

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania



The Bagamoyo Statement

Bishops Summit on Economic and Political Democracy

9 – 13 March 1994 held in BAGAMOYO, Coast Region

INTRODUCTION

We the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, who attended the Consultation to study and analyze how political and economic democracy is implemented in Tanzania, emphasized that because the Church is not an island it has the moral and material obligation to help the society in order to avoid chronic problems that have confronted it.

The five-day consultation held in Bagamoyo from March 9 – 13, 1994, was attended by 21 Bishops from all over Tanzania.

However, we observed that, we as Church leaders cannot avoid the responsibility of addressing political, social and spiritual issues as this is the history of the Church.

Further, we agree that, in its development, the Church realizes that the importance of the right of every individual to contribute ideas, in order to accomplish development, unity, love and cooperation, regardless of religion, color, tribe, gender or ideology and that there is need to educate the society on the problems confronting it.

On that basis, we have observed that, in order to help the society in which we live, there is need to contribute ideas in order to rectify where things have gone wrong.

As leaders of this society, we have found it imperative to analyze the on-going political and economic reforms by weighing them against the principles of justice and peace in our country.

Bagamoyo is a historical place where an African was emancipated from slavery by Christian Missionaries more than a hundred years ago.

With sorrow we remind the Government of Tanzania that slave trade prospered when our grandparents – with their economic and political strengths were sold and taken to develop the economies of other countries, and to benefit the rich in those countries.

Following this logic, we the Bishops unanimously state that, the slave trade we opposed a long time ago, has resurfaced in another form. The economy of this country is still benefiting the people of other countries, and the rich in these countries, who after satisfaction drop the crumbs to us – they force our Government to succumb to them, by giving it aid attached with very harsh conditions, thus totally denying us economic rights.

Therefore, the severity of poverty increases when our country has abundant wealth; this allows a clique of people to enjoy the wealth of this country.

This picture enables us to see clearly that economic and political democracy is not distinct enough to allow all the citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labor, get protection from the state, and equal opportunity in education, trade, health services, power and other things that are basic for a better life of every Tanzanian.

This situation affects the society – particularly taking into consideration the theological principles that call upon the Church to proclaim Good News of Christ as he said in the Gospel according to Saint Luke 4: 18 -19:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and set at liberty to
those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”*

As a Church we request the Government to listen and consider the cry of the people where justice is trampled, corruption is flourishing, and where the leadership of the country is contravening the Constitution, the misappropriation of Government money, the haphazard sale of land and the like.

Turning a blind eye to such problems is to make a citizen hate his /her government particularly when it is borne in mind that he/she is a major producer and tax payer. These problems may also make one fail to understand the meaning of political and economic democracy.

1. POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

Democracy may be defined as the process of enabling the citizenry exercise their freedom to contribute ideas on various issues concerning the leadership of and the government of their society. Also, democracy is implemented when decisions are made on the basis of majority rule.

1.1.1. One Party Democracy:

Immediate after independence, our country was made a one party state thus eliminating political opposition that existed before. Despite of gaining a measure of peace, unity a (and our union), love and solidarity, our country plunged into guided democracy. The ruling party began to make and implement decisions without the consent of the people and without observing human rights.

Some of the decisions reached without the consent of the people include:

- The nationalization of people's property
- The 'villagization' programme
- The operation on retail shops (closure)
- Passing of by-laws forcing people to grow only certain crops

However, some of the decisions, made people lose their lives, property, and other acts of violating human rights.

1.1.2. Multiparty Democracy:

After about thirty years of one party rule, our country proclaimed to go back to multiparty democracy in 1992. Under this system, 12 political parties have been registered.

After contemplating on the issue of the Union, the political changes in this period of transition and the results of the by-elections of Kwahani (Zanzibar), Ileje (Mbeya) and Kigoma, the Bishops' Consultation states that, in order for multiparty democracy to be of benefit to society, there should be few but powerful political parties. These parties should coalesce so that there is unity for the benefit of Tanzanians.

We remind political parties that opposition is not tantamount to animosity, and therefore, we appeal to them to learn and build the culture of mutual respect.

1.2.2. On the issue of the Union of Tanzania, we the Bishops state that, in order to have the structure of Union that will represent and speak for both sides, there should be one Government. In case the implementation of this is impossible, then it is important to have three governments.

1.2.3. True democracy cannot prevail when oppressive laws are still in use. We the Bishops want the Nyalali Commission Report to be respected and implemented so that such oppressive laws are eliminated.

1.2.4. In order to maintain peace and tranquillity, we request the ruling party to stop monopolizing and using state apparatus for its benefit.

1.2.5. Further, the ruling party should not lead reforms without taking into consideration the views and recommendations of the citizens concerning the need for a constitutional conference to draft the constitution.

2. ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY:

Economic democracy is the participation of the citizens in decisions concerning the running of economic activities in the society, to enjoy the fruits of their labour and to ensure that the wealth of the country is properly controlled for the interest of the whole society.

In analyzing the direction and situation of our country, the consultation had an in-depth discussion on the problems that emerged in recent years and how they contribute in a profound way in weakening the economy of our country.

2.1.1. Corruption:

In a broad way, corruption has become a chronic problem at all levels of leadership of our country. Receiving and giving bribe, theft through manipulation of accounts, the misappropriation of Government property and some of the actions that have contributed to the deterioration of the country's economy – thus making the citizen go without a number of services – which are their rights.

Those who have been given vocation to lead, have used their positions to misappropriate the resources of the nation, to trample over the rights of weak citizens and turned them into ladders with which to climb to the apex of their affluence.

2.1.2. The Plunder of Resources:

The Monduli Scandal is one of the cases of plundering the resources. The scandal concerned the granting of a lease of over 380,000 acres of land and payment of millions of shillings to a foreigner, while the citizens are confronted with hunger. In view of this, we the Bishops are convinced that the interests of the residents in that area are neglected.

Te other scandal worth consideration is that of Loliondo. At first, we the Bishops could not believe the Loliondo story as a true account but after investigations, we discovered that this was a scandal just like other scandals. It concerned granting hunting rights – of the wild animals to a foreign company – without considering the interest of the nation.

2.1.3. Illicit drugs:

Another thing, we the Bishops have considered to be a threat in our country is drugs. We have discovered that desire for instant affluence has made some of the businessmen turn our country into a market for illicit drugs.

What is more disturbing is the effect of this illicit trade on the health of the youth and children who are the nation of tomorrow. We are also amazed by the way these businessmen are able to buy government officers entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the law – to act on the contrary and break the laws of the country.

Therefore we dare say that, failure of government accountability as expected on this matter raises doubt whether some of the people in the top leadership are not involved in this trade.

2.1.4. The theft and Misappropriation of Government Property:

We have been reading in papers how billions of money have been stolen and squandered in this country – which has been crippled economically, and is among the poorest countries in the world.

It is very disturbing to learn that those concerned with these actions are those entrusted with leadership. The Government in turn, has failed to take legal action against them, or at least demand an account of that misappropriation.

For example the accounts of the Government Accountant General showed that, up to February 1994, the Office of the Prime Minister and First Vice President paid “Ghost Workers” a total of Shs. 8,000,000/=, the Ministry of Education and Culture paid a total of Shs. 200,000,000/=, the Ministries of Defence and Agriculture paid more than Shs. 88,000,000/= and the Ministry of Home Affairs paid a total of Shs. 175,000,000/=. Yet what is amazing, there is no leader who seem to be concerned with this misappropriation.

2.1.5. The Free Market:

Concerning the free market, we the Bishops have discovered that liberalization of trade has not helped the people; instead it has increased the burden on them.

Apart from the fact that the majority of the people have no money to buy the expensive goods from outside the country, the system increases economic as well as social problems.

For example, tax evasion is the order of the day. Some of the businessmen importing goods have been evading taxes by bribing high ranking officers in the government, and all the machinery concerned. This has made the government fail to raise budgeted incomes.

Another example is that of importing goods that are unfit for human consumption. Due to lack of control on the quality of goods, some of the businessmen have imported and sold foodstuffs to people which are not fit for use.

Further, the absence of efficient control worries us that after a couple of years the citizens of Tanzania will find themselves with new diseases or loss of lives.

Therefore, after an in-depth analysis of the economic situation of our country, our consultation states that:

1. The Government should develop a tradition and practice of transparency in political and economic matters concerning the lives of the citizens – particularly on the expenditure of the government money, aid and grants from outside.
2. In order to rectify the situation, the government should take quick measures to correct the mistakes that were secretly done, and to assure the people that they were contrary to the constitution, the law and the interests of the masses. We have learned that when the government fails to speak the truth, the citizen lose confidence in it.
3. We unanimously appeal to the Government to stop actions of provocation and oppression to the citizens – which lead to disgust, anger and hatred to the government – which is ultimately forced to use state power thus leading o unending and increased violence.

For those who are in support of the free market, the government should take effective measures to control goods imported into the country.

Further, because our constitution is not satisfied with the work of the majority of government leaders, and those entrusted with the responsibility of protecting state property, we appeal to the government to set standards and criteria for accountability which will enable the citizens control their leaders. As far as trade is concerned, the Government should punish severely big businessmen who evade taxes and prohibit the importation and sale of bad foodstuffs to citizens instead of humiliating people with low income.

In order to ensure the success of this exercise, we the Bishops see the need for the government to avoid the influence of rich people. Therefore, in order for leadership to be properly accountable to the people, there should be established an independent commission, when and where the situation calls for accountability in order to avoid the mistakes done by the previous commissions.

3.1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH:

The Bishops should remind the believers and the whole church leadership that, because the church is part of the society, it has to be directly involved in education for democracy from parish to national level.

However, direct involvement alone is not enough. The Church has to be vocal, condemn the evil, and rebuke the society so that it does not plunge into destruction brought about by fracas, theft, robbery, murder, drunkenness, etc.

Further, we recommend that, apart from praying and reconciling our society, the Church should be involved in awareness creation, directing and advising society, the government, political parties and individuals on the execution and implementation of human rights.

In view of the fact that we heads of the church lead Christians from various political parties, our ordained leadership – Bishops, Pastors and their spouses should not seek membership to any political party.

The lay (church) leadership, namely the national Executive Secretary, Diocesan Executive Secretaries, Heads of Departments at national and Diocesan levels, should not be members of any political party. We also emphasize that lay Christians with higher positions in political parties should not be employed at higher level of the church leadership without relinquishing their political party membership.

Therefore, in order to help our country, the whole church should raise awareness to help the people to know their rights of voting and to usher them into the culture of democratic participation and not guided democracy. People should be educated on how to identify the right candidate regardless of their political party, color, tribe, ideology or religious faith.

In order to accomplish this, the church should use various means of media such as radio, newspapers, magazines and TV in order to educate and rebuke immoral methods used by various political parties.

Further, we the consultation participants recommend to the church that the Human Rights Desk due to be established should be link its activities with those of the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and other churches to pool strength together.

However, in order to ensure that the Church is clean, we the Bishops state that, all the ELCT leaders should be conversant with the constitution of all political parties, and also, the church should know through person-to-person all Christian Government leaders who are members of our churches in order to counsel them not be party to corruption in the Government.

Moreover, we see the need for the church to find ways of discouraging businesses that destroy the ethics of society such as video shows and bad films, the use of condoms and dresses not accepted by our society. By doing that we shall have proclaimed the mission of the church.

We the Bishops are aware of the importance of education in the development of humans. The Church should therefore develop new and effective strategies of teaching Christian education in schools. The church should also educate society about the environment.

CONCLUSION:

The Church will continue to have overt and close relationship with the government observing the following:

- Accountability
- Transparency and openness
- Human rights
- Non misappropriation of people's property
- True democracy
- The rule of law
- Respect to the Constitution
- Unity of the country

The Church appeals to the present Government to take these recommendations seriously. The church on its part, will supervise and implement resolutions that concern it. In order to be meaningful, political and economic reforms should contribute to the improvement of the lives of the citizens, reduce the gap between the rich and poor and bring hope to live.

Signed by:

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