



CONFERENCE EPISCOPALE DU RWANDA

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PRESS RELEASE AFTER THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE RWANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE HELD IN KIGALI FROM 19 TO 22 MARCH 2019

From 19 to 22 March 2019, an ordinary meeting of Catholic Bishops of Rwanda was held in Kigali, at the headquarters of the 'Conférence Episcopale du Rwanda (CEPR)'. This session of the first quarter of 2019 was led by His Lordship Philippe RUKAMBA, Bishop of Butare and President of the CEPR.

In the introductory words, the chairman of the session announced to his colleagues the items on the agenda. They included the sharing of the news of the universal Church, the exchange of information of the Church in their dioceses since December 2018, the revision of the reports on the activities of the inter-diocesan services as well as the revision of various points of the pastoral program as a whole. In particular, the Bishops also had to discuss the behavior of the Church and its faithful during the 25th commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 by confirming their faith in God and helping one another. The Bishops also had to rework the document "Tugendere hamwe" (Let's Move Together), which describes the design and running of good pastoral care. In this context, they would advocate a good common way for all dioceses, through which Christians give alms and other offerings. They also exchanged on the opportunities offered by the good collaboration between the states and the Holy See and appointed members in the incomplete episcopal commissions for their good functioning.

Before analyzing all the aforementioned points, the Bishops first followed the speech of Monsignor Andrzej JOZWOWICZ, Apostolic Nuncio to Rwanda, who told them that he welcomed the program of collaboration between Rwanda and the Holy See. He told the Bishops that the state wanted this collaboration and asked them to help justify it so that everything went well. He also recalled that throughout the Church, Good Friday, Christians give alms for the maintenance of holy places in Israel.

The Bishops, then, exchanged news of the local Church, dominated by the various activities carried out by the Bishops themselves in their respective dioceses. The SCEAM, Symposium of the Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, will celebrate its golden jubilee from 20 to 29 July 2019 in Kampala, Uganda. The Bishops also received in audience representatives of the Rwanda Interfaith Council (RIC) to discuss the lines that the jurists of churches and religious denominations will use when drafting the statutes that will govern this new body that will aim at peace, collaboration and mutual respect.

During this session, the Bishops also received the reports on the different achievements of the Episcopal Commissions and the Inter-diocesan Services in 2018 and exchanged information on thereon. These included, firstly, the report of the General Secretariat of the CEPR, the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace (CEJP), the National Secretariat for Family Action (SNAF) and the capacity building service within the Church.

They also looked through the reports of the National Secretariat for Catholic Education (SNEC), the National Office of Catechesis (BNC), the Pontifical Mission Works (OPM), and the Episcopal Commission for Youth Ministry (CEPJ), the Episcopal Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity (CEAL) and Radio Maria Rwanda. They finally examined the reports of the Inter-diocesan Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Rwanda (TECIR), Caritas Rwanda and Kinyamateka. They generally noted that the year 2018 went well for all commissions and services. They thanked all those who submitted their reports and recommended that future reports describe challenges and exit strategies to improve the mission.

The Bishops exchanged on some issues raised in the reports and proposed appropriate solutions. They expressed that they wanted there to be, at the level of the CEPR, a person responsible for the development of pastoral projects and their implementation. They decided to create a commission in charge of the pastoral care of the children, made up of the persons who were responsible for it in all the dioceses. The Bishops have realized that the faithful need a magisterium that educates them and strengthens their faith. Therefore, they urged the priests to restart catechesis for different categories of Christians. Concerning the houses of Caritas Rwanda, they decided that those that are not used should be ceded to the poor but that those which are very old should be renewed for other purposes.

After examining the reports of the commissions and the inter-diocesan services, the Bishops examined other points related to pastoral care in general. They approved the basic articles governing how almsgiving will be carried out in the church and how Christians will present their offerings at masses and celebrations to reflect their inner piety. The Bishops will inform the faithful of their dioceses and give instructions in relation with this subject. The Bishops also decided to prepare a message to help Christians and all Rwandans during the 25th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, by contemplating the Risen Christ from the dead to save us from eternal death. This message will be read to Christians on April 7, 2019 in all the Masses and Celebrations of the Word of God in place of the homily. The CEPR was also informed of the current state of construction of its building in Ruyenzi and defined strategies for efforts to be made so that this work can progress well and be completed on time.

The Bishops were pleased to communicate to the Catholic Church of Rwanda the recommendations of the ACOREB session, held in Ngozi from March 11 to 14, 2019. It is very necessary to talk to young people, to listen to them, to advise them and have them actively contribute to their own pastoral work. This requires a renewal of the functioning and mission of Catholic Action Movements to conform to the present and help solve the problems facing Christians. It is also necessary to take advantage on technology in pastoral care, especially

among young people, and to remind parents that they are the first to take care of their children's education.

The Bishops unanimously condemned the sexual abuse of minors suspected on some priests and religious and reaffirmed that they would never tolerate such behavior by anyone guilty of it, but that they would collaborate with the courts to ensure that good triumphs over evil. However, they called on everyone not to take advantage of this position to falsely advance such accusations.

The Bishops also presented certificates of merit to SORAS Group Limited and ISANGO STAR TV in recognition of their contribution to pastoral care. SORAS is the special sponsor of Kinyamateka, the Catholic Church's newspaper, while Isango Star TV regularly broadcasts Sunday Masses and various local church ceremonies to strengthen God's good relations with his people in the Catholic Church.

Closing the work of this session, the Bishops recommended putting into practice, as soon as possible, the previous recommendations that had not been applied. And before separating, they wished each other a holy Lent and the Easter of the Lord.

Done at Kigali on 22nd March, 2019.

Father Martin NIZIGIYIMANA,
Secretary General of CEPR

✠ Philippe RUKAMBA,
Bishop of Butare and President of CEPR