



INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN RWANDA

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Interreligious organizations in Rwanda (1): *Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda*

The Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda is a program of the Centre for Formation and Documentation of the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda. The executing agency is the National Committee in charge of Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda. The program consists of:

- *conferences*
- *national seminars*
- *local seminars*
- *and the publication of the acts of the seminars*

The conferences are typically held in institutions of learning (secondary schools and universities). They are organized around the theme of “the role of the religions in fostering unity and reconciliation of the people of Rwanda”. The conferences are facilitated by a team composed of a catholic priest, a protestant minister, a Muslim leader and the coordinator of the program. The coordinator presents the objectives of the program. The protestant minister introduces the question of the genocide and the responses of the religions in Rwanda. The Muslim leader presents the teaching of Islam on unity and reconciliation. The catholic priest explains the Christian vision of unity and reconciliation.

The Muslim-Christian National Seminars gather together both Rwandan Muslims and Christians of various churches. The theme of a national seminar is an issue identified as important to the reconstruction and development process of the country. The national seminars follow the same methodology:

- *Presentation of the question by an expert*

- *The response of the government and/or agencies of social development*
- *The responses of the religions:*
 - *The Catholic Church*
 - *A protestant church*
 - *The Islamic community*
- *The common final declaration in which the participants commit themselves to work together.*

The National Seminar themes since 1997 include:

- *1997 : Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Rwanda*
- *1998: The promotion of dialogue between Christians and Muslims for a peaceful coexistence.*
- *1999: Are Relations between Christians and Muslims in Rwanda possible?*
- *2000: Muslim-Christian Dialogue in view of interreligious conflicts resolution.*
- *2001: Muslims and Christians for the promotion of social justice in Rwanda.*
- *2002: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the field of human rights in Rwanda.*
- *2003: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the fight against violence.*
- *2004: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the fight against ethnicity.*
- *2005: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the fight against corruption.*
- *2006: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the fight against poverty in Rwanda.*

- *2007: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in the fight against the ideology of genocide.*
- *2008: The question of population growth as a handicap to socio-economic development of Rwanda.*

Since 2003, the Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda has organized national seminars for women. These seminars are organized by the women's division of the National Committee in charge of Muslim-Christians Relations in Rwanda. Themes of the women's seminars organized to date include:

- *2003: Acting together in the search for peace, justice, reconciliation and women's rights in the Rwandan society.*
- *2006: Rwandan women's participation in the socio-economic development of their country.*
- *2009: Rwandan women's participation in decision making in their country, in their family and in their faith communities.*

Local seminars develop and deepen the year's theme proposed by the national seminar. Thus the year between the 2008 seminar and the 2009 seminar was dedicated to the question of population growth in Rwanda. Local communities (associations, parishes, etc.) organize a 2-day event. These local communities invite participants from different faith communities living in the same area. Local seminars generally follow this program:

- *Presentation of the program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda by the coordinator of the Program.*
- *Presentation of the theme of the seminar by an expert.*
- *Point-of-view of the religion of the community that organizes the seminar.*

The acts of the national seminars are published in booklet form. Fourteen (14) booklets have been published to date.

The National Committee in charge of Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda.

Each committee is composed of a men's and women's subcommittee. The two subcommittees are the executing agencies of the Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda. They plan the activities and follow them through to their completion. The statutes of the

subcommittees are currently under development. Subcommittee members are all Christians from different churches. The Catholic Church is fully involved. Father Apollon Senyenzi, secretary of the Episcopal conference for ecumenism, and Father Cyrille Uwizeye were successive vice presidents of the men's subcommittee. Catholic women are also members of the women's subcommittee.

Participation of the Catholic Church in the Program.

Since the program's beginning (1997) the Catholic Church has been actively and officially involved. Members of the Catholic Church have always been present at national seminars either individually or as mandated by the leaders of the Church. There have always been Catholic speakers who presenting the vision of the Catholic Church on the subject. Currently Father Serge Moussa Traore - a member of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa and an expert in interreligious dialogue - works as a resource person in the program. He is part of the team presenting the Muslim-Christian conferences. He also participates in organizing the seminars. It should be noted that the program is primarily funded by the Dutch Catholic CMC/AMA.

Collaboration with the Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA).

The Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda is affiliated with the Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa. This program is based in Nairobi, Kenya. The African Program started in 1959. It is an initiative of several protestant churches. PROCMURA is dedicated to helping Christians living in an interfaith environment to remain faithful witnesses to the Gospel and to empowering those Christians to engage in constructive dialogue with Muslims for a peaceful coexistence. It should be noted that a Rwandan Catholic woman is vice-president of the African Program.

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