

# CONFERENCE DES EVEQUES CATHOLIQUES DU BURUNDI

Secrétariat Général

## A WORD OF THANKS TO THE DELEGATION OF THE SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

Your Excellencies! Archbishop and Bishops, Dear Priests and Dear representative of the Laity who have been sent by the SECAM, AMECEA and SACBC,

1. First of all, in communion with my brothers Bishops of our Catholic Episcopal Conference, I would like to thank God the Giver of life. During all this years of socio-political turmoil, God has shown us that he has not forsaken us. He has kept sending us his messengers to strengthen us in hope. We all remember how His Holiness Pope Francis sent us from Rome a heartfull message as soon as He heard that a new crisis had erupted in Burundi, calling the people of Burundi to engage in an inclusive dialogue in order to settle all pending problems without indulging into violence. When He was visiting Uganda a few months ago, He reminded us the same need, inviting all christian faithfull around the world to continue praying for Burundi so that we avoid any catastrophe. We really thank God for this messenger whose heart remains close to Burundi as a caring father.
2. We also thank God for the delegates representing various religious denominations who have been visiting Burundi in these last months, bringing a message of peace. Some are from our Catholic Church, others are from our extended christian family and others from other religious denominations believing in God. We all know that one appreciates authentic friendship when one sees somebody caring for him/her during times of trial. We experienced the love of God in those visitors who kept giving us encouragement. Blessed be God.
3. Today we are experiencing the same loving care. It is the whole African Catholic Church present with us here. As you have been told, these bishops, priests and laity represent the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), an organization that unites all Catholic Bishops in Africa, including Burundi. They came to us as African neighbours usually do. Even more, they are here because we share the same faith in Jesus Christ as brothers. We are very thankful for keeping us in this brotherhood.
4. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I would like to tell you that at the end of their visit, God must have a message he wants us to treasure, a message of hope. Besides the fact that all of our visitors are friends and neighbors, we have three of them coming from the Republic of South Africa, the country of one of the beacons of peace in Africa all Burundians know, the Late H.E. Nelson Mandela. He is the one who helped us reach the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which made it possible for Burundi to recover, bringing back unity and in keeping violence away from Burundi for more than 10 years. Is this not a symbolic sign today that God wants us not to stray away from the spirit of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement? We also have in the delegation the Vice-President of the Ugandan Bishops Conference, coming from the country of the facilitator in the Burundi crisis, H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. As you are aware H.E. President Museveni has once again, been mandated by the East African Heads of State to facilitate the dialogue in Burundi in order to keep alive the spirit of the Arusha

Peace Agreement. Is this not another symbolic sign that God wants us to understand that there is no other good way to build true peace, true reconciliation and integral development besides dialogue and forgiveness for the wounds people have had to suffer?

5. Dear brothers and sisters with whom we share our faith and hope, you may keep wondering why these visitors came precisely during this period. You have heard them explaining the aim of their visit. They came as neighbours and brothers to express their solidarity and give us encouragement. We have spent these days together sharing our brotherhood. Our visitors have also been able to get in touch with various sides of the Burundi conflict. They have had the opportunity to see by themselves the effects of violence in our country. There are things we cannot hide to the eyes of visitors. For examples, they put to us this question: "Why is it that some of the vehicles that came to meet us at the airport had policemen inside? Did they come to welcome us or they are your usual bodyguards?" We were embarrassed because there are things you cannot hide.
6. After listening to representatives of all sides of the Burundi conflict and seeing some effects of the conflict, the delegates of the African Bishops Conferences congratulated our people saying that with all that has happened, we have been able to stand united and avoid ethnic divisions that plagued the country for decades. They encouraged us reminding us that we owe this to the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. We should then stick to the spirit behind that agreement, make a good and wise evaluation of it, make a good follow up so that this process helps the country make another good step forward. We Bishops from Burundi welcomed that advice with thanks. The visiting delegation made us understand that the African Catholic Bishops Conferences will continue helping us to implement programs related to peace building in our country. We wanted to share with you some of the content of our conversation with them because in visiting with us, they had you in mind. We are sharing this so that you can join with us in thanking them for their visit.
7. Dear Delegates of the African Catholic Bishops Conferences, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Burundi is very thankful. We also assure you that our christian communities are very thankful. As you depart from Burundi this afternoon, we wish you a nice trip back home. May God continue blessing your ministry. May he make this visit very fruitful. May God be blessed. May God bless you

Bujumbura, June 12th 2016

+ Gervais Banshimiyubusa  
Bishop of Ngozi Diocese  
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Burundi.