

Africa - Europe Ecumenical Forum on Migration – Communiqué

From 15th March 2023 representatives of All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Northern Germany (Nordkirche), German institutions and churches, as well as the World Council of Churches (WCC), gathered for four days in Hamburg to exchange experiences and ideas on migration, and to discuss the theology of migration. Hosted by Missionsakademie and Nordkirche, in several sessions and workshops we were exposed to various organizations working with migrants in Hamburg. It was an inspiring encounter of self-critical European churches and self-confident African churches. We both live in a context where migration is on top of the agenda.

The relationship between African and European churches has a long history. Where in recent times we feel brothers and sisters in Christ, part of the ecumenical world, we also acknowledge slavery, racism and the colonial past. For present and future, we will focus on finding that same basis of the same Gospel: there is more that unites us than divides us.

There are many tenets that unite us: the Bible, faith in the Triune God, Christian ethos, the belief that people, as created beings and image bearers of God, are equal and that creation is given to us as a common home within which we are free to migrate, just as the Bible testifies in many places.

Migration is intrinsically connected with theology. A new deepening theology of migration is required to position faith and churches in the field of migration. This theology should be developed and discussed in churches in countries of emigration and immigration together.

People are driven to migrate, looking for a better future. Policy makers on both continents need to build up new regulations that address the barriers to accessing legal pathways, and work towards ensuring the dignity of migrants. In all our approaches and as far as developing and implementing policies on migration, we all acknowledge that the criminalization of migration is a direct violation of how we understand the Gospel.

We acknowledge and appreciate the work that churches in Africa and Europe are doing to address the plight of migrants. While churches have always tried to give shelter, protection, acceptance, and love to migrants, keeping alive the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ on how we should treat strangers in our communities, we acknowledge that racist stereotypes still exist among our members and structures. We cannot say that the churches in the countries experiencing immigration represent increased diversity in membership and leadership. We hope that the future cooperation of AACC and CCME will facilitate better cooperation, openness and inclusiveness of churches in addressing migration challenges.

The conclusions of the conference are:

- Migration has always been part of the human experience, it will continue to be so and it is an integral part of the biblical story. Churches and governments, within their respective means, have a responsibility for ensuring that people migrate with dignity and that when migrants reach host countries, they are received with compassion and empathy.
- For all countries and churches involved, irregular migration is a real challenge: too many people die, are exploited, get hurt and traumatized. Some return empty handed and in shame after a long time, or remain in unbearable situations due to fear of shame. Counseling and re-integration is a difficult process but we must all join hands to ensure that proper psychosocial support, integration and re-integration of migrants take place.
- We acknowledge that racism is one of the major factors contributing to the plight and unequal treatment of migrants, especially those of African descent. Racism is a sin. All racist behaviors and responses to migration should never be condoned. We oppose the coerced redirection and transportation of asylum seekers, including those of African descent, to places in Africa, for example, the UK – Rwanda deal.
- Migrants are part of humanity and the criminalization of migration is against the Gospel. We encourage churches all over the world to oppose the policies that move towards that direction.
- Our task is to discourage irregular migration and fight human trafficking, practices that prevent many people from experiencing the love and goodness of God. Even in this, we need to increase our focus on addressing the push and pull factors that cause people to migrate even in ways that put their lives at risk. These include poverty, conflicts and wars, the climate crisis and all its consequences, and inaccessibility of legal pathways.

- The legacies of the enslavement of Africans, colonialism, and colonial missions have significant implications for the African migrants who move in search of better opportunities or flee from danger to Europe. We, representatives of churches in Africa and Europe, need to work together on and promote decolonization of the economic system, theology and education, and ending neo-colonialism.
- The African Churches and migration communities in the diaspora need to address racism, Intra-African discrimination, and divisions.
- The All Africa Conference of Churches' Campaign on "Africa. My Home. My future." is a strategic approach to building the confidence of young people that they can build a great and prosperous future in Africa. This campaign should be intensified and supported by European churches.
- The churches need to advocate for their governments to respect the protection of human rights when addressing migration issues.

AACC and CCME are calling on all their members to continue cooperating in developing migration theology in addressing migration issues as equal partners, in cooperation with WCC and other ecumenical partners. We will strengthen our bonds in the firm belief that this is what the Gospel asks us to do, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.