

8th AFRAM ZONAL ASSEMBLY 2010
Zonal Coordinator's Triennial Report
Lomé, Togo, Feb. 7-13

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Welcome. In the name of the AFRAM Zone, I welcome you cordially to our 8th Zonal Assembly. We are here because we belong to the same Society of the Divine Word in the service of the Church in Africa and Madagascar. We are here because we believe that together we can enrich each other by sharing our experiences, that together we can encourage one another and that together we can make a greater impact in the mission field through our coordinated efforts and unified goals. As we say in Africa: *"We can't row the canoe fast with one paddle"*. The creation of the Zones is relatively new to the SVD. It might still take time before confreres appreciate the existence of the Zone. Whereas a confrere might give all his attention and spend all his energy on his particular mission others might be more aware of the importance of the district to where he belongs. Furthermore, others still see the need of "Province awareness". Hopefully more and more would also sense the "belongingness to the Zone". Thus, the motto of my predecessor continues to challenge each one of us: *"Think Zonal and act locally"*.

2. Situation. The SVD in AFRAM is growing in years and in number. Today we have missions in fourteen countries: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Chad, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A confrere lives in Burundi for the refugees. The Zone is constituted of six provinces, one region and three missions. We are blessed with vocations. We have three Common Formation Centers for theology students and brothers in temporal vows, two functioning Novitiates, seven Philosophy Houses and five Propaedeutic Houses. Hundreds of young men express their desire to join us. A lot of discernment, however, is necessary to spot genuine vocations. Young confreres too from others Zones continue to join us. Other congregations are astonished to see young missionaries rejuvenating our communities assuring the continuation of our ministries and bringing new ideas.

A quick glance at the countries we serve shows that some are enjoying peace and progress, others have survived years of war and division and still others are suffering until now from political, social and economic instability. Poverty and hunger are everywhere as well as lack of good education. Corruption is a common denominator and as also with all forms of injustice. Malaria, HIV and other illnesses continue to kill people. Often we see images of throngs of men, women and children fleeing from their homes due to war and ethnic conflicts. We realize that we are prey to multinationals coveting our natural resources, creating troubles among tribes if necessary, to obtain what they want. We need a platform wherein the voice of the voiceless can be heard. Vis-à-vis this reality we can no longer act as disparate or isolated individuals. We need to unite, "to network" as we say in our days, to consolidate our forces to face collectively global issues.

While we see shadows in the political, social and economic field we see a bright light as we look at the Catholic Church in Africa and Madagascar. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of her recently as the "spiritual lungs of the World today". The Christian communities exude life and grow faster

than anywhere else. Last October 4-25, in the Vatican, the Second Synod of Africa was held. The Church must play a great role in the process of Reconciliation and in the promotion of Justice and Peace. (Unfortunately the aspect of the Integrity of Creation has seemingly been overlooked). As a Zone we are called to open wide our horizons and be sensitive to the current trends of our time.

3. Looking back. Father General, in his address to the 7th Zonal Assembly (Kinshasa, D. R. C. 2007), challenged us as he did in the 5th Zonal Assembly (Mananjary, Madagascar, 2001), to go beyond our concerns for formation. Indeed for many years our main preoccupation was formation. It is high time that we broaden our vision and deal with the contemporary issues and problems of the Church and the World, particularly in Africa and Madagascar. He mentioned about the fourfold dialogue (with the faith seekers, with the poor, with other religions and cultures and with other ideologies), about the vocation of Brothers, about self-reliance and about the expansion of our presence in the Zone. These four points continue to be our priorities in our action plans. As you see in your agenda we have allotted a time to discuss these matters and see what we can do in the future.

B. HAPPENINGS IN AFRAM. During this triennium many things have happened.

1. World Social Forum (WSF). On January 20-25, 2007, some 60.000 participants coming from 140 countries, composed of civil societies, local peace activists from the grass roots, some representatives of parliament gathered in Nairobi, Kenya for the 7th World Social Forum. Some 30 members of VIVAT international were there and the SVD JPIC Zonal coordinators of Asia-Pacific, the Americas, Europe and all coordinators of the AFRAM Zone. Its principal message was “Another World is Possible”. I quote VIVAT Newsletter no^o 37 recapitulating Bishop Desmond Tutu’s speech: “... *it is a fundamental law of our being to be bound to one another; and the only way we can regain our dreams, instead of living the nightmare, is working together, all united as one.*”

2. The Protocols. The General Visitations took place in the AFRAM Zone between July and November 2007. The focus of the Visitations was “Our Missionary Life and Service of Prophetic Dialogue”. These were followed up 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 the vision and mission of our provinces, region and missions.

- It is very interesting to note that the concern on “*self-reliance*” has appeared in all the Protocols. This concern has been confirmed during the Meeting of the New Provincials as we gathered as a Zone. Yes, efforts are being done but there is a big worry as to how to carry out our action plans.

- Another concern that was explicitly mentioned in at least six protocols is *education or school apostolate*. The crises we have in Africa and Madagascar 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 Goals (MDG) 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 ministry 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.

- After reading the protocols and the letter of the Generalate to the Zone I also reviewed our AFRAM *Vision-Mission Statement*. Many elements remain relevant but we need to attune it to the situation of Africa and Madagascar today.

3. Meeting for New Provincials. It was a wonderful occasion for many of us to see each other during the Workshop for new provincials in Rome last July 5 to July 20, 2008. The majority of AFRAM provincials were present: ANG, GHA, KEN, BOT and ZIM (MAD was not able to come) meaning that many are still in their first term of office. They expressed the desire to know each other more as well as the situation of our respective provinces, regions and missions. We dedicate therefore in this Assembly ample time for the sharing of facts and figures, of problems as well as of projects and of dreams for the future. Hopefully we can learn much from each other.

4. Zonal activities. In the last Zonal Assembly we programmed Workshops for the different areas of coordination. We realized the (1) Workshop for Pre-Novitiate and Novitiate Formators in Lusaka, Zambia last July 27 to August 2, 2008, (2) Workshop for Mission Secretaries in Luanda from 8-13 March, 2009 and the (3) Workshop for AFRAM Formation Board, in Nsawam last June 8-13, 2009. Other workshops were postponed for different reasons: lack of good preliminary preparations, no sufficient exchange of communications among the coordinators in the same area, the health conditions of some Generalate coordinators (Treasurer, BPM) and the economic recession that struck the world and that affected our Society. We tried to avoid spending our precious money in meetings which do not promise good results. Three years ago my predecessor Emmanuel Fianu said this: *"Some of the Coordinators are to be commended for their efforts in moving forward the animation and coordination of their areas. In some cases however things have not been very encouraging. There may be a number of reasons for the shortcoming but I think this Assembly needs to seriously think of the confreres we vote for to take up these responsibilities if we want to move away from an over-emphasis on formation in the Zone. If we do not have capable Area Coordinators, we may end up singing the same song at the 8th Zonal Assembly.* I hope that this time we will take more seriously the choice of the Zonal Coordinator and Area Coordinators. To be fair, I know that some area coordinators tried their best to communicate to their colleagues but it also happened that the provincial and regional coordinators did not cooperate enough.

5. The Execom. The 7th Zonal Assembly amended the AFRAM Statutes to give to the Execom more responsibilities. I quote 1.2.2 *"The EXECOM meets every year to deliberate and decide, in the name of the Zonal Assembly, on the recommendations that arise from the meetings of the Area Coordinators as well as on zonal matters in general."* We had an Execom meeting in Lomé, in February 25, 2008 and another Execom meeting in Accra last June 13-14, 2009. Indeed we were able to approve the recommendations submitted by the Formators and the Mission Secretaries. We also decided on the distribution of our Novices to the Common Formation Centres. The last Execom meeting had contributed much in preparing the agenda of our Zonal Assembly.

6. Meetings in Rome. Every year the Generalate invites the four zonal coordinators of ASPAC, PANAM, EUROPE and AFRAM for a meeting. For Fr. General, these are moments where Rome gets in touch more intimately with the Zones. Aside from the annual reports on the Zones many important items were discussed which gave us a picture of what is happening in the Society as a whole and in the Zones. For example, together we followed up regularly the resolutions and recommendations of the General Chapter and saw to what extent they were realized. We also participated in the planning and took part in the preparations for the Brothers' Assembly.

7. Assembly on Brothers' Vocation. I take the opportunity to thank you for your contributions in the preparations for the Assembly on Brothers' Vocation. All provinces, region and missions have participated in the initial process and the summary we submitted to the preparatory Committee was well appreciated. Four brother delegates, one priest and I represented the AFRAM Zone. It took place in Cebu, Philippines (the island where I was born) last June 29 – July 12. One African brother was also there to represent the PANAM Zone. After the assembly a statement has been made and passed to all the major superiors of the Society. We will hear in your reports how your province, region or mission has acted upon the document. Bro. Alfonso Berger proposed that we take up *Recommendation 1* under the heading of *Leadership* particularly addressed to the Zones: “*We recommend that every zone assess the need and possibility of having a coordinator for Brothers.*” Are we ready for this?

8. Lumko. Last February 12, 2008 in Rome, I was asked to join the General Council Meeting to discuss the letter sent by Fr. Gabriel Afagbegee concerning the invitation of the Bishops of South Africa for the SVD to take over the direction and running of LUMKO. This Institute was renown even beyond the bounds of Africa. The Generalate responded positively. It took several months to look for possible candidates. Fr. Provincial Paul Shiju of BOT and I were again invited to the Generalate meeting last July of the same year to pursue the matter. On the 25th of January 2009 Fr. General came to South Africa to discuss and to sign the contract. At present there are four confreres to constitute the core group. Things are not yet well settled but LUMKO has finally obtained a new site, the former Carmelite Centre, in a place called "Benoni", not far from the Airport and on the way to Pretoria.

9. Strategic planning. Last January 7-8, 2010 the Provincial of Kenya asked me to facilitate what they called “Strategic Planning”. A group of twelve composed of the Provincial Council, the District Superiors, the members of the Bureau of Development and invited veteran confreres responded together to four questions: “Where we are now?” (our present situation), “Where are we going?” (our goals), “What do we have?” (our assets and potentialities) and “What do we have to do?” (our action plans). Hopefully the results of the meeting could help the Provincial Assembly fixed for January 28.

10. VIVAT International. Last January 11-15 the members of VIVAT International and its associate members working in East Africa, Middle East and Egypt, gathered in Nairobi for the first time to know more about this NGO accredited by the United Nations. Three members of the board of directors from Rome and the two executive directors from New York gave the orientation and facilitated the Workshop. We are all members of VIVAT. With the other eight members we are more than 20,000 strong. We can multiply our strength in terms of influence by

the number of people for whom we work. Human rights broken into (1) poverty eradication, (2) women, (3) sustainable development and (4) culture of peace are VIVAT issues where we are called to engage in. I hope that as a Zone we can discuss how we could become more active members as we also want to vivify our engagement for JPIC.

C. OTHER MATTERS

1. AFRAM Contact. The Zonal Coordinator was expected to publish regularly the Newsletter AFRAM Contact. This was my weak point. I could not do it. I asked our Area Coordinator for Communications if he could do it but he too declined. The aim of the newsletter is to promote Zonal consciousness and belongingness. However, there were all kinds of hindrances: like lack of articles, cost of publication and difficulties in mailing, the idea of satisfying the three language groups in one Newsletter (thus two thirds unreadable), etc. To compensate I started with the AFRAM Update for the Provincials and the Coords-Link for the Coordinators. Fr. Mirek Wolodko initiated the AFRAM Website, *svdafram.org* which has rendered news and documents of AFRAM accessible to all. In terms of communication it is good to note that many provinces are sharing their news through Newsletters, Websites and Blogs. Our Communications Area Coordinator will talk more about it.

2. AFRAM Funds. We have not touched the Afram Funds in Teteringen, Netherlands due to the economic recession. Last December 31, 2006 we had the following financial statement: Common Formation Fund – 91,523.01 EUR; Social Fund – 12,714.67. Last December 31, 2009 we had 105,949.33 EUR for Common Formation Fund and 14,718.82 EUR for the Social Fund. These funds have specific purposes as the titles indicate. We need to discuss further how to make use of these funds. As to the money we have in the AFRAM Coordination, I will distribute to each of you a copy of the statement of accounts.

D. CLOSING WORDS

Dear confreres, Fr. General and members of the 8th AFRAM Zonal Assembly we thank you for leaving behind your respective areas of responsibilities, provinces, region and mission to be here. Together we share, we reflect, we decide and we plan for the good of our Mission here in Africa and Madagascar. We ask the intercession of Saints Arnold and Joseph, Blessed Maria Stollenwerk, Blessed Josepha Stennmans and our four SVD martyrs that our Assembly give an impetus to a New Era in AFRAM. May the Holy Spirit hover over us and blow his inspiration even to the farthest confrere doing his mission! May something good come out of Lomé 2010!

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AFRAM Zonal Coordinator (2007-2010)