

**REPORT ON THE MEETING OF A DELEGATION OF THE CAMEROON ECUMENICAL FORUM FOR  
CAMEROON WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON ON THE 17<sup>TH</sup>  
MARCH 2020**

It was at exactly 1:33pm on Tuesday March 17, 2020 that the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cameroon, Chief Dr. Joseph Dion Ngute welcomed the delegation of the Cameroon Ecumenical Forum at his office in the Nation's capital, Yaounde.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), the Rt. Rev. Fonki Samuel Forba introduced the purpose of the visit and the members of the delegation to the Prime Minister. He explained to him that the Forum has as its main purpose the search for ways to assist the government of Cameroon and Religious bodies in Cameroon to find acceptable and genuine solutions to the Anglophone crisis that has led to the suffering of thousands of Anglophones as the armed conflict rages on. He particularly introduced the overseas partners and explained why others could not make it; the cause being the lockdown in Europe because of the rapidly spreading COVID 19 virus.

With the introduction of Rev. Dr. Lesmore G. Ezekiel, Director of Peace, Diakonia and Development of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) as the spokesperson of the delegation, he had this to say. He first of all thanked the government of Cameroon through the Prime Minister for accepting to have them in Cameroon and granting this official audience to them. He explained that the Global Ecumenical Forum represents over 1 billion Christians from various Christian denominations across the globe with PCC as one of the credible partners and member in Cameroon. He went further to express the deep concern of the Forum about what is happening in Cameroon that for many years had been known as the symbol of peace in Africa. He went further to explain that ecumenical forum is in Cameroon to expression of authentic solidarity that identifies with sisters and brothers in Cameroon, especially in moments of crisis like the one in Cameroon. He then conveyed the deep condolences of the Forum to the government and people of Cameroon for losing their dear ones to this crisis that is still a huge problem, needing lasting solutions.

Rev. Dr. Lesmore appreciated the efforts made by the government of Cameroon so far to resolve the crisis in which children can't go to school, women and girls are raped, kidnaps and abducted for ransoms are a common practice, killings and colossal damages still going on. He said that as Africans, this is unacceptable that brothers and sisters of the same country are experiencing these and presenting Africa as a land of cannibals. He underscored the fact that the peace and stability of Cameroon is the joy of the Forum and the entire Africa.

He encouraged the government to intensify their effort towards peace and lasting solutions, especially with the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) Commission. He

proposed that the government could consider granting general amnesty to everyone involved if that would bring about a lasting solution to the crisis.

Rev. Dr. Lesmore raised a critical question on how much the government had engaged the Religious Leaders of Cameroon towards finding lasting solutions to the crisis, whom he stated are neutral and can be used as mediators. He presented that Religious Leaders and their institutions as resources that the state can use to significantly contribute to resolving the crisis plaguing Cameroon. He said that with the outbreak of the COVID 19 virus, religious facilities and personnel can be involved in the fight against this global pandemic that threatens everyone on the face of the globe. He concluded by pledging the willingness and readiness of the Global Ecumenical Forum among other things, to accompany the government of Cameroon and the Religious Leaders Forum of Cameroon in humanitarian efforts to alleviate the suffering of thousands of Cameroonians affected by the crisis in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon (NWR/SWR).

### **Response from the Prime Minister of Cameroon**

He stated that he was happy to receive the delegation to his office, and also for the loaded message. He said that Religious Leaders have always been put at the center to assist in the resolution of the crisis in the two Regions and the government would continue to use them. He said that life is beginning to return to normal in the NWR/SWR as people were gradually returning to their homes, although this needs more encouragement.

He explained that each time the government and other missions went out, they met with Religious Leaders and have often listened to them and would continue to do so, especially as Pastors, Priests, and Imams go to places they cannot go and can meet the fighters whom they cannot meet. He went further to say that before the Grand National Dialogue, there were Ecumenical Prayers, in addition to the fact that Religious Leaders had led peace caravans that have helped to cause some of the Amba fighters to drop their arms and report to the Reintegration centers. He observed that they were examining why the (DDR) programme was not succeeding as intended.

He revealed that the Head of State, H.E. Paul Biya had created a Follow Up Commission to ensure the effective implementation of the resolutions of the Major National Dialogue, which would fast track the coming out of the Boys and laying down of their arms against the intoxication of the Diaspora. He said that many Religious Leaders would be members of this Follow Up Commission to be chaired by the Prime Minister. He said the Religious Leaders truly have major roles to play because almost all of the Boys fighting were either Christians or Muslims.

He stated that, like any other State, the State of Cameroon has the responsibility to keep peace and ensure the unity of the nation. He said that the soldiers who, in the course of exercising their duties, went into excesses are sanctioned accordingly without making it a public matter, because

their job is delicate as they have signed for death. He criticized the fact that the populations criticized and blamed the military when they misbehaved, but would not do so when the Boys do the same acts.

He called on the Religious Leaders to keep preaching and praying for peace and encouraging the Boys to drop their arms and return to normal life. At this point he thanked the Moderator of the PCC for his message of peace on the day of their Thanksgiving and Induction. He revealed that in some parts of the NWR/SWR, schools had reopened and should be encouraged because he was Prime Minister for the simple reason that he went to School.

He revealed that the President of the country honestly wants to see an end to the crisis and is restraining the military from the use of heavy arms in the conflict. He called on the Religious Leaders to assist with the DDR, especially those who have killed and need psychosocial support. He thanked the Forum for the initiative.

### **Other Contributions**

The Presbyterian Secretary of the East Mungo North Presbytery of the PCC and Parish Pastor of PCC Bastos, Yaounde, explained that the pressure of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) was very heavy on the Anglophone Community and institutions in the Francophone part of the country. And that many IDPs come to their Churches asking for assistance, but the Churches do not have the resources to assist these people. He requested that the Churches and Mosques and their leaders be included in the distribution of the national humanitarian scheme of the government. He continued that a considerable portion of the humanitarian gifts and finances by the government be made available to Anglophone Religious Leaders in areas both in the Anglophone Francophone Regions where many IDPs are taking refuge. He requested that Religious Leaders be involved in the humanitarian programme because people trust them more.

In response, the Prime Minister promised that this would be considered subsequently.

Rev. Dr. Lesmore presented a symbolic gift of a pen from the AACC to the Prime Minister with the inscription, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

Rev. Prof. Bosela E. Eale made the closing prayer and the visit came to an end by 2:05pm.

The following were members of the delegation: Rt. Rev. Fonki Samuel Forba, Rev. Dr. Lesmore G. Ezekiel, Rev. Professor Bosela Eale, Cheikh Oumarou, Imam Tukur Mohammed, Mohammed Aboubakah, Rev. Ajime Nelson, Rev. Masok B. Emmanuel, and Rev. Gustav Ebai

### **The Challenge**

After about 3 hours meeting with the Prime Minister, a televised message from the same Prime Minister closing down Cameroon's air, land and sea borders as a measure to preempt the spread of the coronavirus virus because some affected cases were identified in Cameroon was broadcast. Rev. Dr. Lesmore and Rev. Prof. Bosela who had booked to fly to Nairobi, Kenya the next day (March 18) could no longer fly. Many like them were stranded and frustrated by this abrupt decision by the Cameroon government. Our partners had to travel back to Buea the next day in order to proceed to Nigeria by land where they could fly back. They were now joined by one of the PCC Pastors, Rev. Dr. Chewachong Amos working and residing in Scotland who was caught up by the closing of borders as well. Through the intervention of the Moderator, an authorization from the Cameroon government for the border between Cameroon and Nigeria to be opened to them was obtained. That was Wednesday 18.

They traveled to Ekok, the border town to cross into Nigeria where they passed the night to cross into Nigeria the next morning. Unfortunately for them, Rev. Prof. Bosela was not allowed to enter Nigeria for lack of an Entry visa into Nigeria, a requirement that was not needed by Rev. Dr. Lesmore, a Nigerian and Rev. Dr. Amos, a Cameroonian that by mutual diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Cameroon, Cameroonians do not need an Entry visa into Nigeria and vice versa. The PCC driver, Mufa Daniel who drove them to the border had to bring Prof. Bosela's Passport to Buea for the visa which was already negotiated by the Rev. Ajime Nelson with the Nigerian Consulate in Buea to be issued by proxy to Prof. Bosela.

The driver was in Buea at about 5:30pm and by 6:30pm the visa was issued and the driver took off for Ekok, but passed the night in Mamfe, a town that is about two hours' drive to Ekok. Early the next day which was Saturday 21, both Prof. Bosela and Rev. Lesmore crossed into Nigeria and continued their journey.

### **Some Lessons Learnt**

1. That governments should not declare an abrupt shutdown of their borders and country without giving ample time for people to prepare themselves for it, because such an abrupt shutdown can cause serious problems to people even more than the crisis they want to preempt. At least 48 hours be given to people to prepare themselves in cases of emergencies.
2. Driving through almost all the key towns of the South West Region in Anglophone Cameroon affected by the armed conflict unexpectedly, allowed our partners to see some of the deserted and burnt down villages and bullets-ridden houses and settlements along the highways.
3. That African governments should ease movements within Africa by coming up with a common African visa that allows Africans to easily travel from one country to the next when in possession of such a visa, call it African Union visa.
4. The operating of a Nigerian Consulate in Buea, the former headquarters of Southern or British Southern Cameroons is a historical reminder that the struggle for the reinstating

of the statehood of the Southern Cameroons is not a false claim, but a legitimate struggle that needs a profound, rather than a casual and dispassionate attention and solution.

5. The stress that our partners went through is a sacrificial lesson to us that the price for peace is, and can always be very costly; therefore it needs resilience, wrapped quite often in frustration and pain to achieve that golden goal.

### **Recent Development**

The President of the Republic of Cameroon, Paul Biya, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 signed a decree creating a committee charged with the follow up of the implementation of the recommendations of the Major National Dialogue with the following persons: this committee is headed by the Prime Minister

1. The President of the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
2. The Metropolitan Archbishop of Yaounde
3. The Archbishop Emeritus of Douala
4. The President of the National Youth Council
5. A representative of the Catholic Church from the North West Region
6. A representative of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
7. A representative of the Cameroon Baptist Convention
8. Two representatives from the Muslim community from the NWR/SWR
9. Three representatives from the Diaspora
10. Four representatives of the Civil Society.

This Committee is assisted by a Secretariat and a technical committee of each of the eight committees of the Major National Dialogue appointed by the text of the Prime Minister.

This is a commendable move by the government of Cameroon and we hope that it would bring about the much desired genuine and just end to this crisis that has claimed thousands of lives.

Rev. Dr. Lesmore G. Ezekiel  
Delegation Leader

Rev. Ajime Nelson Zuwed  
Secretary of the Forum