



GKKE

Gemeinsame Konferenz
Kirche und Entwicklung

Joint Conference Church
and Development

GKKE · Evangelische Geschäftsstelle · Charlottenstr. 53/54 · 10117 Berlin

A Letter of Solidarity from Germany

To Ecumenical Partners in Zimbabwe

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The Joint Conference Church and Development (GKKE) is deeply concerned about recent developments in Zimbabwe, expresses solidarity with ecumenical partners and condemns the vilification of Catholic Bishops and church activists

In an Email addressed to various Christian churches and church organisations mainly in Europe on August 7th, 2020, Reverend Kenneth Mtata, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), sent out a call of distress in the name of his compatriots for a global ecumenical solidarity with his country, Zimbabwe.

Among many reasons for his call, he cited the all well-known collapse of the economy, which has led to unprecedented levels of poverty, which in return have made over 60 percent of the population food insecure, the total collapse of health infrastructure in the midst of a universal pandemic. Even more alarming are activities of the state machinery, which has descended on its own population, brutally suppressing any dissenting voice through sinister methods such as arbitrary arrests, abductions, rape and all kinds of torture. Reverend Mtata did not forget to clearly indicate that church actors who are trying to find some common grounds for a peaceful settlement of the Zimbabwean problems, found themselves in a very high level of insecurity.

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) and ZCC have at multiple occasions highlighted that only a Comprehensive National Settlement based on an inclusive and broad-based dialogue is the key to the country's problems.

On August 5th, 2020, at the Direction of ZCBC, represented by Reverend Fr. Frederick Chiromba, and ZCC, represented by Reverend Kenneth Mtata the National Convergence Platform launched the Comprehensive National Settlement Framework proposal. They did this in unity with churches and civil society organizations that are committed to building an united, peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe. In the same line of events, on August 14th, 2020, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter entitled, **The March is not Ended**, in which they gave a historic perspective, mentioning root causes of current Zimbabwean problems and clearly highlighting the role of the current government in the ordeals the citizens are experiencing. The pastoral letter is bold and prophetic at the same time. It names the ills that are destroying society, like corruption, total disrespect of basic human and constitutional rights of the citizens, a government that serves itself than serving the people. This pastoral letter debunks the myth of a party which always tries to legitimate its grip on power by portraying itself as the savior of the country from colonial rule, by unequivocally stating that this would not have been possible without full participation of the population in various forms and therefore the people of Zimbabwe more than anyone else have been and are their own liberators. The Bishops conclude in inviting the government and the entire Zimbabwean society to embrace a transformational dialogue that will forge a new path for the recovery and bright future of the Nation.

After the pastoral letter became public, the Government of Zimbabwe through its Minister of Information attacked and vilified the Catholic Bishops and tried to divide them in singling out the President of the Conference, Archbishop Robert Christopher Ndlovu, as the author of the letter and accusing him all sorts of ills.

In early February 2019, the Joint Conference Church and Development (GKKE), a German ecumenical body working on issues of peace and development in the Global South, sent a delegation to Zimbabwe to discuss with church leaders, civil society organisations and governmental institutions on the topic of “Contribution of Churches to Just Peace in Africa”. During their stay, the delegation reflected on the causes of violence in Zimbabwe, listened to various stakeholders and at the end in a statement, expressed their full support to the people of Zimbabwe in their quest for a future where their human dignity is fully guaranteed, peace and human development thrive. Observing recent and current events, GKKE is saddened to realise that the Zimbabwean situation has not positively improved since the visit of its delegation in the country last year.

In accordance with the Catholic Social Teachings of the Church, the Church does not simply formulate a doctrine of peace and development, but understands itself in its deepest essence as the embodiment of a doctrine of peace *“in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men...”* (Lumen Gentium No. 1).

The Preamble at the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2013 in Busan, South Korea, states: *„Just peace is a journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.“*

In light of all the above, as an ecumenical body of the German churches, we condemn the baseless attacks of the Zimbabwean Government on the Catholic Church of Zimbabwe. We admire the courage of Zimbabwe Churches as highlighted by expressed positions of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), of the ZCC, of the ZCBC and of the Zimbabwean population at large, which refuses to remain silent in the face of governmental abuse and repression and has rather chosen a liberating prophetic approach.

Convinced of our Christian values, the GKKE cannot and will not keep silent while our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe are calling for help. As always, we will listen to you and extend our helping hand wherever and whenever we are asked to do so. We therefore encourage you to continue giving hope to your people and assure them of your support and indeed our support, make them understand that they are not alone and show them without fear that you side with them in their suffering. In Christ we are one and in Christ we suffer and celebrate together.

GKKE Working Group Contribution of Churches to Just Peace in Africa

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