



## **Catholic Professionals in the Electoral Processes in Africa Today- Applying the Social Justice Values of Catholic Social Teachings.**

### FINAL DECLARATION

We, Catholic Professionals from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, met on 13th October 2012, at the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations in Nairobi to reflect on the topic **‘Catholic Professionals in the Electoral Processes in Africa Today- Applying the social justice values of Catholic Social Teachings’**.

The meeting was organized by Pax Romana- International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (Pax Romana-ICMICA) and the Kenya Movement of Catholic Professionals (Pax Romana-KMCP) and facilitated by the Africa Forum for Catholic Social Teachings (AICAST) and Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR).

#### **Reflecting on how we lead our lives as Catholic professionals:**

We acknowledge that our spaces and destinies in society are to a large extent shaped by the politics of our countries. Yet, we also acknowledge that as Catholic Professionals, we have a responsibility to contributing to such defining processes in our respective countries.

We particularly note that in most of our countries, the Church, through the clergy, has remained steadfast in calling for better governance through different means including pastoral letters by Bishops and homilies by the clergy. In addition, we acknowledge the role played by the Justice and Peace Commissions towards social change process.

Catholic Professionals on their part have made some contribution to social justice endeavors. However, their efforts need to be stepped up to match the urgent needs in our society today. This is despite the fact the Gospel of Christ to which we are called and the Church which nurtures us into our faith presents us with a sound basis for disposing of our intellect and skills to foster justice peace and reconciliation in our countries.

As Catholic professionals, we have not fully come to the defense of our Church, the poor and the voiceless in our communities, particularly when their rights are violated. We have not adequately utilized our comparative strength that lies in numbers, where it is estimated that 15.5 percent are Catholics, most of whom are practicing professionals. Therefore, we perceive this not as an inability to heed the gospel teaching of the few laborers and great harvest but rather a question of ‘many laborers and little harvest’. In other words, it is hard to quantify the contribution of lay catholic professionals in either our individual or collective capacities to better governance of our respective countries.

**Reflecting on the electoral processes and overall socio economic, political and cultural situations prevailing in our countries:**

We are deeply concerned with the political challenges that many of our countries in Africa still face, especially as they relate to electoral processes.

We note that there is general discontent among citizens, attributed to widespread corruption, systematic political marginalization and constitutional manipulation in most of our countries. In addition, our countries are known to have constitutions with excess powers in the institution of the presidency which confer limited powers to other governance arms namely the judiciary and the legislature.

Political challenges in our countries are further compounded by even more serious social-economic challenges visible through high rates of unemployment, particularly among the young people, who comprise of the majority of the populations and make up the high number of voters too.

Despite our countries’ rich diversity of natural and human resource base, majority of our citizens sadly have limited access to basic education, health, water and sanitation services while food security continues to be a growing source of disillusion for our citizens. Further, religious and ethnic intolerance and extremism are slowly gaining root in our countries.

**With the foregoing concerns, we hereby address the following recommendations to Catholic Professionals and the Church Leadership (Bishops and the other Clergy):**

*(a) For Catholic Professionals, we implore them to:*

- Constantly come to the defense of our Church, the poor and the voiceless in our communities, particularly when their rights are violated;
- Actively participate in politics in general and electoral processes in particular, including taking up political office or appointments;

- Be committed to the promotion of peace, justice and reconciliation in line with the calling of the Second African Synod and Pope Benedict's Post-Synodal Exhortation in the *Africae Munus*;
- Be much more open in expressing their faith and commitment in this Year of Faith, further to support Catholic colleagues in positions of power and bring back to the Church fellow Catholics who no longer practice their faith;
- Seek the support from the clergy on how to live their catholic values of advocating for justice, reconciliation and peace in both public and private lives;
- Actively participate in social political and economic developments in their respective countries by contributing alternative feasible policies and strategies for development; and
- Work together under one platform by drawing together Catholic professionals from different professional background at the parish, diocese, national and regional level. We feel that such integration and coordination can be fostered by groups such as Pax Romana-ICMICA working together with the Commissions for Pastoral and Lay Apostolate.

(b) *To the Church Leadership (Bishops and other church ministers) we implore to:*

- Support the integration of Catholic Professionals and offer adequate guidance and support to groups such as Pax Romana-ICMICA, so that they can contribute not only to electoral processes but development as a whole;
- Dialogue and explore possibilities of 'incentivising' Catholic professionals to dispose their energies for the good of the Church and society with 'pride' and according to the Church's teachings;
- Urgently explore (together with the laity) means of ensuring that the Catholic faithful are empowered with tools such as the *Catholic Social Teachings* (CSTs) through continuous formation or other identified means, so that they can be equipped with knowledge to address the development or political challenges that confront our countries from faith, peace, justice and reconciliation perspectives; and
- Re-think the implementation of the Vatican II model of the church which has openly called for the promotion of the theology of the lay people. Such theology should be acculturated and also take into account elements of liberation theology. This is critical in developing critical thinking among the laity.

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