

CHAPTER 11
MASERU DECLARATION ON THE DEBT CRISIS
AS IT AFFECTS HUMAN RIGHTS

By
ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

NOTE: For a brief introduction of this Declaration, go to Gathaka's Chapter 9.

We, participants from twenty-four countries of Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America:

Coming from various parts of the universal church;

Meeting under the auspices of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC);

Asserting the right and responsibility of the church, representing the people of God, to speak out on behalf of the weak, oppressed and poor;

Having met in Maseru, Lesotho, September 20-30, 1990, and having considered the Debt Crisis as it affects human rights in Africa, namely;

I. THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS:

A. The disastrous effects of the payment of the African debt should be compared to a low intensity war which brings death, hunger, malnutrition, sickness, unemployment, homelessness and loss of dignity and personal worth to millions of children, woman and men, young and old;

B. The dismal prospect that Africa may enter the twenty-first century with a greater proportion of her population non-literate and unskilled than it did at the beginning of the 1960s;

C. The obscene widening of the gap between rich and poor and the increasing impoverishment and pauperization of the great majority of the African population;

D. The consequences of the debt on the right to the life of infants and children reflected in the high rates of malnutrition, low birth weights and prevalence of preventable diseases that cause the death of thousands of children daily;

E. The gross unemployment of crisis proportion especially among the youth and women;

F. The devastating and disastrous impact on the living standards and well-being of hundreds of millions of Africans leading not only to the destruction of the social fabric of African society and to the emergence of a perverted morality under which corruption, injustice and dishonesty are applauded, and honesty, justice and virtue disdained;

G. The serious implications of the debt crisis and its effects on human rights for the mission and calling of the church, and on the spiritual welfare of individuals;

H. The denial and gross abuse of human rights as enshrined in international instruments of human rights, such as

The 1948 International Declaration on Human Rights

The 1966 International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
and Civil and Political Rights

The 1969 UN General Assembly Declaration on Social Progress and
Development

The 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

I. The destructive effects of internal civil conflicts and sub-regional wars as privileged and disadvantaged groups struggle for control over shrinking national wealth;

J. The entrenchment in positions of power, influence and affluence by means of instruments of repression and coercion of self-imposed leaders and others who have long lost the mandate of their people.

And recognizing that these are but symptoms of:

II. THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE CRISIS --

A. ***An unjust world economic system*** under which Africa has been forced over the last five hundred years to support and subsidize the high consumption and wasteful lifestyle of the industrialized nations of the north through the cheap export of her children as slaves or immigrant workers, and her natural resources as commodities;

B. ***An unjust international financial system*** that rewards Africa poorly for her labor and resources, and penalizes her severely with high interest rates for loans contracted to service the production of exports to the rich nations of North America and Europe;

C. ***The irresponsible borrowing and irresponsible lending*** of loans that were spent on projects conceived and designed through corruption and the acquisition of irrelevant, inappropriate and in most cases obsolete equipment, manufacturing plants and materials;

D. ***The mismanagement through corruption, incompetence, greed and*** avarice of national resources including loans that were contracted at high rates of interest;

E. ***The imposition of unacceptable, alien and disastrous development models*** and plans on African populations without their consent or knowledge, by leaders who grasp and maintain power through force, coercion and summary elimination of those who dare speak out or oppose them;

F. ***The abdication by the church of its responsibility to train, teach and nurture*** the continent and its people in responsible citizenship, true religion and morality and the values of the Kingdom of God, and to challenge Christians of the North on the realization of a just and equitable international financial, monetary and economic order;

III. RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. An International Ethic on Loans

We hereby call for the formulation of an international Ethic of Lending and Borrowing which applies to both lender and borrower stipulating:

1. That public systems of accounting and auditing should be open to discussion by the general populace;
2. That projects and programmes for which loans are contracted be viable, feasible and beneficial to the development of the people as a whole;
3. That loans be procured not for political purposes or goals, but for legitimate development goals and objectives that serve the interest of the people;
4. That loans not be linked/related to the self-interest of and conditions imposed by the lenders, such as the purchase of capital goods or recruitment of personnel from the lending nations or institutions;
5. That loans should not be taken on start for unnecessary military or security purposes or to offset budgets for military expenditure which are but/only expendable and unproductive investment;
6. That where political leaders have accumulated personal wealth outside their countries, provision/granting loan should be tied to the repatriation of such wealth back to their countries;

B. Action by Local Churches:

We further call for:

1. Concerted Christian efforts to denounce the diabolic and unjust financial and economic systems based on the lust for power and the greed for wealth - Idols - that require the lives of women, children and men with their perverted morality and structural evil;
2. Concerted efforts by God's people to respond to the needs of the millions who have become the victims of the evil system, by:
 - a. Involving the people in designing and implementing strategies of survival and development;

b. Seeking to transform unjust structures through programmes of education, action and advocacy whether in passive resistance, militancy or solidarity.

C. Action by National Churches

We also urge National Churches, Conference and Council of Churches, and where these do not exist, individual churches in Africa as well as Third World countries facing similar problems, to:

1. Study and examine the debt issue within their national situations, inform their people, and together with them, formulate appropriate strategies to counteract the impact of the crisis;
2. Endeavour to set up desks on economic and social justice where they do not exist yet;
3. Organize workshops, symposia, seminars and development education programmes on the debt crisis by bringing together people of other denominations and religious persuasions as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other relevant agencies;
4. Design programmes involving the youth and women in particular in the dissemination of information and ideas on the crisis;
5. Undertake and conduct Bible studies, sermons and teachings on the debt crisis and economic justice within the church;
6. Make the issue of the debt crisis a priority on the churches' agenda;
7. Set aside specific periods of reflection on the debt crisis;
8. Ensure greater democratization within the church and probity and accountability from church leaders to their people;
9. Share the results of these actions with other people of the South faced with similar problems.

D. African Continental Action

We call as well on the executive bodies of the All Africa Conference of Churches, affiliated and member churches to:

1. Ensure that the debt crisis and its effects on the human rights of the African people be taken as an issue of serious discussion at regional and continental seminars and meetings, and that, until the crisis ends, this remains a permanent agenda item requiring periodic review;
2. Prepare a policy paper on the debt crisis relating particularly to an Ethic of Borrowing and Lending, Utilization and Accountability, for discussion by churches who should use it, as appropriate, within their countries;
3. Develop a theology and social doctrine on the debt, human rights, and economic and social justice;
4. Come out boldly at the next AACC Executive Committee Meeting scheduled for Nigeria, with a call for the genuine democratization of the national political systems of Africa; and for reconciliation, peace and justice on the continent; and an end to all wars, preparation of wars and militarism;
5. Call on African governments and people to take cognizance of the events in Eastern Europe and the moves for European union in 1992 to galvanize the continent towards self-reliance, economic integration and greater political cooperation at both regional and continental levels;
6. Consult the World Council of Churches and sister churches in the North and South to request from the international community the creation of a separate distributive round of special Drawing Rights (SDR) by the International Monetary Fund, within the shortest possible time. This round of SDRs should be designated for the cancellation of all existing debts, official and commercial, whilst encouraging the rich countries to diminish the key role their

currencies play within international trade;

7. Request, in conjunction with the World Council of Churches and churches in the North, that the IMF and the international community create a restructured international financial and monetary system by taking the recommended new SDR through yearly increases, according to the general volume of world trade and acceptance of new rules of distribution of SDRs, not according to the existing wealth of nations, but according to population sizes;

8. Call, in conjunction with the World Council of Churches and the churches of the North and South, a Year of Jubilee with its provisions for the cancellation of debts, and restructuring of the international economic, financial and monetary order.

E. Action by Churches in the Northern Hemisphere

In recognition of which we call on churches in the Northern hemisphere to:

1. Reverse the negative image of Africa in the consciousness of northern populations by disseminating, especially through their own media, the positive efforts and events undertaken by African people;
2. Adopt a more sensitive approach to the cultural and social conditions of the churches in the South and act in solidarity as equal partners with them;
3. Inform the people of the North that the profits Northern corporations make, and the high living standards which citizens of the rich nations enjoy, all derive from the debt crisis and its effects on the human rights of people in Africa and the Third World;
4. Join the church universal in denouncing the unjust and evil economic and financial structures and systems, and work in order to bring nearer the kingdom of God through the exercise of the prophetic mission of the church to transform these structures;

5. Join in the realization of those proposals that can help end this crisis.

We finally call for a follow-up to this consultation and urge national churches to report on the situation in each country and the actions being taken at national levels, to the International Affairs Desk of the AACC, for the coordination of efforts and dissemination of information and ideas concerning the struggle for peace and distributive justice.