

Church Women's Report to the Church Leaders
Women's Seminar
New York Hotel, Juba
1-2nd April 2008.

Preamble

We are women, a significant part of the body of Christ, the Church that we love so much. The Holy Spirit who empowers both men and women guides the church as the body of Christ. As women, we affirm the fact that our presence and services in relation to spiritual and social roles especially women's resilience in both church and society have been somehow recognized and clearly evident. We however acknowledge that amidst conflict and post-conflict in Sudan, our communities have not been a very safe home for us. Amidst that reality, we also experience discrimination in most levels of decision making in society at large and the Church in particular. There are still some church ministries that we are not allowed to be involved in despite the fact that the majority of church membership is women. We feel that some church leaders still resist our empowerment as a threat to their positions of power. Such attitudes and practices contradict the fullness of our being as part of the one and united body of Christ where the criterion of full participation is not determined by whether one is male or female... (Galatians 3:28).

Existing Challenges

During the twenty-one years of war and post-war, this resulted into the following:

- Families were scattered and separated due to insecurity problems;
- Children and women were abducted and abused;
- Girls and boys were abused in front of their parents;
- Children were trafficked for cheap labour and prostitution;
- Children lost their education and became street children vulnerable to child soldiers and crime. eg. Drug traffickers and abusers; child prostitution; prone to different types of crime;
- Increased widowhood vulnerable to dispossession of property and wife inheritance;
- General silence around issues of sexuality, HIV and AIDS;
- Forced marriages, increased polygamy and HIV and AIDS incidents, which have led to women being stigmatized and blamed for HIV infections;
- Job loss of the majority farm workers and increased poverty, which led to increased number of women involved in traditional beer brewing for families' economic sustainability—subjecting them to imprisonment under the Sharia Law;
- Poor sanitation, lack of access to basic services like health care, education, shelter and food;
- Exposure of women to gender-based violence;
- High levels of corruption and lack of transparency in the Government and Church resulting in women's vulnerability to sexual abuse and general loss of their dignity—

- Resulting in frustration expressed in alcoholism, drug abuse and continuous killings, inter-tribal conflicts and general post-conflict trauma;
- Early and unwanted pregnancies resulting in death due to illegal abortions;
- After the signing of CPA three years ago, as women we are looking forward for the full implementation of the 25% women's representation at all levels of decision-making.

Recommendations

As churchwomen, who are going forth in faith for a healed and peaceful Sudan, and more inclusive and united Church, we seek God's mercy and guidance and implore our church leaders to consider our humble contribution in the following recommendations:

- Need for churches and especially church leaders to break the silence around issues of sexuality, HIV and AIDS;
- Churches to mainstream HIV and AIDS in their church schools' curriculum;
- Churches through their various ministries and family life education to encourage Christian men (fathers) to be involved in the life of their families;
- Children's ministries (Sunday school and Holy Childhood Programme) to be an important part of the Churches' ministries:
 - Invest in training of teachers/animators, development of training manuals;
- Churches to have clear pre-marital educational programmes that would include encouragement for Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) for engaged couples before they enter into marriage;
- Promotion of women's rights through gender (relationship between men and women) awareness campaigns and training targeting both men and women;
- The churches to encourage religious and lay women to be recommended and allowed to go for scholarship;
- Churches to prioritize the training and equipping of pastors' and catechists' wives and evangelists for effective delivery of their services;
- Churches to invest in adult education for both women and men;
- The SCC member churches to re-open the Women's Desk in the national office and the rest of the regions in Sudan;
- Churches to plan for programmes that can bring together the women and men of different faiths and church traditions so as to bring to reality healing, reconciliation and peace in our communities:
 - To continue strengthening ecumenism:
 - To continue organizing reconciliation, forgiveness and healing programmes for the church and communities in general;
 - To involve women in implementation of such programmes so as to use the women's resources and experiences as well;
- The church to stop applying double-standard measures regarding moral issues and expectations especially when it comes to women and men;
- The Church to rise up and regain its prophetic voice during this critical transition period (between the signing and implementation of the CPA).

We submit all these with deep faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ who is the basis of our unity and the Prince of Peace, the Sudanese Hope. AMEN.