

A narrative report on the 15th Plenary Assembly and 40th Anniversary celebrations of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) held at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) in Accra, Ghana from July 26 – August 2, 2010 on the theme: *SECAM at 40: Self-Reliance: The Way Forward for the Church in Africa.*

A) Opening Ceremony

The 15th Plenary Assembly and 40th Anniversary celebrations of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) was held in Accra, Ghana from July 26 – August 2, 2010. The Assembly which had as its theme: *SECAM at 40: Self-Reliance: The Way Forward for the Church in Africa*, was attended by about 200 Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Religious and the lay faithful.

At the opening ceremony at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) in Accra the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, Mr. John Dramani Mahama urged the Catholic Church to continue to champion the cause of Justice and Peace in Africa.

He commended the Church for complimenting the efforts of Government in the areas of education, health and agriculture, and he praised SECAM for organising the Plenary Assembly and bringing many African Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops to Ghana, which he said was a blessing to the nation. (The Vice-President represented the President of Ghana who was at that time in Uganda for a Summit of the Africa Union).

In his opening remarks, Sir Paul Victor Obeng, Chairman of the National Planning Development Commission who chaired the function, called on Catholics to support the Church in Africa to achieve its goal of becoming a self-reliant continent.

Society, he said, had accepted the Church's moral authority because it has its flock at heart by providing them with holistic developmental needs.

Archbishop Leon Kalenga, Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, in addressing the Assembly hoped that in spite of the challenges facing SECAM, it would surmount

its problems and build a strong Church on the continent of Africa. He conveyed the greetings and blessings of the Holy Father to the Assembly.

His Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, Archbishop of Dar-es-Salaam, and President of SECAM, said the Mission of SECAM is “to promote its role as a sign and instrument of salvation and to build the Church as a family of God in Africa.”

He acknowledged the support of SECAM’s development partners, the Government of Ghana, the Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, the lay faithful and in particular, the Local Organising Committee.

The Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (CEP) in the Vatican, Most Rev. Robert Sarah, called on the bishops of Africa to intensify their evangelization efforts in Africa. He also conveyed the best wishes of the Prefect of the CEP, His Eminence Ivan Cardinal Dias to the Bishops.

In a goodwill message, Dr. Monsignor Josef Sayer, Head of MIEREOR, asked African bishops to be wary of negative tendencies of globalization adding that it was unfortunate that Europe and Africa have failed to put the painful historical relationship between them on a new foundation of mutual trust, solidarity, justice and genuine partnership.

He appealed to SECAM to play an important role in advocating for the socio-cultural interests of Africa. MISEREOR, Msgr. Sayer stressed, is ever prepared to support the activities of SECAM, with particular reference to the Good Governance project which MISEREOR has been supporting since 2006. (This project is now in its second phase at a total cost of about two million Euros). The Head of MISEREOR also appealed to the bishops to pay more attention to issues relating to Climate Change and other challenges facing Africa.

There were goodwill messages from the European Bishops’ Conferences, German Bishops’ Conference, MISSIO, SIGNIS, UCIP and other Partner Agencies. All of them assured SECAM of their close collaboration and support.

B) Working Sessions

- i) Workshop on the theme: “*SECAM at 40: Self-reliance, the way forward for the Church in Africa*”.

A two and half-day workshop on the theme of the Plenary was conducted by two Consultants of CORAT Africa. The Consultants advised the bishops to apply professionalism in their evangelisation efforts in order to achieve efficient and effective results. Several suggestions on how to make the Church in Africa truly self-reliant were made during an open forum of the workshop.

- ii) Keynote Address.

The keynote address on the theme was given by Most Rev. Peter K. Sarpong, Archbishop Emeritus of Kumasi who had served in many capacities in SECAM. He noted with regret the lack of commitment of some bishops to the ideals of the founding fathers of SECAM.

- iii) The Challenge of Gender Ideology

One of the resource persons of the Assembly, Rev. Monsignor Tony Anarella, a Psychoanalyst and Social Psychiatrist from France gave a talk on *Caritas in Veritate, the Family and the Theory of Gender*. He dilated on the challenge of the gender ideology.

- iv) Caritas in Veritate

His Eminence Peter Cardinal Turkson, President of the PCJP took the bishops through some of the salient points of Caritas in Veritate, an encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, with a call on the bishops to promote a more humane and just society.

- v) Africa Family Life Federation

Mrs. Daniele Sauvage of Africa Family Life Federation for Africa appealed to the bishops to help promote Christian family values in order to mitigate the challenges that are facing most families on the continent.

vi) The language and philosophy of the UN Speeches

A call was made by Mrs. Marguerite A Peeters to the Assembly on the need for Africa to be wary of some recent western ideologies and lifestyles that were contrary to the values and virtues of Christianity.

Mr. Andreas E. Widmer of SEVEN Fund, a US based organisation, and Prof. Yago de la Cierva Executive Director of the 2011 World Youth Day Celebrations in Spain took turns to address the bishops during the Assembly on their respective activities.

C) Courtesy call on the President of Ghana

On Friday, July 30, the President of SECAM led a 20-man delegation to pay courtesy call on the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency John Evans Atta-Mills at the Osu Castle, the seat of Government.

Cardinal Pengo, in addressing President Atta-Mills called on Ghanaians to continue to see the Catholic Church as a partner in development and improving the lives of the people especially the poor and the marginalised.

He said, wherever the Catholic Church finds itself, it promotes the spiritual, moral and socio-economic development of the people which is the hallmark of all the Episcopal Conferences in Africa. Cardinal Pengo said Ghana has been very supportive of the work of SECAM in several ways. He was grateful to the President for sending his Vice- President, John Dramani Mahama to represent him at the official opening ceremony of the Assembly.

On behalf of SECAM, Cardinal Pengo presented the 2007 Acts of SECAM's 14th Plenary Assembly and other SECAM publications to the President of Ghana.

President Atta-Mills in reply assured SECAM of his government's support and called for closer relations between the Church and State. He entreated the bishops to pray for Ghana to achieve the country's goals of improving the lives of the people. The President commended the Church for her enviable record in Ghana in the provision of education, health, agriculture and social amenities.

In the delegation were His Eminence Theodore Adrien Cardinal Sarr, First Vice President of SECAM from Senegal, the Second Vice President, Most Rev. Francisco Joao Silota of Mozambique; Cardinals Peter Appiah Turkson, Francis Arinze and Anthony Okogie of Nigeria. The others were Cardinals Christian Tumi of Cameroon, Wilfred Napier of South Africa and Archbishop Robert Sarah, Secretary of CEP at the Vatican.

D) Plenary Assembly and Elections

The last two days of the Assembly were dedicated to business matters of SECAM. The President of SECAM opened it by giving an overview of the activities of SECAM since the last Plenary Assembly that took place in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania in January 2007. This was followed by a report of the Secretary General of SECAM, Rev. Fr. Francois-Xavier Damiba, and those of the Justice, Peace and Development Department, Biblical Apostolate and Social Communications. The Financial Report was presented by the Treasurer of SECAM, Most Rev. Charles G. Palmer Buckle, Archbishop of Accra, Ghana.

A closed session was held in the afternoon of Saturday, July 31, for only the Cardinals and bishops. During this period elections were held. The results are given below:

His Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, Archbishop of Dar- Es- Salaam, Tanzania, was re-elected President of SECAM on July 31, 2010.

His Eminence Cardinal Theodore Adrien Sarr, Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal, was also re-elected as first Vice President while Most Rev. Gabriel Mbilingi, President of the Angolan Catholic Bishops' Conference replaced Bishop Francisco Joao Silota of Chimoio Diocese, Mozambique, as the Second Vice President.

The Secretary General, Rev. Fr. Francois-Xavier Damiba, of Burkina Faso was reappointed for a third three-year term. Rev. Fr. Joseph Komakoma of Zambia got appointed for the first time as the First Deputy Secretary General. Rev. Fr. Martinho Maulano was retained as the Second Deputy Secretary General for his third three-year term in office.

In his acceptance speech, Cardinal Pengo promised to continue with what he had started especially in the areas of ensuring that SECAM became self-reliant in all spheres and played her vital role as the voice of the voiceless in Africa. He therefore appealed to all members of Conference to remain committed and dedicated to the mission and vision of SECAM.

Currently, SECAM has about 500 Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals, and is made up of 37 national and nine Regional Episcopal Conferences on the African Continent. The Headquarters has been in Accra, Ghana since 1971.

E) Closing Mass and Celebration of SECAM at 40.

About thirty Cardinals, Bishops and Priests together with some twenty lay participants and SECAM staff were at the Holy Spirit Cathedral, Accra, for the closing Eucharistic celebration which also climaxed the 15th Plenary Assembly and 40th Anniversary celebrations of SECAM. The Mass was presided over by His Eminence Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, President of SECAM.

Prominent among the concelebrants were His Eminence Peter Cardinal Appiah Turkson, Most Rev. Robert Sarah of CEP and Most Rev. Leon B. Kalenga, Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana.

A message from SECAM was read to the congregation by Cardinal Pengo at the end of the Mass.

The other bishops and priests were distributed to more than 30 selected Parishes in the Accra Archdiocese to celebrate SECAM Day with the faithful of the local Church.

Later in the day the bishops concluded the Assembly with an official visit to the SECAM Secretariat at the Airport Residential Area, Accra, Ghana.

The next Plenary Assembly will take place in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013.

Prepared by: Benedict Assorow, Director of Communications of SECAM.

August 12, 2010. NB: The full-text of the presentations will be posted on the website of SECAM: sceam-secam.org.