

Memory, Trust and Justice – Dealing with the Burden of the Past

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I warmly greet the organizers, facilitators, participants and sponsors of the international workshop, “Memory, Trust and Justice – Dealing with the Burden of the Past”, on dealing with Uganda’s violence-burdened past.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Church calls us to intervene against acts that violate human dignity. This is expressed in the Constitution, *The Church and the Modern World*:

Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men and women are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury.¹

After the First Synod for Africa, in his Post-Synodal Exhortation, Pope John Paul II reiterated that the work of justice and peace is an “integral part of the task of evangelization, (and) it follows that the promotion of these values should also be a part of the pastoral programme of each Christian community.”² Our commitment to the Gospel demands that we commit ourselves to bringing peace on earth.

The Second Synod for Africa had as its theme, “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: ‘You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world’ (Mt. 5:13).” In his closing Homily, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the many problems that the continent of Africa faces and then recalled that “Moving witnesses showed us that, even in the darkest moments of human history, the Holy Spirit is at work and transforming the hearts of the victims and the persecutors, that they may know each other as brothers.”³

The Church in Uganda has been very active in working for peace and justice. The initiatives of the Acholi Religious Leaders Initiative for Peace (ARLPI) under the leadership of Archbishop John-Baptist Odama of Gulu Archdiocese, and the initiatives by the dioceses of Gulu, Nebbi, Arua and Lira known as *Grow All New Alive in Love* (GANAL), show that commitment to peace can bear positive fruit. Thanks to these efforts as well as those of many individuals, institutions, religious leader and people of good will, since 2006 northern Uganda has known some semblance of peace, since the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has relocated but not disappeared.

¹ *The Church and the Modern World*, no. 27.

² John Paul II, *The Church in Africa*, 1995, no. 107.

³ Benedict XVI, *Homily*, Concluding Eucharist of the Second Synod for Africa, 25 October 2009.

May these words of Our Lord Jesus Christ invigorate you with new energies to serve him as peace makers: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). From Rome we join you in praying that the abandoned peace talks between the Uganda of Government and the LRA are brought to an amicable conclusion. May God generously bless your workshop to be fruitful in reflection, encouragement and inspiration in addressing the challenging issues of forgiveness, reconciliation, trauma healing and post-conflict reconstruction, all for the sake of enduring peace.

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson

President

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace