MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, 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 struggle 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.

With all protocol observed, I begin by thanking the organizers of this gathering and all of you for being here and for your willingness to contribute to solving a basic problem that besets Ghana and the rest of Africa. There is an epidemic that grips Africa. It is the problem of governance. Governments across this continent, entrusted with the fundamental moral duty of working for the common good and ensuring equitable distribution of resources have failed to do so. Instead, they compromise the common good and future of their citizens for immediate monetary gains.

In 2013, African Catholic Bishops - SECAM, published a joint pastoral letter titled Governance, the Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa (a masterpiece and must read). They identified bad governance and corruption as a cancer that stands in the way of Africa’s development. Such is the case with the issue that has brought us to this gathering; the issue of land grabbing and dislocation of people from their lands and water resources.

Land deals in Africa has a common tread

Africa is the continent targeted most for large-scale land acquisitions. Over 10 million hectares, centered mostly in East and West African countries, have been acquired by investors from the

- Middle East who are looking for food and fodder production.
- UK and Asia (India, China, Malaysia) searching for biofuel production – for clean energy
- Domestic investors who partner with foreign investors to gain advantage in land acquisition
- Private companies focus on the production of sugar, rice, rubber, oil palm and jatropha as well as livestock activities.

Patterns and Consequences of Land Grabbing

Land deals have consequences for the life styles of communities, as documented by Land Matrix International (LMI):

- Acquired along major rivers and natural water sources
- They mostly involved land previously owned by a community
- They were often used for crop production by the community as com-
mon land

- Smallholder agriculture used to be practiced on acquired lands
- In effect, there is a direct conflict between communities and investors
- A change of land ownership has a direct impact on the sources of income, food and other resources for the affected communities
- Land targeted is often fertile and densely populated with good access to markets and cities. The population around provide cheap labor for investors
- Investors are interested in high value land and not in marginal land which is hard to develop
- The crops planted most are Palm oil, jatropha and sugar cane followed by rubber and a number of cereals.
- In general, most of the crops planted in grabbed land are not for consumption by the local communities but cash crop

**Informed Consent**

We discover that when properly consulted, local communities especially those have undergone awareness program of the implications of large scale land deals, often reject the takeover of their land by investors. The agents of investors know this and avoid community consultations during the negotiations preceding the contract agreement. Those that consult the community often do not give them the full picture, amounting to deceitful negotiations. They promise the community benefits, mainly in the form of educational and health facilities but also in roads and other types of development. But these are mostly empty promises. There is little compensation for the communities whose land and water resources are taken. According to Land Matrix, in only a third of the cases for which compensation was reported have promises partly materialized.

**Sowing the seed of Conflict**

Populations continue to increasing, but land size does not increase correspondingly. In Ghana for example, in 1960 the land size was 238,533 square kilometers. Today, the land size is still 238,533 square kilometers. On the contrary in 1960, Ghana’s entire population was 6.7 million, in 2015, the population of Ghana stood at 27.41 million, so we can assume at least 28 million in 2016. If you do the math, there are 21.3 million more people in Ghana today than in 1960, occupying the same land size.

The question is, if Ghanaians keep giving out large chunks of land to corporations, where will future generations of Ghanaians live, farm, and build homes and schools for their children? We are setting up conflict for future generations.

Already it is happening in some communities. At a recent roundtable meeting at AFJN in Washington with Fr. Peter Konteh, Executive Director of Caritas and Vice Chairman of Caritas Africa Humanitarian Team we learned that Sierra Leone is already seeing conflict between communities because of land grabbing. In one community for example, their common land was given out to investors. The communities no longer have a space to bury their dead. An attempt to get a piece of land in the neighboring town for burial plot has resulted in serious conflict. In effect, land grabbing is further dividing and subdividing Africa, keeping them in perpetual state of conflict while their raw materials are taken away.
Business corporations do not come to help you without having already calculated the profit they are going to make from you.

Let me repeat that. No business corporation comes to help you without having calculated a good profit they are going to make from the deal.

Business corporations, land developers, those in extractive industries, and those promising you abundant food and a better life do not come to “help” you for your sake. They come because they have already seen ahead. What they see is good for them.

Some already built into the contract an undue advantage for themselves and a great disadvantage for the local community. A case in point: An agribusiness company, Herakles Farms that acquired large chunk of land in Ghana’s Volta Region preached development, increased production, employment and improved living standards; coercing the community to sign and give away their land. AFJN obtained the contract document and found a clause that stipulates that if there is any dispute to this contract agreement in the future, the case will have to be settled in a court in Paris. Think for a moment. Local farmers in the Volta Region who do not have a passport, who do not speak French, who have already lost their farm lands and their source of livelihood, will have to find their way to the French embassy here in Accra for a visa with all the hassle that comes with it. They will have to hire a team of lawyers, pay for plane tickets for themselves and their lawyers, book a hotel in Paris for however long the litigation lasts, contribute to supporting French economy and cuisine, etc. to seek justice for their heritage taken over by a stranger! Explain that to me.

Unfortunately, there are always local insiders who are chief collaborators with these corporations, who serve as the doorway to the exploitation of the community, and who preach that what they do is best thing for the community. They readily mortgage the heritage of their people for a bowl of soup.

When these corporations dangle a few dollars or Euros in their faces, something strange happens: their rational, logical reasoning and ability to see beyond the immediate gratification seems completely annulled. What a tragedy!

It is time Ghanaians and Africans develop what the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche called "the art of mistrust," at least as an intellectual disposition in business engagements with others. When it comes to business dealings, do not take what is offered to you at its face value. Read between the lines. When it sounds too good to be true, look and think again because what you think it is, is not what it is.

On a deeper level, we need to take a look at a recurring pattern in Africa of which the Ghanaian soil bears a lasting testimony in the so called “Castle” in Cape Coast. It concerns the issue of Africans readily selling their own and their heritage for a bowl of soup. When one looks at the history of slavery, the history of colonization, the dynamics that reduces Africa to a land of permanent raw material extraction, and now a new form of colonization that is worse than the first, something striking stands out that can be depressing. Why do Africans readily sell off their own and their heritage for cheap gains? One recalls here that
some of the exchange incentives for local dealers during slave trade were mirrors, gun powder, bottle of gin/whiskey, umbrella, etc.

So brothers and sisters let us wake up and see what is at stake and take action for the good of the future. Let it not be that future generations will look at this generation and curse us for mortgaging their heritage for a bowl of soup. The children of Africans who were sold into slavery are still cursing Africa today for what happened to their forebears. History might forgive those who did not know better but history will not be kind to this generation because we should know better.

Remember that a handful of people can and have brought about a great change. History bears testimony to that. If you doubt it, learn from the wisdom of an African proverb that says, “If you think one is too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with one mosquito in it.” There is a saying that “All that it takes for evil to thrive is that good people do nothing.” So I thank you all for your determination to do something to erase this menace from Ghana, and from the continent.

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