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*"We can't row the canoe fast with one paddle"*  
(African proverb)

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## AFRAM ZONAL REPORT 2007-2008

**1. Concrete realities.** If you remember, last year I shared with you our dream of a United States of Africa. This time I begin by reporting nightmares! The New Year's usual greeting of peace was marred by violence in **Kenya** following the elections. We were stunned because we looked up to this country as one of our models. We were particularly worried because we know that we have our confreres there and that some of their families were affected. Then **Chad** held its breath as the rebels went as far as the entrance to the capital. We have confreres there too! In **Zimbabwe** the 84 year old President Mugabe was surprised having lost the elections. Unfortunately he did everything to stay in power. The violence mounted and the economic situation got worse. We think of our confreres who are there too! It was frustrating to realize that the African Union composed of 53 countries could not do anything to stop him. Even the United Nations could not act. The President of **South Africa** Thabo Mbeki, the one who could have done something, pretended to ignore the crises. In the meantime, in his own country, the South Africans were driving out and abusing their fellow African brothers residing there. The victims of racism of yesterday have become racists themselves. A big business man who worked in South Africa fears that one day the country will become like Zimbabwe. Will the black population take over the properties of the whites? Are these incidents of today not going towards that direction?.

**Crises.** Most of the crises in Africa are rooted in ethnic differences, corruption, bad leaders and lack of education. Without a well instructed population the problem will remain for a long time. As consequence to these problems we have now food crises in many African countries. The oil problem is also strongly felt. It is affecting specially the poorer class of society.

**Hopes.** On the other hand, last July, Nelson Mandela was in London honoured for his 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There were many big stars singing in behalf of the HIV victims. The biggest star was of course the African hero of our time. His living optimism tested by more than 25 years in prison continues to inspire us and to give us hope. There are also countries which are doing better. According to the media **Ghana** and **Botswana** are faring well in terms of political and economic progress. **Benin** is improving and **Togo** has been relieved of sanctions. **Mozambique** is experiencing peace after ten years of war. **Angola** also newly relieved from 40 years of war will soon be holding their elections. **Congo** after the civil war which has cost 3 million lives is reconstructing. One sac of cement in Kinshasa could go as high as 30 USD per sac! **Madagascar** is evolving economically but there is fear of a new dictator in the making.

**Economic and political shifts.** The Chinese and other Asian countries are progressively conquering the market of Africa. The appliances and commodities once inaccessible to the poor are now available, though the quality is often questionable. They are building infrastructures in exchange of primary natural resources. Europe is not happy about this. What will be the consequences? Coincidentally there are more and more Asian missionaries working in Africa. Will this have some implications?

**2. In the AFRAM Zone.** Three main events happened in AFRAM: the General Visitations between July and November 2007, the first Executive Committee meeting on February 2008 and the elections of the new Councils followed by the new triennium which started in June 1, 2008.

**The Protocols.** The focus of the Visitations was "Our Missionary Life and Service of Prophetic Dialogue". These were followed by 9 Protocols and the Letter of the Generalate addressed to the Zone entitled "A New Era in AFRAM". In these documents the five areas of our missionary life were

highlighted namely: Spirituality, Community, Leadership, Finance and Formation. Reading the Protocols, I have the impression that the “fourfold prophetic dialogue” in doing mission and the “four characteristic dimensions” of our ministries have permeated in the vision and mission of our confreres.

- It is very interesting to note that the concern on “self-reliance” has appeared on all the Protocols. This concern has been confirmed recently during the Zone Meeting of the New Provincials. Yes, efforts are being done but there is a big worry as to how to realize an action plan. The Letter of the Generalate also touched on this reminding us that after all the different initiatives, self-reliance may be best realized by relying on the generosity of the people with whom we work. I hope that this concern will help to push the Zone to do more to stand by itself.
- Another concern that I see explicitly in at least six protocols is education or school apostolate. The crises I pointed out above in Africa cannot be subdued as long as the big part of the population is illiterate. Knowledge is power. Democracy can only take place if the people know how to think, to argue or to oppose. One of the Millennium Development Goal is to provide Universal Primary Education (UPE) to children by the year 2015. The Generalate letter, referring to the Lineamenta of the Synod of African Bishops, mentioned education among the role of the Church.
- Formation was also among the common concerns. We have a good number of vocations in many AFRAM countries (though with some exceptions). It’s a blessing but also a responsibility. We have to have good discernment, good formations and financial capacities. The new missionaries need to have good orientation and introduction to the mission in his host country. There is worry about our young leaving their mission country. Could it be the reasons why we have problems with leadership?

**The Execom 2008.** Last February 25 we held our first Execom meeting. We finalized the distribution of 21 Novices to our three Common Formation Centres in Tamale (GHA), Nairobi (KEN) and Kinshasa (CNG). I was very happy that CNG has decided to send candidates to GHA and that GHA also sent candidates to CNG. I hope that these acts for unity in AFRAM would bear fruits. We discussed about LUMKO and talked about the possible confreres to work there. The schedule for the different AREA meetings were reviewed and more precisions were made concerning the dates. Modifications were still made during the meeting of the New Provincials. A major change is that of the Mission Animation Meeting scheduled for November 2008. Because of the coming elections in Angola and the take over of the new administration in the province we agreed to postpone it to March 2009. The JIPC was moved one week earlier. Please see below:

Area	Date	Place
1. Formation	28 July -02 August 2008	Lusaka, Zambia
2. JPIC	February 9-13, 2009	Botswana
3. Mission Animation	March 2009	Angola
4. AFB and Treasurers.	June 8 to 12, 2009	Nsawam, Ghana
5. Communic. and BPM	October - November 2009	Zimbabwe
6. Zonal Assembly	March 2010	Togo

**The new triennium.** June 1, 2008 was the date of the take over of the new Provincial/Regional Councils. We held our breath as we waited for the names to come out. I had a feeling that it was not easy to choose a provincial in some provinces.

**Evolution in AFRAM.** The status KEN as province is reinstated. TOG has become a province. Thus we have now six provinces, one region: MAD with a council raised to five and three missions. ZIM is the youngest erected only last June 1, 2008. Just to refresh your memory we are now engaged in 14 countries.

- 3. Focusing.** While reflecting on the current events that are happening in Africa and Madagascar today and reading the Protocol and the Letter of the Generalate to AFRAM I looked back at our Vision Mission

Statement which was ratified in the Zonal Assembly of 2003. I believe that most of the elements are still very relevant and remain part of our focus.

**Word of God.** Proclaiming the Word of God is our main task in AFRAM. The people themselves manifest their love for the Bible. God in the first place wants to dialogue with his people and we could be his mouthpiece. The transformative power of his Word can change lives and nations. It builds new communities which go beyond human families, tribes, races and nations. Could it not be the way to challenge ethnic wars and divisions? That is why we work for primary evangelisation, Mission Animation and the Biblical Pastoral Ministry.

**Dialogue.** Conflicts, war and political crises often have their deepest roots in ethnic differences. Dialogue has been part of the African culture to solve problems. Our fourfold prophetic dialogue could enhance this spirit and break the walls that separate us: those who are believers and those who still seek, the poor and the rich, the different cultures and the different beliefs and ideologies. The promotion of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation will also help.

**Education.** As I mentioned earlier education was one of the topics dealt in many Protocols. Interestingly it was already spelt out in our Vision-Mission Statement. Through education we can also impart Christian values and “give them a sense of life and hope”. Communication is a powerful tool for education. The mass-media can reach millions of peoples till the intimacy of their homes.

**The needy.** We will be the voice of the “voiceless”, on the side of the poor, the victims of AIDS and the displaced.

- 4. Never lose hope!** I remember when I was a young missionary, almost 25 years ago, I was with Fr. Pio Estepa and another Filipino priests. We were shocked by the situation of Congo at that time. As we were sharing our spirits became more and more drowsy. Finally we were all silent. As we kept our mouths shut I heard the singing and jubilating of the people surrounding our house. I said to myself: “If they (themselves) are happy, why shouldn’t we?” If the people never lost hope, why should we?

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