

A PUBLICATION OF THE



MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN), inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggles for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations, namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC, for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa. Presently there are twenty eight member organizations of women and men religious congregations supporting the work of AFJN.

REPORT

Continental Conference on Land Grab and Just Governance in Africa



From November 22 to 26, 2015, an international conference on *Land Grab and Just Governance in Africa* brought to Limuru, a suburb of Nairobi (Kenya) one hundred and sixty four delegates drawn mainly from across Africa, and others from Europe, America and Asia. For three full days the participants addressed the scourge of land grabbing on the African continent, and its proximate and long-term negative impacts on local populations.

The conference provided an ideal platform for both the participants and the presenters to dissect the new threat to food security and the sovereignty of African countries. This phenomenon was amplified by the food and financial crisis of 2007 and 2008. The spread of land grabbing in Africa is predominantly attributed to bad governance of African leaders and the lack of comprehensive and credible land tenure policies across Africa. Some African leaders readily enter into contracts with multinationals to the great disadvantage of local communities, often signing contracts that pitch business corporations against the citizens.

The participants composed of scholars, students, farmers, activists from the NGO world, leaders or chiefs from the major faith traditions (Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions) unanimously acknowledged the existence of the threat and vowed to form a united front against the menace.

FIRST DAY HIGHLIGHTS



On the first day, the opening sessions set the stage with an emphasis on the salient aspects, statistics and the scope of land grabbing in Africa. Archbishop Thomas Luke Msusa of Blantyre and President of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Sr. Teresa Okure (the keynote speaker), Fr. Aniedi Okure (Executive Director of AFJN), Fr. Samuel de Jesus (Deputy Secretary General of SECAM), Fr. Ferdinand Lugonzo, (Secretary General, AMECEA), Beatrice Odera, (National Executive Secretary of the Kenyan Catholic Justice and Peace commission), Fr. Chika Onyejuwa (Executive Secretary of AEFJN), Chief Tamale (traditional leader from the Buganda Kingdom in Uganda), highlighted the need of a bold approach to reverse the devastating effects of land grab. Sr. Prof. Teresa Okure expertly revisited the spiritual understanding of communal land ownership in Africa in the light of biblical scholarship and thereby recasting new insights into the debate. She insisted that the role of the king is to protect the people and their land as stipulated in the covenant. In addition, the Encyclical *“Laudato Si”* of Pope Francis further provided a strong basis to the keynote speaker to substantiate the urgency of the matter and our moral duty to stay engaged on

the issue. She noted further that in the plan of the Creator, the earth is a living organism, destined to give life to its inhabitants. It is because the earth has life itself, that God commanded her to bring forth life: "Let the earth bring forth vegetation; seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruits with seed in them, according to their various kinds" (Genesis 1:11). Chief Tamale of Buganda kingdom articulated the spirituality of land as understood by a traditional chief in relation with the world of our ancestors, a sacred heritage and not a commodity for sale. Our land is sacred; those who sell it betray their people.

SECOND DAY HIGHLIGHTS



The second day was tremendously rich in content. At the plenary sessions, presenters explored the international, regional and national policies promoting or facilitating land grabbing. A few cases of resistance were drawn to map out the resistance and resilience efforts across the continent. Even with rudimentary means, some communities continue to put up a robust fight against the mighty multinationals or local land grabbers; for instance the campaign against the G8 Alliance case of Dominion Farms in Nigeria and Kenya.

A noteworthy innovation of the conference was its abundant use of breakout sessions. In the breakout sessions, participants and presenters alike extensively discussed the selected case studies to deepen their understanding of the issues at stake. Nineteen case studies drawn from the West

African coast, the Sahel Belt, Angola, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Gabon, Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar and more were tabled to illustrate the scope of the scramble for African land. In the final analysis, the blame of the shameful trade points to the multinational corporations in Europe, United States, and Asia - particularly China that take advantage of the chaos in many African countries to siphon their resources.

THIRD DAY HIGHLIGHTS

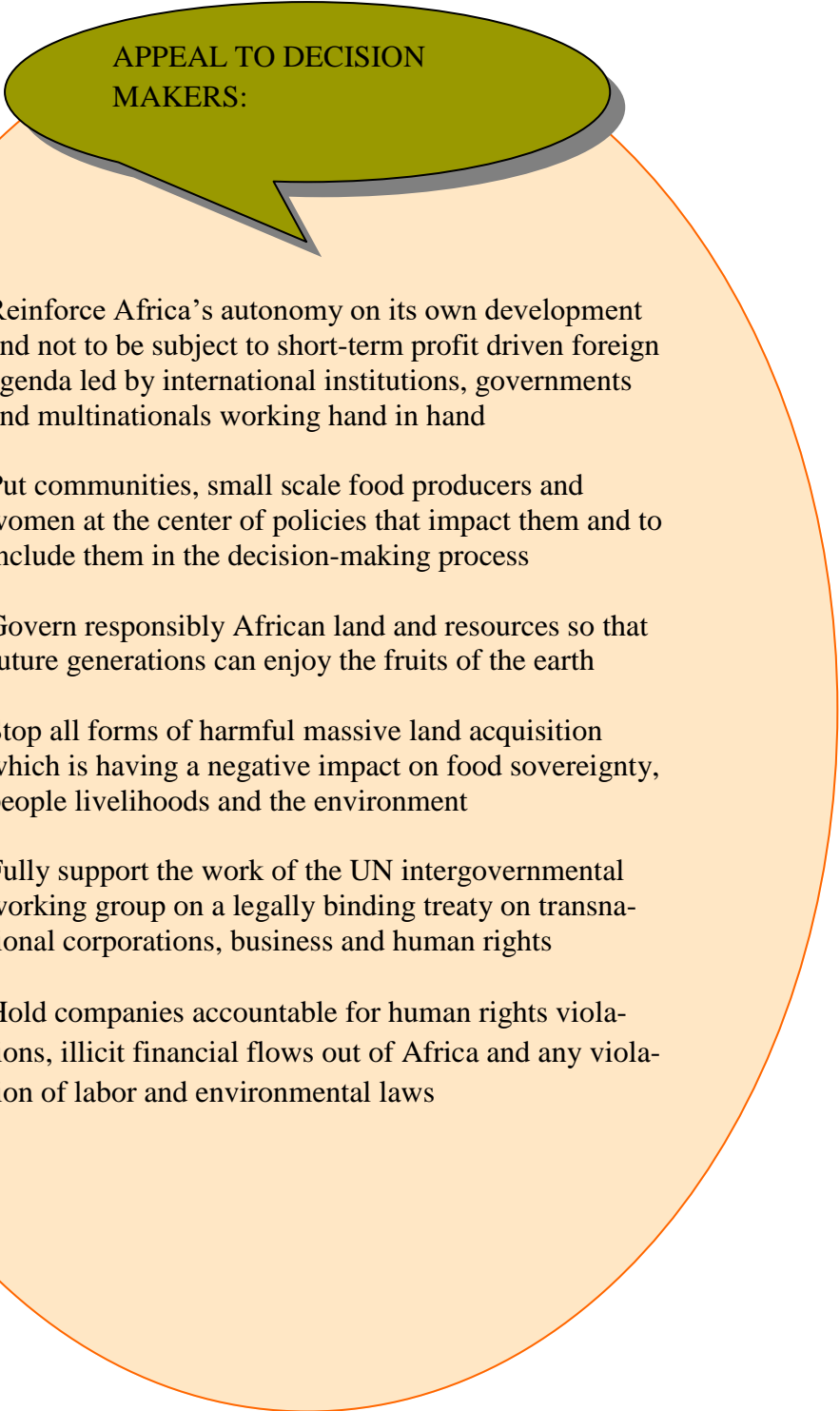
On the third day, the participants clocked the series of case studies and opened the debate for a bold plan of action. Two major documents stemmed from the discussions: a commitment statement that encapsulates the strategies for personal and group commitment. It is our roadmap, for our land is sacred and we must protect it at all costs against any speculation; the second document is the Nairobi Declaration destined to the international governing bodies and the wider public, multinationals and states, investors and advocates of human rights. This document warrants our full attention.

CORE POINTS THE PARTICIPANTS ADDRESSED IN THE SHORT AND LONG-TERM:



- Communities to keep or regain access, control and ownership over their land and other natural resources in order to feed their families, their communities and eventually, to feed the world
- The right to food and to water to be fully realized as an indivisible part of human rights

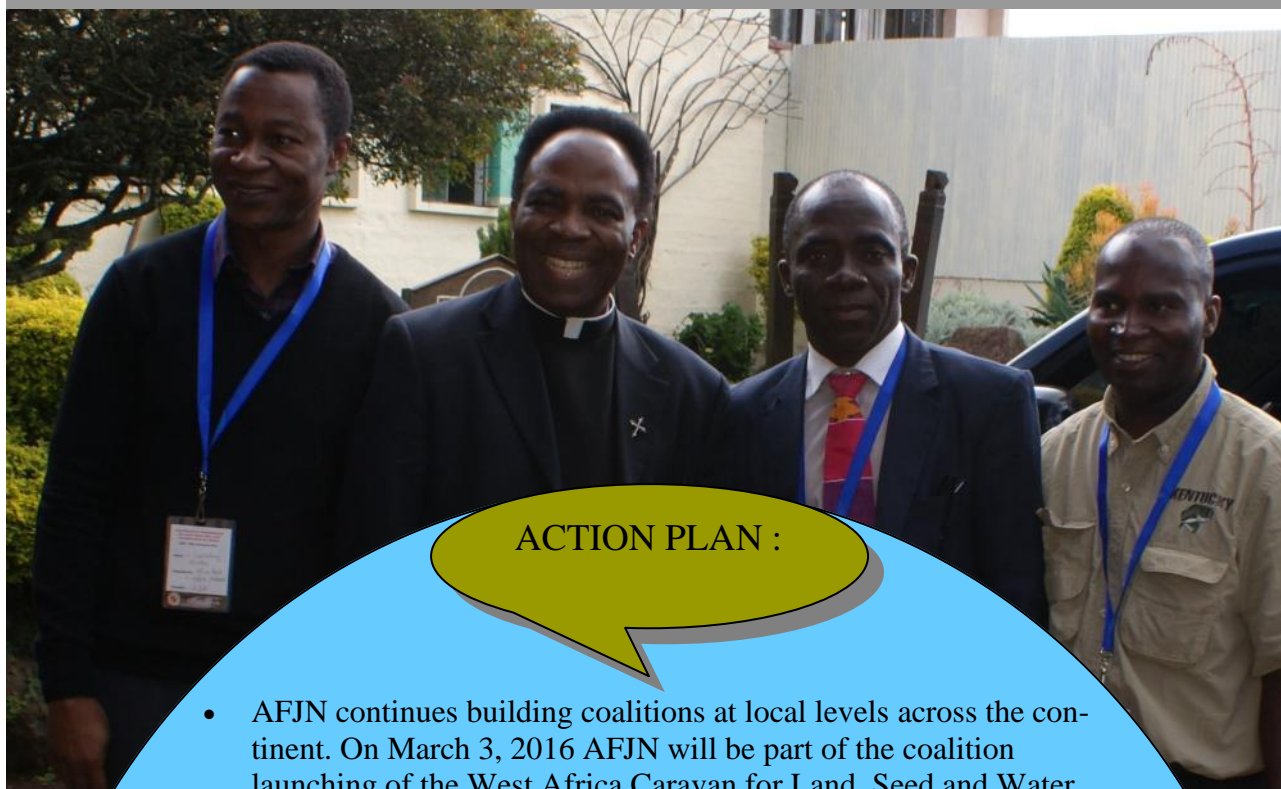
- Local community-owned and driven investments to flourish
- Communities to invest in other levels of the food chain (stocks, processing, distribution, ...) in their own countries
- An increase in resilience of rural communities avoiding rural exodus and forceful and inhumane evictions
- Gender equality and job opportunities to youth
- Communities' right to protect their identity and cultural heritage



APPEAL TO DECISION
MAKERS:

- Reinforce Africa's autonomy on its own development and not to be subject to short-term profit driven foreign agenda led by international institutions, governments and multinationals working hand in hand
- Put communities, small scale food producers and women at the center of policies that impact them and to include them in the decision-making process
- Govern responsibly African land and resources so that future generations can enjoy the fruits of the earth
- Stop all forms of harmful massive land acquisition which is having a negative impact on food sovereignty, people livelihoods and the environment
- Fully support the work of the UN intergovernmental working group on a legally binding treaty on transnational corporations, business and human rights
- Hold companies accountable for human rights violations, illicit financial flows out of Africa and any violation of labor and environmental laws

AFJN Staff Present at the Conference: Fr. Barthelemy Bazemo, MAfr, Fr. Aniedi Okure, OP, Mr. George Saku-Darkey (Ghana Volunteer) Mr. Ntama Bahati



ACTION PLAN :

- AFJN continues building coalitions at local levels across the continent. On March 3, 2016 AFJN will be part of the coalition launching of the West Africa Caravan for Land, Seed and Water rights.
- Follow up awareness and prevention forum against land grabbing is scheduled in April in Tanzania in collaboration with the Precious Blood Fathers, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, other faith communities and civil society organizations. AFJN is also building up a coalition of many faith communities and civil society organizations for a follow up advocacy conference in Nigeria end of May 2016 and similarly in Uganda in June.
- AFJN is already working on a national conference in Ghana to promote awareness and prevention of land grabbing in collaboration with the National Catholic Secretariat and the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge on Development (CIKOD). The awareness strategy includes information sharing using the platform of FM radio stations and training in grassroots education and advocacy.
- Nigeria's delegation to the conference plans to work with those from Mozambique and Kenya to ensure that land deals by the US based agribusiness Dominion Farms is just and respectful of the rights of local communities where the land is taken.

ORGANIZERS RECOGNITION

As the participants prepared to leave on the fourth day, they rightly praised the major organizers of the event; firstly the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) for initiating the conference and carrying it to completion, secondly a vote of thanks to the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) for hosting the conference and giving it a continental scope; thirdly Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) and the International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies (CIDSE) for their active participation, their expertise and the sharing of information from their partners, and lastly the coalition of many partners across Africa including Catholic Relief Services, Land Matrix, Partners for the Land and Agricultural Needs of Traditional People (PLANT) the Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Patrimony (COPAGEN), GRAIN, and many others that made it possible.

DONORS RECOGNITION

We conclude this report with a heartfelt vote of thanks to donors who financially supported the organization of the conference. We are indebted to the Catholic Relief Services, The Raskob Foundation, Misereor, The Missionaries of Africa, Manos Unidas, Trocaire, Fastenopfer and many other individual donors for their generosity. Your generosity made this conference a success. We wholeheartedly thank you on behalf on our brothers and sisters on the African continent who are bearing the brunt of land grabbing, and who benefit from your generosity.

