than as common goods to be stewarded with care. Africa is being asked to sacrifice its ecosystems and communities to help Europe meet its decarbonisation goals – whether through massive land deals for so-called “green” energy projects, the expansion of carbon offset plantations, or the outsourcing of industrial agriculture’s toxic inputs and waste. This is not partnership. This is not justice.

“The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (*Laudato Si'* , §2)

The Catholic Church, inspired by late Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, shares the understanding that we must hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. These cries are loud and clear across Africa. Climate change is wreaking havoc on those who depend on the land, even as our continent has contributed least to the crisis. Soil degradation, poisoned water, and the loss of biodiversity are destroying the foundation of rural life. Hunger in Africa is growing, not because we lack food, but because we have allowed systems to dominate that put profit above people and that treat agriculture as an industrial process, not a way of life.

We urge the ministers gathered in Brussels to place the dignity of African peoples at the heart of the AU-EU partnership. This means supporting a transformation of agriculture that breaks free from dependency on imported fertilisers, chemical inputs, and genetically modified seeds. It means protecting and promoting farmer-managed seed systems, which are the repositories of Africa's agricultural biodiversity and the key to food sovereignty. These systems are not backward or inefficient – they are resilient, rooted in tradition, and adapted to local ecologies. Criminalising farmers for saving seeds or imposing rigid intellectual property regimes aligned with UPOV or corporate agendas violates both their rights and the planet's needs.

We call for an immediate ban on the export and use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides in Africa. It is a grave injustice that chemicals banned in Europe for their risks to health and ecosystems are still manufactured there and marketed to African farmers. This double standard must end. Instead, we must invest in agroecology – a science, a practice, and a social movement that nourishes the land, respects cultural traditions, and empowers women and youth. Agroecology offers a truly African path to climate adaptation and rural regeneration. It is rooted in the wisdom of our communities and validated by science. It is our future.

Moreover, we remind our political leaders that land is sacred. For most Africans, land is not merely a factor of production or a tradable asset. It is a gift from God, entrusted to us by our ancestors and held in common for future generations. Large-scale land acquisitions by foreign investors or development finance institutions, carried out without free, prior, and informed consent, are an affront to this sacred trust. They displace communities, erode customary rights, and contribute to conflict and forced migration. Ministers must act decisively to end land grabbing and ensure legal protection for communal and customary tenure systems.

We are particularly disturbed by growing use of African territory as a site for Europe's resource needs and climate ambitions. Decarbonisation must not come at the cost of African ecosystems or the rights of African communities. It is ethically untenable to demand that Africa become the dumping ground for Europe's “green transition” –

whether through extractive mining for critical minerals or vast land projects that reduce our continent to a carbon sink.

Let us be clear: Africa does not need charity, nor does it need to be a battleground for external interests. What it needs is justice. What it needs is a partnership grounded in mutual respect, environmental stewardship, and the centrality of human dignity. We believe such a partnership is possible – but only if the structures and priorities of AU-EU cooperation are fundamentally reoriented towards these objectives.

We therefore urge ministers to listen more closely to African civil society, Indigenous peoples, and faith communities – not as token participants, but as equal co-creators of policy. Real dialogue means making space for the voices of those who live on and with the land.

We conclude by echoing the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, which calls for an “integral ecology” – one that recognises the profound interconnection between people, planet, and purpose.

We pray that this meeting may mark a turning point – not only in diplomatic relations but in the moral and spiritual compass guiding our shared future.

Africa needs a transformation rooted in the Gospel values of care for creation, solidarity with the poor, and the pursuit of peace. As *Laudato Si'* teaches us, “everything is interconnected” (§117) – and so our response must be holistic and courageous.

We invite the AU and EU Foreign Ministers to rise to this moment. Let this be the partnership that listens to the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor. Let this be the moment when Africa’s future is shaped not by external interests, but by the aspirations of its people – especially those who till the land, feed the nation, and protect the environment.

For the people. For the planet. For our common home.

*Accra – Brussels
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