

PRESS RELEASE

The All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations are appealing for everyone to pool their efforts in the fight against human trafficking.

The celebration of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, on 30th July 2017, provides the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the West African Observatory on Migrations (WAOM) with the opportunity to express their compassion for all the victims exploited by other human beings throughout the world, in particular in Africa. No human soul can, in all conscience, remain insensitive to the tragedy that forced labour, trafficking in human organs, or the sexual exploitation of one human being by another for profit, represents. Every day, the churches of Africa and the member organizations of the West African Observatory on Migrations receive testimony from men, women and children who have been turned into domestic slaves, exploited in factories and farms, or forced into armed conflict, prostitution, pornography or begging.

It is often difficult to imagine the atrocious ways in which human beings can be mistreated by other human beings in Africa and other places around the world. Hunger, unemployment, failing harvests and poverty are forcing a growing number of families to sell their children rather than using official adoption channels. Many families are also pushing their daughters into forced marriages, as a way of getting money. Millions of men, women and children, both in Africa and throughout the world, find themselves in vulnerable situations, as refugees or internally displaced persons, due to wars and natural disasters, forcing them to accept every conceivable form of exploitation to survive. As is ethically required of all human societies and in the name of the faith that unites all believers, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations is calling on everyone profiting from the exploitation of a human being to refuse to participate in these crimes that are condemned by religious and secular morality alike.

The churches of Africa and the member organizations of the West African Observatory on Migrations are continually taking preventative, protective and humanitarian action to assist the victims of trafficking. As they are community-based, churches are often the most effective places to sensitize communities against selling their sons and daughters, who are later exploited in the countryside and towns of their own countries, and countries other than their own. Considering the complexity of the human trafficking issue and the criminal nature of the people and the organizations that profit from it, the All African Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations are calling on the African States to implement more effective repressive action against these organizations and people, while avoiding criminalizing victims and their communities. Now more than ever, African States should be devoting additional resources to ensuring the reinsertion of trafficking victims returning to their country of origin.

Due to the regional and transcontinental nature of the trafficking of African men, women and children, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations are also calling on the regional economic communities (ECOWAS, ECCAS, IGAD, EAC, SADC, etc) and the African Union to intensify regional cooperation, and to come to an agreement with their counterparts in Europe and the Middle East, to ensure that the rights of African migrant workers exploited in these regions are respected. While commending the efforts of the African States that have reinforced existing legislation against human trafficking and migrant smuggling, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations wish to express their deep concern

regarding the criminalisation of hauliers and African citizens exercising their right to freedom of movement within the regional areas of the continent. Such criminalisation, partly a consequence of European Union pressure on certain African countries following the Valletta Summit, and the lack of legal means available to Africans to exercise their right to mobility, can only lead to migratory routes, that are even more dangerous, being opened and an increase in the recourse to traffickers.

For the All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations, promoting economic and social justice, and democratic values, at national and international levels would offer a long-term solution to human trafficking. By fairly distributing resources, decent employment would be available to all, enabling everyone to feed their families and provide an education for their children. Human trafficking will not be eradicated without facilitating the regularisation of migrant workers and respecting their rights wherever they exercise their professional activities, ending the kafala system in the countries of the Middle East, and taking strong action against the demand for prostitutes and a labour force at the beck and call of destination countries. The All Africa Conference of Churches and the West African Observatory on Migrations remind everyone that the fight against human trafficking is everyone's responsibility, whether it be at the individual, family, community, country, regional or international level, for all human beings merit respect and compassion.

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