

# ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES (AACC)

## WOMEN'S PRE-ASSEMBLY COMMUNIQUE TO

### THE AACC 11<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY

#### **Preamble**

We, the women delegates, representing the 181 member churches and Councils of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) are thankful to the organizers of the AACC 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly for this opportunity to bring to the conference agenda the key issues that are holding back the progress of women in achievement of their full potential that will lead to the full development of the African Continent.

We submit this communique with the knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ came so that *"everyone may have life and have it fully"* (John 10:10). He demonstrated abundance of life by uplifting human dignity during His Holistic Ministry when he stood-up for social justice in deed and his teachings, restoration of human dignity through many miracles and paying the ultimate price to fully restore us in the image of God.

As a response to the call for justice in *Micah 6:8*, the Church has always had a God-given responsibility to promote justice for all humankind. We believe that man and woman are equal before the eyes of God because they are created in the image of God. As women delegates, we hold that when the Church promotes social justice, empowerment of women and protection of nature, it fulfills God's purpose for creation.

We acknowledge efforts by various AACC member churches, Theological Institutions, Faith-Based Organizations, and other stakeholders such as international organisations, national and local governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs, Civil Society organizations (CSOs), and development partners to promote gender justice. This has resulted to increase in women's education opportunities, women's ordination to priesthood in most churches, increase of women in leadership positions in the church, and other sectors, and different policies and frameworks that address gender justice.

Nevertheless, we, the women delegates, representing women in our member churches in this AACC pre-assembly, note the following issues of concern that continue to distort the perception of the image of God in woman in Africa, hence undermining her dignity:

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- 1) Access to education and vocational skills training for women of all ages and status which continues to be affected by social norms such as child marriages, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and child labour among others.

- 2) Women's access to economic opportunity and resources such as land and financial assets is still at a relatively low level.
- 3) Women remain among the most vulnerable groups especially during conflict situations where perpetrators of Sexual and Gender-based violence (SGBV) use of rape and abductions as tools of war.
- 4) Women are underrepresented and lack meaningful participation in many reconciliation and mediation processes.
- 5) The family is the basic building block of the Church and Society; however, it is threatened by internal pressures and negative external influences, harmful traditional practices, where gender injustice remains a key divisive factor.
- 6) In Africa, maternal mortality remains high due to inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- 7) Human Trafficking mostly affects women where they are enslaved into the most brutal and inhuman conditions such as undocumented migrant labour and sex slavery.
- 8) Women are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change which destroys their means of livelihoods, worsening their already very difficult circumstances.
- 9) In spite of several biblical texts that promote gender justice, the Bible continues to be read *selectively in some contexts* to reinforce cultural prejudices that demean women and deny them equal opportunities of leadership and effective participation in the church.

As women from Africa, representing all races, status and coming from churches in cities, towns and villages, we are united in our purpose to promote gender justice and social empowerment of women in respecting the dignity and God's Image in every human being.

We acknowledge that the AACC and its member churches have the capacity for resource mobilisation and advocacy for gender justice and social empowerment for women and hereby recommend to.

***The Church:***

1. Build its capacity to intervene directly in the education sector by providing education facilities where women of all ages including women with disabilities can be accommodated even in difficult circumstances to ensure continuity of education and skills training. Also sensitize the community to allow girls to go to school
2. Continue to implement programs and projects that address gender based violence (GBV) and respond to the needs of its survivors.
3. Amplify advocacy with AACC and its member churches, Theological Institutions, Faith-Based Organizations, and other stakeholders such as multilateral organizations, national and local governments, Non-Governmental Organization

- (NGOs, Civil Society organizations (CSOs), and development partners on key issues affecting women and those with disabilities in the continent such as climate change, human trafficking, harmful cultural practices and discrimination.
4. Endeavour to work more closely with Pan-African leaders through their institutions like the national governments, sub-regional economic bodies, African Union, and global bodies such as the United Nations, as the prophetic voice that keeps all reminded about women issues and commitments that they have made on gender justice and empowerment through treaties, conventions, protocols and other frameworks.
  5. Be a champion of peace, justice and dignity in the continent, and use its congregations to support women in conflict, human trafficking, statelessness, GBV, drug trafficking and alcohol abuse and other difficult circumstances materially and through prayer including safe houses for survivors while working with other religions and stakeholders.
  6. Be hubs of women's empowerment throughout the continent by creating safe environments where women can access economic resources to improve economic status to gain sustainable livelihoods.
  7. Inform and educate congregations on nurturing thriving families to value peace, justice and dignity and support and protect them from challenges currently facing them to assist in the healing process
  8. Develop platforms for dialogue and promote universal health care including women's reproductive health by providing information, education and services through its churches and health facilities, and develop tools for faith based women friendly services
  9. To interpret the Bible in liberating ways for all, being careful of the temptation/tendency to use patriarchal values that undermine the dignity of woman, in the interpretation of gender-biased biblical texts.
  10. Involve men in seminars, workshops and different trainings on women's rights and responsibilities, discussions on FGM practices, women's reproductive health, girl child marriages, GBV, fistula and other burning issues on women's rights.
  11. Ensure implementation of policies, laws, and by laws regarding women leadership or participation of women in all levels of decision making bodies of the church.
  12. Make gender justice a key component of AACC's national councils' and member churches' strategies, including developing or review of gender policies, and ensuring that their implementation and reporting mechanisms are put in place.

**Governments, development partners and other stakeholders:**

1. Support the church financially and technically to advocate for the enactment and implementation of laws and policies that ensure peace, gender justice and human dignity for women of all status.
2. Work with their national institutions, international organisations like Interpol, UN organizations and international human rights bodies, to prevent and protect women from human trafficking, harmful cultural practices, laws and policies that discriminate against them.
3. Increase financial allocations for health, especially women's reproductive health that ensure access to quality information, education and services for women of all ages.
4. Ensure implementation of commitments that they have made on women leadership, gender justice and empowerment through treaties, conventions, protocols and other frameworks.

**Women in leadership positions:-**

1. Be champions of women and major advocates of solutions to challenges inhibiting progress of women of all status.
2. Identify, promote and propose model interventions that will entrench social justice and women's empowerment mechanisms in churches and governments.

In conclusion, God has called the church to be an agent of change in church and society. We call upon the church, and especially church leaders, to leverage on the pulpit and all available platforms within the church to change the gender discriminatory cultures that many of our communities use to hold back the development of women.

The Church is a potent space for achieving the mission of Jesus Christ on earth that *"everyone may have life and have it fully"* (John 10:10). Let us promote peace, dignity, gender justice and empowerment of women.

***May God Bless You All.***