The Time is Now. Let Us Walk the Talk  
Reflection on the Victoria Falls Conference  
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The Justice Coalition of Religious in Africa which gathered in Victoria Falls from the 24th to the 27th of February 2020 for the 6th Session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development affirmed that we as religious people have started the implementation of the agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 in our different congregations through our charism and mission. As religious we should continue with our good practices in bringing justice and development to the people by living our evangelical councils which are poverty, obedience, and chastity. Poverty helps the religious to bring our giftedness to work with people without looking for remuneration instead as religious we should be at the service of the people. Obedience helps us as religious to respond to the where the mission of Christ is calling us, and chastity helps us to love and to walk humbly with Christ in mission.

In line with the Decade of Action that is for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda 2030 and the African Union agenda 2063 the focus of the developmental agenda was on People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. There was a call on all member states, UN agencies, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders to drastically accelerate the development agenda and progress should be noticed in the African region through improved livelihoods of the people. Youth are the future; hence they should be given a chance to lead. During the
conference, the youth of Africa expressed that there is need to silence the guns of poverty, war, corruption, hatred, unemployment, and economic instability. This, however, can only be achieved through the implementation of agenda 2030 and agenda 2063. “The future is ours”. The young people of Africa echoed. Nothing for us without us is for us. We need new wine in new wine skins. The governments need to create space for the young people in policymaking and provide an enabling environment that allows the young people to express themselves freely and allow them to explore new ideas in technology and innovation. African youths have great hope and are optimistic about the future, their future – our future – is now.

The question which was asked by many stakeholders at the conference was how we can possibly say we are leaving no one behind in sustainable development agenda considering the inequalities in our African society. The rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. The youth for example, were of the opinion that such gatherings as the African Summit on Sustainable development should take part where the marginalised groups of people are for example the elderly, children and women are. For example, go to the villages where people are and hear what they have to say on their own, listen to what they have to say and their real needs. The challenge was for Africa to end poverty, bring together people from all walks of life and hear their issues. There is no need to bring ideas to people instead development should be brought to people.
The human rights based approach should be used to accelerate progress for the most vulnerable groups of our society. There is need for governments to increase avenues for meaningful and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, including children, youth, older persons, people with disabilities, women, adolescents, girls, internally displaced people, refugees, indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups, in decision making processes for development to take place in Africa. It is the duty of all States to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of all its citizens. In addition, the citizens should also claim their rights. However, one can ask do the citizens know that they have rights which they should claim taking for example that most of African population where they live have no access to media and education.

Africa is blessed with sunshine therefore national and sub-national governments to invest in the transition towards the use of renewable energy at all levels as well as in climate resilient infrastructure, and low emission development in both cities and rural areas that are gender sensitive, foster principle of just transition, and incorporates the needs of vulnerable groups (SDG 7).

People at the centre of development. Population as a stimulant of development there is need of a stronger involvement of the general public for sustainable development. All Africans should see their future in the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. Investing in the people in a non-discriminatory way. Women and children produce more food. I am Generation Equality: Realising women’s rights and let women participate in development work in all aspects from
planning to outcome. Gender equality and empowerment of women are central to economic and human development of a country (SDG 10).

All of us, the governments of Africa, the African Union Commission, youth, women, development partners, the UN development system are obliged to leverage the decade of Action to deliver the SDGs and our common vision for a more peaceful and prosperous Africa. There is need for progress check each year and identifying new ways of moving forward as well as accountability of resources involved in the implementation as well as who has benefited from the SDGs and agenda 2063. Implementation and accountability processes around the SDGs and Agenda 2063 should be a priority to all governments. In addition, governments should find ways to collaborate toward national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 through the national development plans which should be monitored and evaluated at a regular basis.

Climate change which is being addressed by (SDG 13) is one of the major challenges of our time as it adds considerable stress to the modern societies in general and to the environment in particular. From shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding for example, Cyclone Idai which took place in eastern Zimbabwe in 2019 which took many lives and destroyed the Eastern region of Zimbabwe. The impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly. Addressing climate change requires an “unprecedented level of
cooperation, not only between women, but also between different levels of Governments, private sector and individuals. In addition, small holder farmers should be involved in decision making processes.

States were asked to renounce the use of force in international relations instead they should promote, establish, maintain, and strengthen the international system. The youths at the Victoria Falls summit called the governments to silence the guns of war, hatred, and corruption. The youths also echoed that they were tired of hearing the same old songs from their leaders. The rationale behind is to achieve a coordinated response to worldwide threats of human rights arising from the global interdependence of all individuals, people, and nations. Once international cooperation has been strengthened collective goals may be achieved at all levels. Thus, a solid culture of peace may be maintained and giving a fresh impetus to the struggle against violence and attitudes based on force and gender discrimination. There is need to recognise the holistic concept of peace and go beyond the strict absence of armed conflict. In addition, there is need for the inclusion of women and youth in global peace building and conflict resolution processes. Member states were called to support local initiatives on conflict resolution, peace building and combating terrorism, violence, extremism and xenophobia, and work towards resolving existing social, political, cultural conflicts. Member states are called on to ratify, domesticate, implement, and periodically report on regional and international conventions and protocols that respond to good governance and the rule of law.
Gender perspectives is critical to ensure that the agreements are balanced as well as women’s equal participation in the post conflict societies as well as finding ways of preventing future conflicts. When women are left behind in decision making processes in peace conflict resolution and development issues it perpetuates discrimination of women in efforts of rebuilding the society after conflict. SDG 5 calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls hence women have a right to participate and benefit equally in peace, conflict resolution, and development issues. Furthermore, resources should be made available for women to build a gender equitable community for lasting peace and society.

Congregations who were represented at the summit, called for the religious people to come together and work as a team the on continent of Africa and in our individual countries and follow Jesus manifesto in the way of doing justice. (Luke 4:18-19) “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me…”

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