



# HOPE OF PEACE FROM AFRICA

Proposal by the

*Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII*

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*“The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace”*

There are many experiences of reconciliation and nonviolent conflict resolutions in Africa's past and present. These should be made well known among the Synod Fathers and the Universal Church. It is also important to strengthen unity among African Episcopal Conferences and promote nonviolence experiences and paths of reconciliation. This paper examines these issues and makes some proposals for the future.

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## **CONTENTS:**

- I. The Association *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* and *Operazione Colomba***
- II. Making the African nonviolence and reconciliation experiences well known among the Synod Fathers**
- III. Strengthening the unity among Episcopal conferences**
- IV. Promoting actions of reconciliation**
- V. Conclusions**

## I. THE ASSOCIATION *COMUNITÀ PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII*

The Association *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* (Community of Pope John XXIII) is an International Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right, with juridical personality, recognised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on 7 October 1998.

The vocation of the Community consists in conforming one's life to Jesus, poor, servant and suffering and in sharing directly the life of the poor and the least. As a result of this, the members of the Association are also committed to removing the causes of injustice, social exclusion and conflicts of various kinds.

The Association was established in Italy 40 years ago by Father Oreste Benzi and has been present in Africa since 1983 (in Zambia since 1983, Tanzania since 1993, in Kenya since 1997). In these countries, the majority of the Association's members are local and the Association's projects mainly address:

- Hiv/AIDS victims, orphans and vulnerable kids. This is done in particular through health projects and the Rainbow project, which has been implemented in Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya and reaches at present 10,000 families.
  - Street kids, by means of a multiple stages approach which aims at their social inclusion and creation of job opportunities.
  - People with disabilities, the elderly and women forced into prostitution through specific projects which also include their welcoming into the Association's family-homes.
- Through these projects, the Association supports about 24,000 people in Africa, especially children.

### **OPERAZIONE COLOMBA**

*Operazione Colomba* (Operation Dove) is the Association's nonviolent peace corps. Its actions in any conflicts begins with sharing the victims' daily lives, living their living standards and difficulties. *Operazione Colomba* volunteers enter the conflict at the same time on both sides, being neutral towards the conflicting parties, but not towards injustice. This simple and well-trying method gives protection to the minorities, lessens the violence, works as interposition, facilitates the encounter and dialogue between parties, and helps reconciliation paths.

*Operazione Colomba* started intervening in conflicts in 1992 and has been in the following conflict areas: the Balkans (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia), East Timor, Chiapas (Mexico), Chechnya (Russia), Kosovo, Israel/Palestine, Georgia, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Congo and Uganda.

With respect to Africa:

- in Sierra Leone *Operazione Colomba* carried out peace-building activities during the war, in 1990, in cooperation with Bishop Giorgio Biguzzi of Makeni Dioceses.
- In Congo, it was one of the promoters of the 2000 International March of Bukavu, in the Kivu region, supporting the action of the local Civil Society.
- In 2008 *Operazione Colomba* went to Nyala (Darfur) on an exploratory mission, invited by the local Bishop Mgr. A. Menegazzo.
- In North Uganda *Operazione Colomba* lived from 2004 to 2008, and cooperated with Archbishop Mgr. J.B.Odama. The volunteers lived in Minakulu Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp, in Gulu diocese. Father Carlos Rodriguez Soto (*Combonian* Missionar) wrote about them:

*"Operazione Colomba, however, is not an NGO as such. They have no ambitious programmes, neither do they set up big structures. They insist on being present in the conflict with the war victims. This is what I have seen them do: They walk with some of the displaced persons from the camp to their gardens, help them dig their fields and come back. They support some Justice and Peace Church groups. They take care of some disabled children. They take patients too poor to pay for transport to hospital. They build huts for elderly IDPs who have remained without relatives. In the evening, they chat with people in the camp. And many other things.*

*Does that make any difference in changing the situation? I have to answer with a clear "yes". War victims need better life conditions, they need efforts to solve the conflict, and they also need to know that they are not alone in order to rebuild their trust in life."*

## **II. MAKING THE AFRICAN NONVIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION EXPERIENCES WELL KNOWN AMONG THE SYNOD FATHERS**

With respects to nonviolence and experiences of reconciliation which took place in Africa, in the last twenty years, we have recently met over 80 bishops, archbishops and cardinals coming from 20 different countries. In Africa there are many examples of reconciliation and nonviolent resolutions of social conflicts. It can be said that Africa is the hope of the whole Church, since it is the proof of the feasibility and effectiveness of nonviolence and reconciliation: this awareness is a great gift and a responsibility as well. In facts we realized that the great number of these experiences are not generally well known. We recommend that the Synod Fathers know well these experiences, some of which are briefly described below:

- South Africa: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made possible, in the 90s, the abolition of the apartheid system without the outbreak of a civil war.
- Sierra Leone: the Inter-religious Council made great contributions towards ending the civil war in the 90s.
- Mozambique: the Community of St Egidio acted as a mediator of the peace process which led to the signing of the Peace Accord in Rome in 1992. At a national level, many catechists were trained to promote pastoral care in reconciliation in their parishes.
- Madagascar: the nonviolent actions carried out in 1991 and 1992 led to the end of President Didier Ratsiraka's dictatorship and to his exile.
- Congo: the nonviolent Civil Society Movement promoted the International March of Bukavu, through which awareness was raised at an international level and a truce was made.
- North Uganda: the ARLPI (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative), together with its President . Archbishop Odama, have made significant contributions to the achievement of peace in recent years.

## **III. STRENGTHENING THE UNITY AMONG EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES**

We have witnessed through the years that, in the Church, many peace-building actions depend almost entirely on the initiative of some priests and bishops (e.g. Mgr. Odama in North Uganda, Mgr. Giorgio Biguzzi in Sierra Leone and Mgr. Kataliko and Mgr. Munzehirwa in Congo). It is important that the Episcopal conferences not only approve these actions, but also promote and support them in practice. We need to stop rely on spontaneous initiatives of single Christians. We need to structure paths. If wars are well planned, reconciliation needs to be planned as well. For all these reasons, we believe that it is important to work in unity and, if conflicts arise, sometimes it can be useful to receive help from third parties.

A good example of the above comes from the South African Catholic Bishops Conference: they established the *Denis Hurley Peace Institute* in order to provide support to other Episcopal Conferences or Dioceses ([www.sacbc.org.za](http://www.sacbc.org.za)).

An other example is given by the Zimbabwe Episcopal Conference: following the 2008 general election they suffered from internal political division and resolved these conflicts thanks to the help of other bishops.

## **IV. PROMOTING NONVIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION ACTIONS**

### ***LISTING AND STUDYING***

We have been often taught about the reasons why wars outbreak and the number of casualties that they produce. Why, instead, can't we be taught about how peace can be built and the quality of life be improved in this way? Moreover, we tend to think that peacebuilding actions are effective only when peace accords are achieved. Instead, we should be aware that peacebuilding actions

always adds something positive to society.

For the above mentioned reasons, it is important to bring together all the initiatives of reconciliation and nonviolent struggles carried out in the Church through the years. By doing this, the promotion of reconciliation would be made easier, because every community can learn strategies from other communities. It is also important to study the reasons of success of such experiences and listen to those who participated in them. Conferences and meetings could also be held for this purpose. There are already-existing examples of this. We only mention two of them:

- *'The first Africa - America Intercontinental Conference on Justice and Peace'*, promoted by IMBISA and Caritas, held in 2000 in Maputo (Mozambique) with the aim of strengthening the process of peace-building in countries of both continents, and exchanging experiences of conflict resolutions and peace building.
- The biannual meeting held at the Notre Dame University in Indiana (USA), promoted by the Catholic Peacebuilding Network.

### **PROMOTING**

In order to be stable, peace needs to be a people's choice and not a mere signature on a peace accord. It is a process made of many small steps and each of them is essential to the final goal. It is important to make people aware of this, as they will be more willing to undertake every small step.

Other examples of promotion of peace include the *Denis Hurley Peace Institute* action: they offer advice to people or communities who need help in solving conflicts. They try to help them find their own solutions, by sending them experts.

The existing nonviolent civil peace corps are also an effective way to promote peace. Examples of these are: *Operazione Colomba* ([www.operazionecolomba.it](http://www.operazionecolomba.it)); Christian Peacemaker Team ([www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org)), Peace Brigades International ([www.peacebrigades.org](http://www.peacebrigades.org)), Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel ([www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org)), and International Fellowship of Reconciliation ([www.ifor.org](http://www.ifor.org)). They could all be asked for help, for example to protect minorities or support nonviolent actions.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

*'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you;  
so that you may be children of your Father in heaven' (Mt 5:44)*

We, as Christians, have received this great teaching from God. We have a responsibility to put it into practice and give it to other people. We should make all efforts to promote paths of reconciliation at a community level and answer injustice with nonviolent actions.

We pray God that He gives us the strength and courage to be consistent with His teachings and be true children of our Father in heaven.

*We would like to thank all the bishops, priests and lay people  
who made possible the presentation of this paper.*

*We would also like to thank all the people who welcomed us in the places we went to.  
Their sufferings and hopes give us the strength to go on.*

### **ASSOCIATION COMUNITA' PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII**

[www.apg23.org](http://www.apg23.org) [Italian]  
<http://en.apg23.org/en/> [English]

*Il Rappresentante Legale* dott. Giovanni Ramonda

### **OPERAZIONE COLOMBA**

**nonviolent peace corps**  
[www.operazionecolomba.it](http://www.operazionecolomba.it)

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