

# **Declaration of the "Francophone Africa Regional Conference" on the theme: land grabbing in Francophone Africa: identifying and promoting endogenous solutions to the problem" from 21 to 23 November 2017 in Abidjan**

"God created the heavens and the earth... The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it "(Gn1,1; 2,15)

In creating heaven and earth God wanted man to work on the earth for the good of all. But driven by selfishness, he fell into the sin of hoarding with all the ensuing consequences.

Based on the word of God and the teaching of Pope Francis on Environment in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* (LS), and following the Continental Conference on Land Grabbing held in Limuru, in Kenya, in November 2015,

Our archbishops, bishops, priests, religious men and women, Imams, traditional chiefs, village chiefs, pastoral agents and civil society actors meet in a Francophone Regional Conference on "Land Grabbing in Francophone Africa: identifying and promoting endogenous solutions to the problem" make the following declaration:

Land is life. Land grabbing is a serious phenomenon that challenges every conscience.

The food, energy and financial crises of the years 2000s accelerated the massive influx of capital investment in land, considered as a financial asset and commodity, causing a huge and unprecedented wave of land grabbing in Africa.

This land grabbing is packaged under the guise of "economic growth", "development" and "food security" for Africa. In reality, it is an open road to local, national, international companies or institutions that use customary, religious, military, political, and politico-administrative elites of African nations to perpetuate the economic models that tend towards the grabbing of the African land, waters and natural resources.

Land grabbing widens the gap between the poor and the rich in Africa, where millions of people whose livelihoods are tied to natural resources, including land and water, do not have the basic minimum to lead a decent life. Frequent wars and conflicts in Africa, terrorism, rural exodus, forced displacement, internal and international migration and increasingly shrinking spaces for civil society are perverse effects of this system. Unfortunately, this state of affairs becomes a recurring issue that breeds the sin of indifference (see LS, 14), whereas the victims are human beings like each of us and not mere statistical data.

We observe that all these threats to life are persistent and go contrary to the basic needs of humanity, internationally recognized human rights, evangelical tenets and African religious, social and cultural values.

In view of all the above we declare:

1. Water, seeds and especially land are not and should not be a commercial commodity. The earth is our mother (see LS, 1).
2. The concept of "giving more value to the land" must be fundamentally revised to integrate the African environmental, traditional, spiritual and social dimensions. Human existence goes beyond numerical figures or finance!
3. There is an urgent need to stop land grabbing in Africa in all its forms;
4. We stand in solidarity with the families and communities affected by this threat, who are struggling to take control of their lands and resources, especially those who have lost relatives, and land rights activists who are constantly persecuted;
5. We condemn the criminalization, arrests, imprisonment, persecution and killings of the victims of land-grabbing, activists and land rights defenders. We reassure the victims that they are not alone in their struggle and we commit ourselves to using all available legal procedures to encourage and support them in their noble struggle;
6. We commit ourselves to continue the study and implementation of trade agreements, food security programs, economic investments and development programs either offered to Africa by the international financial institutions or elaborated by our African States;
7. We call upon African Governments to ensure the effective implementation of the "Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure" (VGGT) and the "African Land Policy Framework and Guidelines" (CLPFA) in their country while at the same time respecting the principles of food sovereignty.
8. Ongoing land reforms in countries should be transparent, inclusive, participatory, consensual and centred on the human person and the Common Good (cf. LS, 183)
9. We invite National and Regional Episcopal Conferences to be more proactive in their commitment to land issues. They should endeavour to create a space for information, training and advocacy in collaboration with the Civil Society Organizations and all persons of good will, for the protection of our common house, the earth (Cf. LS, 13). For, as an African proverb says: "When spiders unite their cobwebs, they can tie a lion".

The similarity of experiences of expropriation and spoliation leads us to recognize that the convergence of our actions and our strategies will help to bring Africa out of this great evil.

The earth belongs to God. We all entrust ourselves to divine Providence, which is never wrong in its plans. May it accompany each of us in the search for justice, peace and respect for human rights and the Common Good.

Abidjan, November 23, 2017

## Signatures:

1. ADEPA (Association Ouest Africaine pour le Développement de la Pêche Artisanale)
2. AEFJN (Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network)
3. AEFJN Central Africa (Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network)
4. AEFJN (congrégation la Xavière),
5. AFJN (African Faith and Justice Network)
6. AFSA (Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa)
7. Association Foi et Justice
8. Association Ngaoubourandi
9. Bddl/Ishi (Bureau Diocésain de Développement de l'Archidiocèse de Lubumbashi, RDC)
10. BIMTT (Biraio Ifandraisan'ny Mpampiofana eo anivon'ny Tontolon'ny Tantsaha),
11. Caritas Côte d'Ivoire,
12. Caritas Ghana,
13. Caritas Guinée,
14. CECCI (Conférence des Evêques Catholiques de Côte d'Ivoire),
15. CEB (Conférence Episcopale du Bénin)
16. Conférence Episcopale Inter territoriale Burkina-Niger
17. Conférence Episcopale du Cameroun
18. Conférence Episcopale du Gabon
19. Conférence Episcopale du Nigéria
20. Conférence Episcopale du Togo
21. CIKOD (Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development),
22. CERAP (Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix,)
23. INADES (Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et social)
24. CGLTE Convergence Globale des Luttés pour la Terre et l'Eau)
25. CICODEV Afrique (Institut Panafricain pour la Citoyenneté, les Consommateurs et le Développement)
26. CIDSE (international alliance of Catholic development agencies in Europe and North America),
27. Collectif pour la defense des terres Malgaches – Tany
28. Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix/Burkina-Niger
29. Commission Justice et Paix Sénégal,
30. Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (CNDH/RDC – Représentation Bureau provincial du Haut-Katanga, Lubumbashi)
31. (CENJP) Commission Episcopale Nationale Justice et Paix Togo,
32. CMAT (Convergence Malienne contre les Accaparements des Terres),
33. COPAGEN (Coalition pour la Protection du Patrimoine Génétique Africain)
34. CRAAD-OI
35. CVJR (Commission Justice Vérité et Réconciliation),
36. ECAR Projet Vahatra diocèse de Tsiroanomandidy,
37. ENDA-Pronat (Environnement Développement Action pour la protection Naturelle des Terroirs)
38. Forum Civil
39. Floraison
40. FENASCOVICI (Fédération Nationale des Sociétés Coopératives de Vivriers de Côte d'Ivoire)
41. FVTM (Fédérations des femmes Rurales de Madagascar),
42. Inades Formation Côte d'Ivoire,
43. Inades-Formation,
44. JVE Côte d'Ivoire (Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement)
45. Juste et Paix Côte d'Ivoire,

46. Justice & Paix N'djamena,
47. Justice Pour Tous,
48. MISEREOR
49. CERAO/RECOWA (Conférence Episcopale Régionale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest), RAIDH  
(Regroupement des Acteurs Ivoiriens des Droits Humains),
50. Réseau Afrique-Europe Foi et Justice Cameroun,
51. Réseau Foi et Justice
52. Réseau SOA (Syndicat des Organisations Agricoles),
53. SCEAM/SECAM (Symposium des Conférences Episcopales d'Afrique et de Madagascar)
54. Synergie Paysanne (SYNPA),
55. Terre A Vie, Xavière,
56. Youth Volunteers for the Environment (YVE) Ghana