

STATEMENT OF MOST REVEREND RICHARD E. PATES, CHAIR OF THE USCCB
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE, DELIVERED AT THE
SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR.

JULY 8-15, 2013

KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Your Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, President of SECAM
Your Eminences, my Brother Bishops and Reverend Fathers,
Your Excellency, the Minister of Interior, Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and myself, I want to thank you for your invitation to participate in the 16th Plenary Assembly of SECAM. I serve as the Bishop of Des Moines and Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace. I am honored to be here with you and I look forward to participating in your deliberations. I also want to thank the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo, and in particular His Eminence Laurent Cardinal Monsengwo and Bishop Nicolas Djomo, for hosting us.

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace for two years I have had the pleasure of traveling to Africa three times, visiting Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria. Later this month I will visit Rwanda and South Sudan.

As I reflect on the situation in Africa and the ministry of the Church in Africa, I am encouraged to note that Africa is rising and the fortunes of the Catholic Church in Africa have never been better. The number and the severity of conflicts in Africa have dropped radically over the last ten years. The number of countries ruled by leaders who have been elected by the people has also increased significantly. Some of the fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa.

The Church in Africa is the fastest growing local Church in the world. Your presence and influence at the highest levels in the Universal Church is growing steadily. In the recent past, it was rare to meet priests and religious from Africa in the United States. Today, in many U.S. dioceses numerous priests and religious are studying and working and making vital contributions to the new evangelization in our country. In my diocese of Des Moines I have the privilege of hosting four priests from Nigeria, three from Kenya, and one from South Sudan.

The Church in Africa is also growing in experience and strength in its work to promote justice, peace and reconciliation in Africa. In many countries in Africa the state of civil society is weak and often unable to influence local governments' policies and actions. In contrast, the Church in many of these same countries is the largest, most widespread and most trusted institution in the country. For many decades the dioceses and parishes of the Church in Africa have operated effective health care and educational institutions

that are second to none in their excellence. In the last two decades you, the Church of Africa, have responded to persistent problems of governance and conflict by creating peace and justice commissions at the parish, diocesan and national levels.

Through these commissions you have confronted a number of Africa's toughest problems. You have spoken out against the issues and injustices created by the exploitation of oil in Africa. Some of you have set up national level electoral monitoring networks to bring to light fraud and abuse that have tainted national elections. Some national bishops' conferences have issued moral statements against governmental corruption, fraud and abuse. Other national conferences have brought ethnic and religious communities in conflict together to rebuild the social fabric and create the foundations of sustainable peace. All of these significant achievements fall in line perfectly with the spirit and the letter of the Papal Exhortation *Africae Munus*.

I am proud that our Committee on International Justice and Peace has collaborated with the Church in many of your countries. We have hosted numerous visits to the United States from Church leaders of Sudan, South Sudan, the Congo, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Nigeria. We have made solidarity visits to the Church in many African nations. Together we have worked with the United States Government to increase development and humanitarian assistance. We have encouraged the government in Washington to adopt policies that would promote justice and peace. Lastly through the Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa we are working to support the pastoral efforts of the Church.

Thus it is timely and appropriate to gather this week to review the principles of *Africae Munus* and to take stock of all the initiatives you have undertaken to promote justice, peace and reconciliation in Africa. Despite the progress that Africa has made and the courageous efforts the Church has made to promote justice and peace, much remains to be done. I want to reiterate our commitment to accompany you and support you in all that you do to build justice, peace and reconciliation to all of Africa.

On behalf of the 250 active and 75 retired bishops in the United States, I come as a brother in this year of faith. During this year we also celebrate the 50th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, the landmark encyclical of Pope John XXIII. It is the foundational document for all of us dedicated to peace building. Its principles are timeless founded on natural law. The encyclical recognizes all in the human family as children of God. This identity endows each person with inherent dignity and thus to each is accorded human rights and accompanying responsibilities.

It is in this spirit of faith strengthened by Church teaching that I am both privileged and happy to be among you. Together, in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, may we be committed to grow in solidarity, communion and friendship.

I pray that God will continue to bless your efforts and that this 16th Plenary Assembly of SECAM will bear much fruit.

Thank you for your kind attention.