

**MESSAGE OF THE SECAM PASTORAL LETTER**  
**‘Governance, the Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa’**

Your Eminences  
My Lord Bishops  
Members of the Diplomatic Corp  
Honorable Ministers  
Members of Parliament  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Pastoral Letter titled ‘**Governance, the Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa**’, which we about to launch, is in line with the message of the Pope Benedict XVI Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus* . The Pastoral Letter points out that the Church in Africa cannot be indifferent and isolated in the face of our present socio-political and economic challenges that have become a major concern in Africa. In the spirit of peace and justice, it notes that common good, respect of people’s rights, and the promotion of good governance are the essential elements of the Gospel message.

The Pastoral Letter views human beings as being granted free will, which is the human freedom expressed through one’s choice to belong and one’s choice to express oneself freely in truth. In the exercise of this freedom in truth, human beings cannot be subjected to restriction or constraint. These considerations explain the passage to democratic transitions and indeed demand a new form of governance in Africa. The Church in Africa lives and works in a society in which she encounters the tragedy of human selfishness, pain and suffering in the midst of a politically tense environment. At the same time the Church is called upon to break the wall of powerlessness in the face of difficulties, to be overcome by living in solidarity with the bruised and maimed of God’s children.

The Pastoral Letter derives its inspiration from Pope Benedict XVI’s message which mentions that, peace is not merely a gift to be received; it is also a task to be undertaken. Thus He says, in order to be true peacemakers, we must therefore educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, and fraternity, in being active within the community and concerned to raise awareness about national and international issues and the importance of seeking adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth, the promotion of growth, cooperation for development and conflict resolution (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus* No. 23-29)

In the Pastoral Letter it is clearly shown that common good, respect of people’s rights, and the promotion of good governance are the essential elements of the Biblical message. The Bible views

human beings as being granted free will, which is the human freedom of choice to belong and the choice to express oneself without restraint. This will ultimately lead to democratic transitions in Africa.

Political leaders in Africa are being urged to see poverty eradication as a priority by using proceeds from the continent's natural resources. This should be addressed through denouncing all forms of corruption, which is a canker in our midst. Also political leaders and governments are urged to address the issue of elections, that they should be free, fair, transparent and non-violent.

The Pastoral Letter clearly urges that everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the Common Good of all members of society. A better society is not for the benefit of the elite but for all. The way in which we organize our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow together in community and contribute to the Common Good. The Common Good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. The Common Good concerns the life of all and consists of three essential elements: respect for the person; the social well being and development of the group; and peace, which gives stability and is the source of security for a just order.

The church's role is explored, in the Pastoral Letter, using access points that include liberation, reconciliation and reconstruction, vis-à-vis democratic values of the quest for human dignity and participation of all people in decisions that affect the quality and direction of their lives. A time for transition from colonial rule and other systems of governance, to democracy in Africa is symbolic, it is an opportune time. A transition creates new opportunities to heal wounds and build bridges. The challenge is to seize the opportunity and its burden of responsibility to redefine the task of the Church and society in general, in working towards building of our nations in Africa. The challenges include the abolition of injustices and the formation of a liberating social order. The Church plays a prominent role as custodian of ethical values, pacesetter in the process of democracy and as one of the main stakeholders in good governance and the common good.

We would therefore continue to collaborate with governments and other institutions for the integral human development of Africa.

We hope that you will find time to read and digest the contents of this Pastoral Letter.

Thank you and may God Bless Africa!

Presented by Most Rev. Gabriel Mbilingi, Archbishop of Lubango, Angola and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of SECAM