

Africa Faith and Justice Network
3025 4th St NE, FL2
Washington, DC 20017

June 08, 2022

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Your Holiness,

We wish to be in communion with you and associate ourselves with your ministry during your upcoming visit to the African continent. Ahead of your trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan from July 2-7, 2022, we, the undersigned faith-based and civil society organizations from different continents, in solidarity with our African brothers and sisters, write to call your attention to some of the ongoing challenges confronting the continent.

These challenges have led to endless political instability and much suffering, poverty, war, and death. We ask that you address these problems in your message to citizens of the host countries, to African political leaders, and to all people of good will worldwide. Let the affected people know that we are not indifferent to their suffering and that we do not wish to be complicit through our silence.

We are concerned about the growing security deterioration. Currently peace in Africa is very fragile. In *Gaudium et Spes*, #78, the Church calls for peace, saying that “...all Christians are urgently summoned to do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about.” This call applies to all humanity because peace is a common good and transcends any human boundary. Many kinds of wars are being fought on the African continent. Nations are fighting against one another. Many wars are secessionist, separatist, civil, and religious. People are rioting against violent, tyrannical, and kleptocratic regimes. Decades after fighting for independence, Africans are fighting neo-colonization wars involving non-Africans. Multinationals have emerged as the new colonial masters, using the soft power of corruption and financing wars to get access to natural resources. Some of Africa’s conflict zones include the DRC, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Cameroon

It is fiercely urgent that African governments govern justly. Functioning institutions are fundamental to building the kind of democratic Africa that Africans desire for themselves. The people of Africa no longer want kleptocratic, tyrannical, or autocratic regimes. Such unaccountable regimes led by a few elites, often circumvent the laws to oppress their own citizens while protecting themselves, their families, and their properties. Their reckless disregard for the common good continues to undermine whatever progress has been made in oppressive states.

Prioritizing the fight against corruption and adopting systems of accountability are critical for building the Africa that Africans desire. The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar in its 2013 pastoral letter *Governance, Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa*, called corruption “**a cancer that stands in the way of Africa’s development.**” Corruption is one of the reasons why poverty persists in Africa. *Leaders use their positions to misappropriate public funds, land and other resources at the*

expense of those they govern. Corruption thrives in schools and hospitals. Judges do not render justice, and courts prosecute trumped up charges. Prisoners are released not because they have served their time, but because they have paid money.

Corruption is not only financial. Evidence shows that the workplace is often unsafe for women and girls who are forced into unwanted sex as a condition for employment, promotion, or retention. Nepotism and favoritism continue to hamper productivity and prosperity in most African countries. Corruption is widespread, whether Christianity or other faith traditions form the majority.

Tribalism, xenophobia, and racism continue to claim lives and divide communities across the African continent. *“If the conviction that all human beings are brothers and sisters is not to remain an abstract idea but to find concrete embodiment, then numerous related issues emerge, forcing us to see things in a new light and to develop new responses.” Fratelli Tutti, #128.* Tribalism has led to countless deaths in Africa including most recently the two countries you are visiting — the DRC and South Sudan.

In South Africa, xenophobic violence against African immigrants has been an all too common occurrence. Racism and xenophobia against sub-Saharan African migrants journeying to Europe for a better life is on the increase. No matter the reasons, violence, hatred, discrimination, and hostility against anyone based on origin, ethnicity or race has no merit and must be condemned in the strongest terms and fought. Politicians and church leaders must become models of tolerance in order to build nations and communities of peace and prosperity.

Land grabbing (often disguised as investment) has led to a new scramble for the partition of Africa. As of June 1, 2022, data by Land Matrix shows that 12,543,089 hectares (125,430.89 square kilometers) of Africa’s arable land has been grabbed by foreign agribusinesses. These lands have been had for as little as \$0.50 per hectare per year for up to 99 years, subject to renewal. In the DRC, the land acquired by multinationals totals 52,147.42 km², which is a little more than the size of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The acquisition of Africa's land on a large scale by multinational agribusinesses amounts to an organized land-grabbing scheme with potential consequences worse than colonization. It threatens lives, livelihoods, the environment, the peace and the sovereignty of the affected countries. Populations are being displaced and landowners are becoming landless. Prohibited toxic fertilizers and pesticides are being used on these lands, causing serious damage to rivers, lakes and even underground water sources. The current rate at which Africa is losing much of its arable land, threatens the continent’s food security and sovereignty. This must stop.

Your Holiness, notwithstanding many issues of equal importance including human trafficking, women’s economic empowerment, arms trade, illicit financial flows, drug abuse by youth, and widespread unemployment, we strongly believe that your voice on the issues we have highlighted will have significant impact. We hope that you will consider these issues as you address the people of God in the host countries and that you will call upon Africans and all people of good will to join hands in finding adequate solutions.

Sincerely,

Africa Faith and Justice Network

[Names of Signers]

Cc: Apostolic Nuncio to the United States
Apostolic Nuncio to the Democratic Republic of the Congo