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

Coords-Link, May 31, 2011

Dear Fellow Coordinators,

I am sharing with you the report I prepared for the Generalate meeting with the Zonal Coordinators. You might be familiar with some of the points because it is a summary of what happened in the Zone from June 2010 to June 2011.

2011 Annual Report of the AFRAM Zone to the Generalate **Meeting with the Generalate June 16-17, 2011**

I. Highlights in Africa and Madagascar

North African revolution. Last year the sub-Saharan part of Africa drew world attention as many countries commemorated their 50th anniversary of Independence. This year it is the Northern part of Africa which shocked the world by its waves of Arab revolutions. In the beginning of the year 2011 a young Tunisian, jobless professional, burned himself to death to protest against his disparate situation and that of his country. The impact of this incident was so strong that it mobilized the youth to protest against the autocratic rule. Who could believe that such a mass of ordinary and armless people could oust a powerful regime who governed them for 27 years? The so-called *Jasmine revolution* spread like a bush fire. It contaminated Egypt and uprooted the Pharaoh who reigned for 30 years. The Algerian youth followed suit though the government responded quickly to appease the discontentment. It reached Morocco too and the monarch responded positively to the youth's demand. Then it was Libya's turn; unfortunately the Colonel, in power for more than 40 years, has no intention to let go. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt the peaceful demonstrations turned into a bloody revolution. The fight for liberty, democracy and economic-political reform has gone beyond Africa and is spreading throughout the Arab world. We don't know yet the outcome of the revolutions in Yemen, in Jordan and in Syria.

In the sub-Saharan region significant events happened too. There was the referendum held in Southern Sudan last January 15 where 98.83% voted in favor of independence. God willing Southern Sudan will be Africa's 54th state in 9 July 2011. In the Ivory Coast, one of the most expensive elections organized in the World ended up with the use of military intervention to enforce the election results. In Niger and Guinea Bissau the military had successfully reinstated civil power and ensured a peaceful transition. In D. R. Congo presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for November this year. To conclude, our countries are different from one another in terms of political evolution. What we share in common are problems of electricity, poverty, food, poor education and underdevelopment. You might however be surprised to know that Africa in general is enjoying positive economic growth. In many countries the Chinese are present in building infrastructures and exploiting minerals.

II. Highlights in the SVD AFRAM Zone

First SVD-ZIM Mission Assembly. The BOT province has expanded to ZIM in 1987. The latter became a Mission in 2008. I had the privilege to conduct the annual retreat of our confreres there and to facilitate the first Mission Assembly, thanks to the invitation of the Mission Superior Tadeusz Grenda. Both events took place last September 5-11, 2010. It is interesting to note that the three years planning of 2008 has been

realized to a great extent. In the 2010 Assembly eleven recommendations have been passed. A good number of new confreres have come to reinforce the Mission. New ventures are projected like extending the Mission from Bulawayo to Harare the capital, reopening of the pre-philosophy program, engaging a lay team for the Biblical Apostolate in Ilizwi Center, expanding the bookstore, initiating the organization of lay collaborators, etc. Zimbabwe has passed over the economic crises and the shops are once again furnished with goods. Hopefully things get still better in the years to come in the country and in our mission.

African response to *Verbum Domini*. Shortly after the publication of *Verbum Domini* (November 12, 2010) the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) created by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) responded. It organized a Seminar with the theme: *Verbum Domini and Biblical Apostolate in Africa - Evaluation and the Way Forward* – with the Biblical motto “*Go to the whole world and make disciples*” (Mt 28:19). It took place last November 30 to December 5, 2010 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. There were 53 participants representing the Episcopal Conferences, the Associate members of the Catholic Biblical Federation, the Biblical promoters, etc. Four SVD’s were present: Mgr. Gaspard Mudiso (CNG) representing the Episcopal Conference of Congo, Fr. Mathew Thekkeyil (CNG), Fr. Achille Mpila (Chad) and Fr. Alex Awuah-Osei (GHA). There might have been organizational problems because our other confreres were not able to come including our Area Coordinator Fr. Sebastian Quadros. In any way this event is very important for us because it engages the whole of Africa and Madagascar in the promotion of the Word of God. Eight resolutions came up in the Final Statement. In the coming BPM Workshop there will be joint sessions with the Communications Coordinator dealing with the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation.

Execom Meeting. Last February 14-15, 2011 the Executive Committee met in the SVD Provincial House of Angola. I have given a detailed report to the Generalate so I will only raise the important points. First, the Execom has made the distribution affirming practically all the propositions made by the Provincials/Regional of the sending provinces. We note that our three CFCs will be full in the next academic year. Already this year we had 9 excess theology students. Fortunately we sent them to host countries outside of AFRAM: 2 to ESP, 3 to USC, 2 to GER and 2 to PHC. Secondly we dealt with the feasibility study for CFC-Luanda. The ANG Provincial Council was able to provide the conditions that were raised by the AFB. The possible place of study is the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Luanda. As residence we have a big space where the actual Propaedeutic is situated in Viana Seminary. Concerning personnel we were able to establish a list of possible formators. The question of visa is resolved because of the new government policy of student visas. For the language course our students can study Portuguese in the Catholic University and in the Alliance Française. However two new problems came up: the tuition fee in the Catholic University is very expensive: 250 USD per month! Perhaps the Association of Major Religious Superiors can negotiate to lower the fee. The bigger problem is the cost of the new Construction which is necessities and the elevation of the ground. The Angolan Province envisioned to inaugurate the CFC-Luanda in three years. But before demanding formally the Generalate to open this project we would like to know its opinion about it after presenting the results of the feasibility study. The opening of CFC-Luanda could lessen our problem of accommodation of our increasing number of candidates. But do we have the means to construct a new building and finance a fourth CFC? The Third point was the study on the 11 recommendations of the AFB. The Execom approved all of them with one modification. The fourth point was about the preparations of the different Workshops scheduled for 2011. I will present as a separate topic following this one.

Workshops. There are five Workshops programmed for this year 2011 because we want to leave free 2012 in view of the General Chapter. The AFRAM Formators’ Course has started last June 12 in Nsawam, Ghana and will end after one month. This is very beneficial to our provinces, region and missions as the participants will be engaged in formation after the course! In July 17-23 there will be simultaneous Workshops for JPIC and Mission Animation in Nairobi, Kenya. We have special guests like Herman Wijtten the first JPIC Generalate Coordinator and co-founder of Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) and Zeferino Martins who was active participant of the Synod for Africa. In September 18-24 we will have the Workshops for BPM and Communications. Bishop Gaspard Mudiso is expected to come as well as the Director of BICAM. For Communications many of our Coordinators have good formation and talents to share to one another. I am happy to say that the preparations for the Workshop were well done and lively

communications are going on. We thank our Generalate Coordinators for Formation, JPIC, BPM, Communications and Mission Secretary for their participation in the preparations. I hope that I will still have time to talk to each one of them as we will be together for some days.

Elections. June 1 is the handover date for all the Provincials, Regional and Mission Superiors and their councils in the AFRAM Zone. The outgoing provincials of CNG, GHA, the regional of MAD and the Mission Superiors of TCD and MOZ have served for two terms and are succeeded by new provincials. The provincials of ANG, BOT, GHA, KEN and the Mission Superior of ZIM have been reelected. I see it as a good sign because practically all our leaders were given a second term.

VIVAT Preparations. The Board of Directors of VIVAT International during their meeting held on the Feast of our Founder this year decided to hold a workshop for Francophone Africa. Fr. Gervase Taratara, CSSp was appointed the contact person for the preparations and organization of the Workshop and I was asked to be the contact person in the field. The R. D. Congo was chosen as the host of the Workshop and we already fixed the date, i.e., from Sunday, October 23, PM to Friday October 28 PM. Fr. Gervase proposed that the Workshop be only for the VIVAT members working in Congo. He gave two reasons: (1) To be able to establish a National VIVAT in Congo and (2) To open the possibility of organizing another workshop in another French speaking country in Africa. We are six members out of ten present here in Congo. Later on however Fr. Gervase told me that some members outside of Congo would like to join. The preparatory committee already met last June 12 and we agreed to welcome some members working in other countries especially those who belong to the same province.

Refugees. Our confrere Romeo Cagatin, who has been working for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been appointed the National Director of the JRS in the D. R. Congo. He came to Kinshasa last April 16-22 to process his papers. He will be stationed in Kivu, in the Eastern part of the country.

Contact with SSpS. I was one of those who touched on the relationship and communication with the SSpS in the Zonal level. I am grateful to the Generalate for their prompt reply giving us the addresses of the leaders of our Sisters. I'm sorry for not having done much to share news with them. Nevertheless wherever we have SVD Zonal Activities we don't fail to meet them like in Togo both our Blue and Pink Sisters, in Benin, in Ghana and in Angola. Twice I helped them uncover a hoax of a pretending bishop who wanted to send good candidates to the Adoration Sisters in Togo and to the Blue Sisters in Ghana. He must be a professional because he knows the addresses of our Sisters from the Provincialate up to the Generalate. Moreover he is capable of communicating in German!

SVD Friends. I remembered the time when the Generalate Mission Secretary asked the Zone for reports concerning the participation of the laity in the Society as Mission Partners. From AFRAM he only got two materials and only from Togo. At present initiatives are taking place in AFRAM to create groups of lay collaborators. When I was in ZIM last year one of their recommendations is to initiate the formation of SVD friends. It also began in South Africa where the BOT Mission secretary resides. In CNG there are active groups developing in the parishes and in our institutions. The draft of the Statutes is nearing its final stage. The Workshop of Mission Secretaries will include this aspect in their evaluation report. We hope to have a global picture of the developments of this aspect of Mission Animation.

III. Concluding Remarks

We might need more time to appreciate the impact and consequences of what is happening in the Northern part of Africa. However from them we can already draw out some reflections. First, we see once again the power of the youth. We should take seriously our ministry to the young generation which constitutes the big majority of the African population. Second, we are more aware of the importance of the modern means of communications: a journalist said that two million Tunisians were connected to Facebook, Twitter and You Tube; even a greater number have access to Television and were watching Al Jazeera. Third, we should be more attentive to the signs of the times because unexpected waves of movements happen and change the world. Fifty years ago there was the wave of struggle against colonialism in the Black Africa. In Eastern Europe there was a wave of emancipation from Communist regimes. Now it is the turn of the Arab world to

get rid of oppressive and corrupt regimes perpetuating themselves in power. It is evident that the changes that are occurring in the North of Africa, which is predominantly Muslim, will have direct effects in the African Continent where a big percentage of the population is Muslim. We hope that their quest for freedom, democracy and social progress would also bring about openness to other cultures and religion. As Aga Khan said: "Religious conflicts of today are due to IGNORANCE".

The change of leadership in the AFRAM Zone was for me heartbreaking because I have come to know the most of the outgoing provincials, regional and mission superiors in a very personal way. Through encounters in meetings and communications we had deep sharing and mutual encouragement. Happily the five reelected ones are still there and I know most of the new provincials. Out of the 44 Council members on the list I know 37 of them. This year as we are preparing the Workshops I also got closer to our Area Coordinators and were able to establish the agenda in collaboration with them and the provincial, regional and mission coordinators. I also notice that many provinces are transmitting the elements of the AFRAM News to the confreres. In this way, we are progressively building our AFRAM Zone.

Fr. Xene Sanchez, SVD
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