

A Renewed Call to  
**SOLIDARITY  
WITH AFRICA**



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# A RENEWED CALL TO SOLIDARITY WITH AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

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In November 2001 the General Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued [\*A Call to Solidarity with Africa\*](#). Based on the experience gained from visits to Africa and from the work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the bishops raised up the cries of the people of Africa and called for greater solidarity. That document declared that the Church in Africa is a fundamental source of hope and opportunity for the continent. It called upon all Catholics to offer our spiritual support and to use our talents and resources to join Africa to overcome its challenges and realize its goals. The USCCB increased visits to and welcomed delegations from Africa and increased outreach to the U.S. Government and to Catholics in the United States. The USCCB also disseminated the document to dioceses and parishes across the United States and organized follow up speaking tours to U.S. universities to tell the story of the struggles and hopes of the Church in Africa.

Now, 20 years later, the Committee on International Justice and Peace (CIJP) wishes to issue this *Renewed Call to Solidarity with Africa* to commemorate and rekindle the grace and vision of the 2001 document and to recommit the Church in the United States to solidarity with Africa.

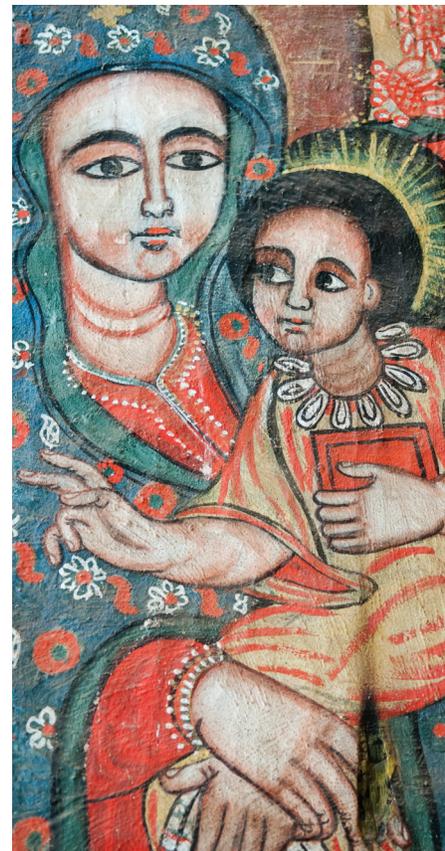
## II. SOLIDARITY WITH AFRICA IN ACTION

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The end of the Cold War saw the expansion of liberal democracy and economic systems across the world and a notable reduction in poverty. From 1989 to 2000, low-income countries mainly China and India more than doubled their economic wealth and improved life expectancy by four years. Most African countries however, experienced reductions in their wealth and health and fell behind the rest of the world.

In 1994 the Holy See held a Synod on Africa resulting in the Apostolic Exhortation [\*Ecclesia in Africa\*](#). Pope Saint John Paul II proclaimed that this was a day of salvation for the continent and called for the Church in Africa to go out with hope and pursue its evangelizing mission. He called for the creation of Justice and Peace Commissions to protect human dignity, to promote dialogue, good governance, and the rule of law, and to be the voice of the voiceless.

Since 2001 the CIJP has engaged with the Church in numerous African countries through many major





events, conflicts, and instances of severe repression. CIJP accompanied and supported an array of remarkable, dedicated clergy, religious, and lay men and women: Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Evangelical, and Muslim. When these African representatives came to the United States and when CIJP met them in Africa, they gave stirring testimony and compelling witness to their courageous work. They told moving stories that helped convince U.S. political decision makers to increase United States contributions to peace, good governance, justice, support for the rule of law, credible elections, integral human development, humanitarian support, and HIV/AIDS programs. Below are some major CIJP initiatives. The CIJP:

- In 2004-10 with CRS and the Catholic Church in Burundi, urged the U.S. Government and the United Nations to support peace and reconciliation programs.
- Was an active member of the Save Darfur Coalition from 2003-06.
- Worked with CRS, from 2006-11 to accompany the Church and people of South Sudan in their quest for independence won in July 2011.
- With CRS promoted the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) saving millions of lives in Africa and today is urging the U.S. to do the same to combat Covid-19.

- With CRS and the USCCB Migration and Refugee Services has promoted migration reform and increased funding to assist African migrants and internally displaced people who flee conflict and natural disasters.
- Along with non-governmental organizations, and the Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) helped reform U.S. mineral mining laws with the passage of the Congo Conflict Minerals Act and the Natural Resource Transparency Act in 2010 and defended these bills through 2012.
- From 2016-19 supported the Church in the DRC to ensure credible national elections resulting in its first peaceful handover of power to new political leadership.
- Hosted a Catholic-Protestant delegation from the DRC in 2021 to support their electoral education and monitoring programs to ensure credible elections in 2023.
- With CRS assisted the Church in the Central African Republic from 2013-15 to engage U.S. government leaders to help stop the ongoing civil war.
- Is working with the Church in Nigeria to address increasing conflict and build an election monitoring and education program to promote free and fair national elections in 2023.
- Visited or worked with the Church in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Zimbabwe, to show solidarity in their time of difficulty and to urge the U.S. to intensify their diplomatic and financial assistance to build good government and peace.
- Has consistently supported conflict prevention and resolution through the Church and urged the United States to fund such efforts.

In addition to the CIJP initiatives above, the USCCB created the Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa administered by the USCCB Subcommittee on the Church in Africa. The

Solidarity Fund supports church pastoral work as a complement to Catholic Relief Services' humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. Since its inception in 2007, the Fund has provided over \$31.7 million in grants to most of the episcopal conferences in Africa, benefiting many dioceses and strengthened the bonds of solidarity between the U.S. and African Churches.

### III. TESTIMONIALS FROM CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADERS

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African church leaders affirm the importance of CIJP solidarity efforts to shed light on the suffering their people experience. These mutually edifying efforts enhance the status of the Church in these countries and lend greater credibility to their

future work. The Secretary General of the South Sudan Conference of Churches, Catholic priest Fr. James Oyet attested, "We know that we are not alone. Your visits keep us alive."

While the Church across Africa confidently plays her faithful role, all too often she encounters a government that fails to act justly. Amidst alarming violence in Nigeria, for example, the local Church lamented, "*The very survival of the nation is at stake. The nation is falling apart. Serious insecurity, ... for long unaddressed, has left the sad and dangerous impression that those who have assumed the duty and authority to secure the nation are either unable – or worse still, unwilling – to take up the responsibilities of their office.*"<sup>2</sup> Catholic and other church leaders' delegations to the United States describe the encouragement they feel when, with the help of CIJP, they can present their case to high-level American decision makers.

A young boy with a joyful expression peeks out from a doorway. He is wearing a light-colored, patterned shirt. The doorway is framed by a wooden door and a wall with a textured, earthy finish. The lighting is warm, highlighting his face.

**“ We know  
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## IV. HOPES AND CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA

### *Sources of Hope and Perseverance*

Today, 20 years after issuing the *Call to Solidarity with Africa*, Africa remains a continent of hope and resilience. Notwithstanding some improvements in wealth and health since 2000, Africa is still falling behind the rest of the world. In response, Pope Benedict XVI proposed important new directions for the Church in Africa in *Africae Munus*. In this Apostolic Letter, following the 2009 Second Special Assembly for the Bishops of Africa, the pope called upon the Church to be a sign of reconciliation: “Evangelization today takes the name of reconciliation, an indispensable condition for instilling in Africa justice among men and women and building a fair and lasting peace that respects each individual and all peoples.”<sup>3</sup> The bishops of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar said that the 2019 Golden Jubilee celebration, “... is a commitment to the service of reconciliation, justice and peace which promotes communion and pastoral solidarity...to stand together against ideological colonization, land grabbing, political and democratic destabilization, human trafficking, terrorism, and arms trafficking...”<sup>4</sup>

The Church in Africa’s lived proclamation of the Gospel, including her schools, health structures, social care facilities, relief and development activities, and Justice and Peace Commissions, is a rich and continent-wide source of human development, faith formation and peacebuilding.

- Africa accounted for almost 60% of the worldwide increase in Catholics in 2018.<sup>5</sup>
- Africa added 1,649 priests in 2019.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2019, Africa was the only continent to increase the number of major seminarians, adding 509.<sup>7</sup>
- The Church in Africa has more healthcare centers, hospitals, primary and secondary schools than any region in the world.<sup>8</sup>
- Pope Francis, the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, Caritas Internationalis, European and American Catholic Church charities, and national Catholic Bishops’ Conferences vigorously promote the development of Africa.
- Religion and religious institutions are held in high esteem in Africa. 95% of Africans claim a religious identity (56% Christian, (22.8% Catholic<sup>9</sup>) and 34% Muslim).<sup>10</sup> 68% of African Christians and 74% of Muslims trust their religious leaders.<sup>11</sup>

Africa is a very youthful continent with a median age of 20 years (United States is 38 and Europe is



33). By the year 2030 Africa's young people will make up 60% of the world's working age population.<sup>12</sup> From 2000-19 life expectancy increased 9 years to 60 years and is steadily catching up with the rest of the world.<sup>13</sup>

A continent rich in human and natural resources, Africa's GDP per capita grew by 30% between 2000-10. This growth combined with Africa's youthful vibrancy can drive greater economic and social prosperity.

Economic and social progress must also be built on greater political stability. Many countries of Africa have experienced a history of fragile governance ranging from successful democracies to autocracies. The recent faltering of democratic regimes has created conflict and fragility, yet the desire for freedom and good governance lies deep in the hearts of all Africans. Findings show that democracy in Africa is the dominant form of government to which most Africans aspire and increasingly demand of their political leaders.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Serious Challenges that Threaten Progress***

*Education:* Children in Africa continue to lag behind most of the world. In 2018 the average number of years of formal education was 5.6 years (6.1 for boys and 5.2 for girls). Less than half of African students meet minimum competency levels.

*Health:* In 2018 90% of deaths from malaria worldwide occurred in Africa; for HIV/AIDS it was 80%; nearly 50% of deaths from communicable diseases occurred in Africa while Africa accounts for only 16% of world population. As such, Africans are 4.5 times more likely to die from infections than anywhere in the world. With ongoing fragility of health systems, Africa remains particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 and other ongoing or potential communicable diseases and pandemics.



*Agriculture:* In sub-Saharan Africa the current gap in agricultural yields is 76% below their potential, the largest gap in the world.<sup>15</sup> Adverse effects of climate change only worsen the problem. Compounded by population growth, food insecurity remains a significant threat. Agricultural output needs to be more than doubled by 2050 to meet increasing demand whereas the rest of the world only needs to increase output about one-third above current levels.<sup>16</sup>

*Governance:* The 2020 Freedom House report states that only four African countries are free democracies; 21 are partly free (flawed electoral democracies) and 18 are authoritarian. Despite earlier progress, Transparency International places Africa as the least performing region in the world showing little improvement over the past few years. Poor governance remains a root cause of much of Africa's problems and risks holding back future progress on the continent.

*Conflict and Fragile States:* The Fund for Peace Fragile State Index shows that 20 out of the 30 most unstable countries around the world are in Africa. While the number of conflicts in Africa has increased, the intensity of the violence and the resulting number of deaths has fortunately decreased. Many of Africa's conflicts are based on

long-standing unaddressed grievances that flare up, sparked by local, isolated skirmishes, or by external actors who intensify divisions. The outcome of these conflicts is increased suffering and deepening conditions of poverty.

*Rising Terrorism:* In 2010 only four African countries experienced sustained terrorist attacks. Today terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab and others have spread their ideologies and violence to nine Sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>17</sup> Where national governments are unable to establish the rule of law and basic social services, they fill the power vacuum and enflame local rivalries and divisions to gain recruits and impose their influence and power. These terrorist groups also intentionally attack religious targets turning inter-religious divisions into open inter-religious violence.

*Climate Change:* Africa contributes 4% of carbon emissions yet suffers disproportionately from the growing impacts of climate change. The Sahel region has been getting drier for decades and the Sahara Desert expands relentlessly further south each year. Cyclones that hit Mozambique increase in number and impact; rising sea levels threaten large cities like Lagos and devastating floods have caused massive displacement in South Sudan. Climate change is affecting agricultural production, access to water and sanitation – demanding our response.

*External Forces:* The Chinese government and its state-owned banks have lent record amounts to governments in low- and middle-income countries since the early 2000s, making China the world's largest official creditor. It is estimated that 62% of African bilateral debt is owed to Chinese creditors.<sup>18</sup> Although Africa has benefited from Chinese investments, China's strategy puts African infrastructural assets at risk of take over and lends more money than some experts think a country

can afford to repay creating a harmful debt trap.<sup>19</sup> Russia has sent private company mercenaries into the conflicts in Mali and the Central African Republic exploiting natural resources and raising concerns about human rights and transparency. The U.S. and European countries at times also impose conditions on their international assistance that do not promote human life and dignity.

## V. SOLIDARITY WITH AFRICA NOW MORE THAN EVER

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Considering the challenges and opportunities that Africa faces and considering the strong bonds of communion that the Church in the U.S. and Africa share, we believe now is the time for us as the Catholic Church in the United States to renew our solidarity with the Church and people of this land. We should never underestimate the power of prayer for God's grace as we pray for our brothers and sisters on the continent of Africa, remembering we need one another as the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:12-26). We express our profound gratitude for the contributions African Catholics are making to the Church in the United States and for their tremendous witness to the faith, hope, and love of God. May they continue to inspire and encourage us to bridge the physical distance that separates us from the peoples of Africa to deepen mutual bonds of love.

The Committee on International Justice and Peace is committed to its on-going support to the Church in numerous countries and will continue to encourage the U.S. government to increase financial and other assistance to strengthen humanitarian relief, integral human development, and peacebuilding efforts for Africa, with due respect for the cultures, traditions, and ethical principles

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of each of the nations of Africa. We invite you to join with us, to follow our [website](#) and to [contact your members of Congress](#) to encourage them to pay more attention to the promotion of integral human development and peace in Africa. We also encourage all Catholics in the United States to consider providing additional financial support to the [Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa](#) through their parish collection or online giving platforms.<sup>20</sup> These actions are additional manifestations of our support for the Church in Africa's efforts of evangelization and pastoral mission on the continent.

We also wish to acknowledge the tremendous work of CRS, which has worked in Africa for over six decades and continues to provide significant assistance to people in crisis, advancing integral human development and building peaceful communities.

The words of Pope Francis in Mozambique echo the hope for all African countries: "A culture of peace requires 'an ongoing process in which every new generation must take part.'<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the path to be taken must be one that favors and is fully imbued with a culture of encounter: acknowledging others, creating bonds, and building bridges... These are the foundations for a future of hope, because it will be a future of dignity!"<sup>22</sup>

# Endnotes

- 1 For the purposes of this document the term Africa signifies the 46 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.
- 2 *We Must Pull Back from the Brink of Collapse*, Statement of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, February 21, 2021.
- 3 Pope Benedict, *Africae Munus*, 174.
- 4 Symposium Of Episcopal Conferences Of Africa and Madagascar, *The 18th Plenary Assembly and Golden Jubilee*, given 28th July 2019.
- 5 Agenzia Fides, Catholic Church Statistics, 18 October 2020
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_in\\_Africa#Catholicism\\_174\\_million](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Africa#Catholicism_174_million)
- 10 Afrobarometer Dispatch # 339, 28 January 2020
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 “Africa Is Central to the Modern World’s Future—and Its Past”, Howard French, World Politics Review, Oct 2021
- 13 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6646944/>
- 14 Afrobarometer, n.d. Online. Available at: <http://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis>
- 15 Ibid, pg. 48
- 16 FAO 2017 Report: The Future of Food and Agriculture-Trends and Challenges, pg. 46
- 17 The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2018 *Militant Islamist Groups in Africa Show Resiliency over Past Decade*
- 18 [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ORF\\_OccasionalPaper\\_327\\_China-Africa.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ORF_OccasionalPaper_327_China-Africa.pdf) pg. 16
- 19 Cilliers, J. The Future of Africa citation of Jayaram, K., Kassiri, and Sun, I. Y., 2017. *The Closest Look Yet at Chinese Economic Engagement in Africa*.
- 20 For information on the Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa, please visit <https://www.usccb.org/committees/church-africa>. In addition to diocesan in-pew collections and diocesan/parish online giving platforms, iGive-CatholicTogether also accepts donations for the Fund at <https://usccb.igivecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-church-in-africa>.
- 21 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 220.
- 22 *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Ponta Vermelha Palace* (Maputo), September 5, 2019.

