

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AFTER INDUCTION

Honourable President of AACC,

Honourable members of the General Committee,

Honourable delegates and participants of this 11th General Assembly of AACC,

My sisters and brothers in Christ.

First of all I give thanks to God the almighty for calling me into this service as General Secretary of AACC, something which some months ago I would not even think about as a possibility. It is a great honor. I thank also my whole family for standing with me and supporting me in the decision to leave where we have been for some years to come back home to serve the church and people of Africa. I thank my predecessor, Rev. Dr. Andre Karamaga, and all the staff of AACC, past and present for the many efforts they have put into the work, so that AACC is strong enough to attract and keep competent staff. I want to publicly express my gratitude to Dr. Karamaga for his committed to smoothly facilitate the transition which is before us. He is one of those leaders who hand over to their successors in joy and thanksgiving to God.

WHY DO I ACCEPT THIS POSITION?

I have been asked by my friends whether I have thought carefully before I decided to leave my secure job in Europe and come to Africa. I want to say again: YES, I have thought carefully. We have prayed about it. We have talked about it. I come to serve Africa from Africa for many reasons:

- I am a child of Africa. This is where I was born, grew up, studied, started my ministry, started my family and I have always remained connected.
- I am committed to the course and welfare of Africa, from the bottom of my heart.
- I have been sent to serve in the global ecumenical movement, where I have gathered very useful experience, which I am glad to bring back and serve Africa.
- I have clearly heard the call of the Lord that it is time to come back.
- I have faith in Africa.

AFRICA?

I am aware of the bad image which Africa has, sadly among Africans and beyond Africa. It is identified with poverty, death, dirt, diseases, conflicts, totalitarianism, refugees, illegal migration, etc. For some it is a lost continent. For others it is a continent which needs a pity of the rest of the world. It is a continent which when it shows its best, some say this is not Africa. I come to Africa because my perception of Africa is different. Africa is to me a continent of HOPE.

- I am tired of those who ignore the development in Africa, choosing instead to focus on ONLY bad news which fit their stereotyped perception of Africa while ignoring anything good coming out of Africa.

- I want to contribute to changing the narrative about Africa by focusing primarily on great achievements and opportunities available every day in Africa while not ignoring the challenges and problems we are facing.
- Without ignoring the conflicts in countries like DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Chad, how about focusing on tremendous successes of democracy and rule of law which has overcome conflicts in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, etc. Since these do not fit in the stereotyped perception of Africa, we do not hear them enough in the media—also in Africa.
- How about the fact that Africa has countries with the fastest growing economies in the world at the moment. Social development is also extraordinary, with majority of the people having access to education, health, communication, financial services, etc. Don't we see?
- Africa has a vibrant church, and faith still matters to the people, even though faith is sometimes a major cause of conflicts—like in the whole world.
- Africa is a continent of celebration and joy for most of its people, even when they do not have the excesses in life like other continents. Challenges like loneliness and depression are not really known, which in other parts of the world are emerging to be big killers of people.
- My Africa is a continent of hope, a continent on the rise.

That is my perception of the continent, and that is why I come to serve the church in Africa.

THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

I come to serve in AACC because I have a passion for the ministry of the church in Africa. AACC is an instrument of the churches in Africa. It is a strong ecumenical organization, with a continental presence and reach. It has good leadership and established legacy. It is an organization which grows and transforms itself to adapt to new needs of the churches in Africa. I look forward to continue with the successful programs of AACC (e.g. Campaign for African dignity, Advocacy at the African Union, Agenda 2063, ecumenical theological education in Africa, gender justice, etc. We will pursue new emerging themes which this General Assembly has identified, particularly the challenge of migration and population explosion as well as special focus on the youth. I look forward to consolidate the financial situation of the AACC towards its sustainability.

WHERE WILL THE EMPHASIS BE?

I have been asked several times what my priorities will be. The answer is clear. I am not the organization. The emphases will be determined together by the structure of AACC, the highest of which is this assembly. I have been listening. I will wait to see what you decide. That is what we as your servants will implement. But there are some things which I may say already now.

- Thematic Relevance: We must do what the members, other stakeholder organizations in Africa want us, expect us to do because they address their needs.

- Organizational Sustainability: which depends on the members, staff and partners.
- Growth and deepening of AACC as an indispensable ecumenical organ of the member churches, which takes seriously the changing ecclesial and political context. I must mention as an example, we need to reach out to more churches to join, particularly the new and growing ones, with whom we have sometimes less theological affinity.
- Theological development, meaning that AACC being an incubator for theologians with competence to explore, propagate and present the African theological perspective at all levels, including at global levels.

IT IS GOD'S CALL

Lastly, I understand my work as a response to a clear God's call to me. I humbly accept it. One of the most difficult things to discern is God's call. For many years I decided that I will only know God's call not through visions and dreams and inner feelings, even not through my own reading of the Bible. It is through the church.

I always see my task as a leader not as a driver of a bus, whose passengers are simply waiting until the bus reaches its destination, but a football captain. No matter how skilled and gifted a captain is, is totally dependent on the play of each and every team member. I therefore take up this position only because I know I am part of the team which has many players. We have leaders of member churches. We have governance bodies. We have staff of all levels. We have partners of many countries.

Each one of us plays a significant part. Without cooperation and playing together, no matter what I do, we will not succeed. I count on you.

But most important, I say like..., Lord, if you do not go with me, I do not go. I need God's guidance and accompaniment throughout the way. I am comforted by the word the Lord promised to Joshua as he was taking over office from Moses: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5).