

Gemeinsame Konferenz Kirche und Entwicklung

Hotspot Nigeria – Current Challenges for Government and Church *Final Report of a Conference Held in Berlin from 31st May to 2nd June 2006*

1. In 2002 the Board of the Joint Conference Church and Development decided to give special attention to the topic “Peace Building and Development Cooperation” and mandated a committee to work on issues related to this topic. 2004 a working group was established with the special task to deal with the same questions with a country focus on Nigeria. This country was chosen as an example because many general questions linked to peace and conflict are of particular and actual importance in Nigeria.
2. Special emphasis was given to a thorough analysis of different causes for current and possible future conflict situations in Nigeria, namely:
 - the situation of majorities and minorities,
 - ethnical and cultural differences,
 - religious differences,
 - the distribution of resources,
 - corruption and the lack of efficient institutions.In addition, the role of the Nigerian military and the influence exerted by external players were to be studied.
3. The result of the group work was summarized in a discussion paper with the title “Hot Spot Nigeria” and presented to a conference, which was held in Berlin on the 28th and 29th of April 2004. Important personalities from the Catholic and Protestant Churches, from Church Agencies, as well as from political and academic institutions in both countries, came together and discussed the conclusions of the study. Recommendations to the German government included the request that the its bi-lateral cooperation with Nigeria should be expanded, focussing on democracy and prevention of violent conflict, and that it assists Nigerian churches and civil society groups in their efforts to advocate for good governance.
4. After this conference, a smaller working group continued the discussions on the findings and the follow up activities with the German government. However, up until now, the most important challenge, i.e. to make the German government develop a more positive view of the current developments and become more interested in actively promoting good governance in Nigeria, have not been met. Yet, the group presented the findings of the 2004 Conference to a newly established dialogue forum (“Ländergesprächskreis”) of the German government’s Foreign Office on conflict prevention in Nigeria. In this way, the ideas expressed at that Conference found some hearing.
5. At the beginning of 2006, before coming to the end of its mandate, the working group had achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between democratic culture, good governance, eradication of poverty and peaceful conflict transformation. In addition, it was clear that the findings of the first conference in 2004 remain valid. It was decided therefore that the work of the group should conclude with a final workshop in Berlin from 31st May to 2nd June 2006. This workshop was meant
 - to re-emphasize the requests that had been made at the first conference,
 - to take account of the achievements that had been made in the mean time,

- to serve as an additional encounter of members of Nigerian and German churches and Church Agencies, and
 - to lobby once again for an enhanced contribution of the German Federal Government to efforts aiming at the promotion of peace and good governance in Nigeria.
6. In preparation for this workshop, field studies were organized in Nigeria in order to take account of the contributions of church and civil society groups towards good governance, crisis prevention, democracy and the rule of law in that country.
 7. The participants at the Workshop discussed the results of these studies and other experiences which they have had since 2004. Guests from the German Parliament, Ministries and Advisory bodies participated at the Workshop.
 8. The Workshop results can be summarized as follows:
 - The findings of the 2004 conference are still relevant.
 - Local violent conflicts become increasingly a feature of Nigerian society. Many early warning signals point to the danger of even more and increasingly generalised violence in Nigeria than 2004 and must be taken seriously.
 - The relation between economic deprivation of the majority of the population and outbreak of violence is a matter of fact. Therefore poverty alleviation is a veritable instrument in crisis prevention.
 - There is an obvious need for development support in these fields, hence the request that the German government becomes more active in bilateral cooperation with Nigeria remains valid.
 - Furthermore, the resolution of conflicts and the balancing of interests require functional and lawful governance, democratic attitudes and practice - not only at the national but also at the local and state government levels.
 - The above mentioned studies (point 6) demonstrate sufficiently that the Churches and civil society groups in Nigeria contribute substantially to the promotion of good governance, to civic education, to an enhanced participation of citizens in public life, to the mechanisms of budget monitoring, to leadership development and to the promotion of the rule of law. These contributions are already making a significant impact for good.
 9. As a consequence of these findings, the Conference makes the following recommendations:
 - i. That Nigeria should deserve adequate attention from the German government and parliament. Development cooperation with Nigeria should be substantially increased. It is of equal importance to intensify bilateral dialogue, free of prejudices, in an environment of mutual understanding and solidarity. Visits of German Government officials to Nigeria and direct experience of the living conditions of the people would enhance this dialogue. Observation of the upcoming general elections would provide good opportunities to support the democratic process in the country.
 - ii. That it is important to involve civil society actors, in particular the churches, when there are attempts to define new concepts of cooperation by the German government, such as “anchor” or “focus countries”. The issue of poverty alleviation should especially in the case of Nigeria, always be seen as fundamental to conflict prevention.

- iii. That the German government supports the formulation of a common EU - Africa strategy towards a common understanding on issues such as respect for human rights and good governance. In addition, a coordinated approach would help to reduce the level of complexity for African countries, when they do not need to deal with each of the EU members individually.
 - iv. That the German government should use its influence on both the international financial institutions and the Federal Government of Nigeria, to relieve what is left of Nigeria's foreign debts, and to insist that the funds thus liberated are used for the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of good governance.
 - v. That the fight against corruption within Nigeria on the one hand, and in the transactions between Nigeria and its foreign partners and multi-national corporations on the other, be promoted by the German Government. The German government could make an additional effort to facilitate the repatriation of monies looted from Nigeria.
 - vi. That the German Government makes a courageous contribution towards stemming the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria and surrounding countries.
 - vii. That the Nigerian Government be encouraged to show greater commitment to processes of the African Peer Review Mechanism, including ensuring the enabling environment for popular civic participation in the process of auditing government and the Nigerian society.
 - viii. That the Nigerian government makes substantial efforts for the revenues of crude oil production to be used for the well being of the population.
 - ix. That Nigerian government looks into the scandal of severe shortage of energy and infrastructure in the country, especially in remote rural areas – in spite of being a major oil producer. Also, for the sake of sustainability and posterity there is the urgent need to look into the development of renewable sources of energy.
10. The working group¹ on Nigeria has contributed to an intensified dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic Churches in Nigeria and Germany, and practical ideas for further cooperation have emerged.
11. The 2006 Berlin workshop marks the end of the Group Work on Nigeria. However the cooperation between German and Nigerian partners² will continue at the level of the church agencies.
12. Finally, the working group on “Hot Spot Nigeria” requests that the Board of GKKE pursues the issues of democracy, human rights and development further and includes Nigeria in such future initiatives.

¹ Members of this GKKE – working group have been Gertrud Casel, Karin Döhne, Dr. Gero Erdmann, Dr. Jürgen Hambrink, Wolfgang Kaiser, Dr. Volker Mönikes, Manfred Sollich

² Members of delegation from Nigeria have been Fr. Dr. George Ehusani, Fr. Patrick Eyinla, Rev. Habila Istifanus, Rev. Ike Okorie, Michael Schirmer, Bishop Dr. Lucius Ugorji