



Report on the  
World Council of Churches  
Living Letter Visit to Liberia & Sierra Leone  
November 1<sup>st</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> 2008

Theme of the Visit:

“Rebuilding & Restoration: Moving Towards Just-Peace”

***“Behold, I will bring it health, and recovery and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace, prosperity and security. And I will cause the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as they were at first.”***

*Paraphrased from Jeremiah 33: 6-12*

*November 30, 2008*

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## **Introduction**

In 2001, the World Council of Churches launched a Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches seeking reconciliation and peace. As the decade draws to an end the World Council of Churches (WCC) has been sending teams of people to different countries that have experienced some form of violence to express solidarity with them. These teams have been called Living Letters. From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2008, one of the Living Letters teams visited Liberia and Sierra Leone. The five member team comprised of:

1. The Most Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Ghana (Head of Team)
2. Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, National Baptist Convention, Inc., USA
3. Ms. Anam Gill, Presbyterian Church in Pakistan
4. Mr. James Macharia, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya.
5. Dr. Aruna Gnanadason, India, WCC staff –Executive Director, Planning and Integration

Ms. Anam Gill arrived on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2008 and was the first member of the team to arrive in Liberia. The next day, Most Rev. Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Presiding Bishop, and Mr. James Macharia arrived to join her. Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker Smith arrived on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008. Dr. Aruna Gnanadason could not come to Monrovia due to difficulty in acquiring a visa to Liberia. She went ahead of the team to Free Town, Sierra Leone.

## **Background and Overview**

Liberia and Sierra Leone were involved in ghastly wars and are still recovering. Since 2002 for Sierra Leone and since 2005 for Liberia, these countries have been transitioning to countries of peace and nation building. The wars are over but both countries have or are seeking to heal after the long endurance of tragic conflicts and wars. The people in these countries have been affected by the great loss of lives and have seen the destruction of the infrastructure of their countries. The damage and negative consequences of the conflict are enormous. Families were shattered, entire communities have been uprooted, and social, political, economic and traditional governance systems have been destroyed. The experiences of the war are devastating, and monumental challenges remain: eradicating poverty and addressing unemployment, especially among the youth, remains the centerpiece of the administrations' efforts so as to create a more secure and stable society. Ethnic and class cleavages, which were some of the root causes of political discontent and conflict, remain a threat to national peace and security in these two countries. Furthermore, a culture of war transmuted into dependency and corruption continues to constrain efforts of self empowerment and accountability. It was challenging and heart wrenching listening to and seeing the post war situation of these two countries.

But as this report shows, in both countries visited the efforts of governments, churches and civil society to rebuild peace with justice has been phenomenal. The WCC Living Letters team visit started in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. From Liberia the team went to Sierra Leone. The team met with youth groups, women groups, church leaders, and government leaders. The blend of their perspectives provided a

comprehensive view of the movement towards peace building and nation building in both countries.

*Being a youth from Pakistan, which has become a conflict zone, considering the insurgency in the North West Frontier Province, though the context is different from these two countries I feel that many of today's conflicts are internal or civil conflicts, to be more precise intra national. There is a dire need of conflict transformation that goes beyond the concept of conflict resolution. In that it requires a transformation of the parties, their relationships to each other, and the structural elements that underline the conflict. These relationships and social structures are often unjust and unequal and transforming conflict seeks to alter these structures in ways that build a more "just society".*

*Anam Gill, Pakistan*

This Living Letters visit has made the team see a truer picture of this war stricken region. The team had to keep in mind that it was not long ago when there was tension in these countries and a war broke out in Liberia and Sierra Leone and now within a space of less than six years the movement forward towards reconciliation and transformation.

*"The stories of faith, hope and courage that spring from the experiences of the people coming out of a war and rebuilding their lives". The Living Letters visit "brought the WCC closer to the churches and the peoples of these countries in a significant way,"*

*Robert Aboagye-Mensah, Ghana*

*"Despite the challenges, Liberia and Sierra Leone are on the move with a future of hope and promise as they are blessed with potent faith."*

*James Macharia, Kenya*

*"In spite of the pain, suffering and horror of the recent civil wars in these countries, our visit revealed the peace commitments of the churches, governments and related partners to rebuild, restore and reconcile, in their countries and region."*

*Angelique Walker-Smith, USA*

The team is hopeful that there is a better future for not only Liberia and Sierra Leone but the world at large in that we are living in an era where the need of "Just Peace" seems to be heartfelt in countries like these. As Martin Luther King has said "peace is not the absence of war it is the presence of justice." By signing a declaration on just peace at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation the churches will show a way forward for a world in need of just peace for the world at large. There is a great responsibility that rests on the shoulders of the powers that rule us to turn this need into a reality. We only hope that our leaders will not close their ears to this clarion call to action.

## **LIBERIA**

### ***1.0 Places of Worship on Sunday in Liberia and Reception of a Cake for Peace***

In Liberia, the team met with the minister of information, youth, women and church leaders. These meetings began with three members of the team who arrived in Liberia by November 1<sup>st</sup> and were able to attend different churches.

Bishop Mensah attended the S. Trowen Nagbe United Methodist Church United in Monrovia. Anam Gill and James Macharia attended the St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sinkor and the Presbyterian Church respectively. This was on Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008. The churches acknowledged and welcomed the presence of the WCC Living Letter team. This was done verbally and through a letter that was read to the congregation from the General Secretary of Liberian Council of Churches. In the Lutheran Church, Anam Gill gave a brief back ground of the Living Letters and the purpose of the visit to Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The United Methodist Church, on behalf of all the churches and peoples of Liberia, presented a cake to the Living Letters team to be given to the churches and people of Sierra Leone to ask for reconciliation from their sisters and brothers in Sierra Leone for the role that Liberian had played in the war in their country, and also to ask that the people in Sierra Leone be in solidarity with them in the process of peace-building now that the wars are over in the two countries. The team carried this precious gift expressing deeply moving Christian love in Christ to the sisters and brothers in Sierra Leone.

### ***1.1 Emergence of the Theme and the Gift of Cake to Communicate Peace on Earth: "Rebuilding and Restoration: Moving Towards Peace"***

Besides giving a background of the Living Letters and the decade to overcome violence, the Bishop read the scripture from the book of Jeremiah 33: 6-12 at the Methodist Church. The essence of the reading is: healing, rebuilding, restoration, forgiveness and reconciliation. The biblical context responds with accuracy to what the churches and the people are presently experiencing in both countries. The text was prophetic, timely and relevant to the context of the team's visit. It symbolized the theme for the visit: "Rebuilding and Restoration."

It was a double blessing when the Bishop received a cake from the United Methodist Church in Monrovia. The cake was symbolic of the commitment to reconciliation and maintaining stability between the two countries. The cake would also be shared with the WCC, implying that the church supports and is in solidarity with the WCC in its work of advancing a peace message to the world through the Living Letters. The kind gesture by the churches in Liberia symbolizes the themes of the decade to overcome violence: "Glory to God and Peace on Earth".

### ***1.2 Meeting with the Minister of Information – The Hon. Dr. Laurence Konmla Bropleh***

The Living Letters Team was warmly welcomed to the offices of the Ministry of Information by the Hon. Dr. Lawrence Bropleh, on Monday, November 3, 2008. The Minister conveyed the president's (Her Excellency Ellen Johnson -Sirleaf) greetings and welcome. He described her as: "a woman of deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ." He said the President would have liked to have met the team if they could have stayed a few days longer in Liberia. The meeting gave the Living Letters team a government perspective of the post war period. While agreeing with the president in building the nation, the Minister said that, "The president believes that Liberia must become a post war success."

Dr. Bropleh also expressed the country's deep appreciation for the role of the churches in Liberia, working through the Liberian Council of Churches, played during and after the war. He considered the Liberian Council of Churches as a key partner in ensuring a secure Liberia. He urged the churches to continue their good work during the period of the peace building in the nation. He also thanked the WCC for accompanying them during the period of the violence and war. Despite the country being a secular state, he believes that the churches have a key role in molding people's virtues, morals and instilling hope in their lives. He demonstrated a strong ecumenical fervor and pledged support to LCC in its work. He saw the presence of the WCC Living Letters team as a concrete reminder of the caring heart of the WCC.

The ministry hosts a radio program; "changing minds and changing attitudes." This is one of the ways the Ministry is committed to the course of building a stable Liberia. The visit was broadcast nationally on the Liberian media.

### ***1.3 Youth Meeting***

After leaving the Minister's Office, the team met with the youth who were University students at Brown Memorial AME Zion Church located at Benson Street, Monrovia. The Church was packed full with young people and the team had a lively discussion with them after they had been informed about the purpose of the Living Letters visit from the WCC in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence. The students shared their fears, aspirations and hopes with the team.

The interaction with the youth generated several concerns that they have. This included: the challenges in education and the sense of betrayal by the warlords. But they also shared with us messages of hope. There was consensus among the youth that they are not recognized and their voices are not heard by the government. Education is a challenge to a big number of youth who cannot afford school fees and therefore lack education. Liberia has only one public university. The youth felt that the majority of them are not admitted, even if they qualify. The university's capacity is low compared to the large number of youth wanting education. The university lacks current books among other reading materials. This is a set back given the fact that most advanced universities have digitalized libraries today. They urged the Government and the adults to listen to them, provide jobs for them so that they too can participate fully in the process of the nation's peace building. They promised that they would never again allow themselves to be used by adults and politicians for some one's selfish ends. The youth were also deeply concerned about the warlords. According to them, some

of the perpetrators of war are well known to people. Accordingly, “they should stop justifying their deeds of violence and instead seek forgiveness”

The youth, especially the female youth, expressed their fears of the increased cases of armed robbery and rape.

This seemed to be a matter of concern also to the government and the NGO fraternity in Liberia. According to the latest publication of the “UNMIL Focus” a quarterly magazine of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, “the Liberian Government and the UN mission re-launched the Stop Rape Campaign in Monrovia last November and since then, musical concerts, sporting events, road shows, screening of anti-rape documentaries, among other activities, have been organized in 10 of Liberia’s 15 provincial capitals with the active involvement of local authorities.” (Sulaiman Momodu; UNMIL FOCUS, Vol. 4 No. 04, June-August 2008). In the same magazine, the Minister of Information Dr. Laurence Bropleh lamented that “it’s a pity that many of the victims of rape are usually girls who have not reached puberty.” There seems to be a commitment by the government to overcome this terrible tragedy. A new rape law is in force with stiff penalties for rapists. The law stipulates that anyone found guilty of statutory rape will be imprisoned for life.

The youth seemed pleased with what President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, (a Christian and a Methodist, and the first African woman president) has been able to achieve so far, and looked forward to greater achievements for the nation.

#### ***1.4 Sub-Theme: Peace at Heart***

It was encouraging to not only hear some voices of reason among the youth but their sense of hope. One of them urged that; “churches should continue to preach peace and reconciliation.” Another youth, challenged everyone in the meeting to “practice peace at the individual level and at home.” This way, peace would permeate to the community and indeed to the world.

#### ***1.5 Women’s Meeting***

The team’s next meeting was with representatives from various Christian Women’s Groups. The venue was S. Trowen Nagbe United Methodist Church. Here too the attendance and the discussions were very encouraging. The 50 women gathered sang, prayed, and shared moving testimonies expressing the faithfulness of God in protecting, caring and guiding them during the period of the war.

The experiences that women went through during the 1990-2003 period were gruesome. No one could know better than the women themselves. They lamented about the increase in rape cases after the war, and how generally men had become insensitive and difficult to live with as a result to the war. They expressed their desire to be in solidarity with the other women in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana as part of the process of seeking healing, restoration and total well being of the nations in the sub-region, and urged the WCC to take leadership in facilitating this.

One woman after the other recounted their experiences during the war. The team heard horrific stories of violence, trafficking and cruel killings, bombs falling on

innocent people etc. Some could not hold back their tears as they recalled how they had helplessly run without knowing where they were going. The sad part is that despite government efforts, rape and domestic violence are still high in Liberia. One woman described men as their enemies. Similar sentiments were expressed during the youth meeting. One young female, asked the living letters team; “we have heard that you planned a meeting with the youth and with the women, why have you not planned to meet with men, they are our biggest problem?” She asked this in relation to the rising cases of rape and domestic violence in the country. The team was touched by the willingness and openness of the women to share their experiences. Bishop Mensah encouraged them with the words of St. Paul in Philippians 3, appealing to them to let go of the past and focus on the future. Through the government’s efforts and their willingness to report any cases of violence, their stories would become “springs of life,” and not misery, he told them.

There was also the recognition of strong women leaders in Liberia during the war and after the war. As previously stated, the first democratically elected female President in Africa is Liberian in the person of H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This is a monumental milestone, knowing that it represents the aspirations and expectations of Liberian women. H.E. Sirleaf had said: “In my country Liberia there have been very powerful and courageous women leaders. Paramount Chief Suacoco, who governed the area inclusive of modern day Suacoco in Bong County, and Paramount Chief Lango Lippi, of Kakata in Margibi County, are two of the many outstanding women leaders. Others such as the late Angie Brooks-Randolph, former associate justice of Liberia, ambassador to UN and president of the General Assembly, and the late Mary Antoinette Brown academic and president of the University of Liberia, inspired many young women to dream of a future role in Liberian politics. ”

### ***1.6 Sub-Theme: Peace Begins at Home***

Some of the concerns from the women on what they would like to see happen in their country were:

- Women’s empowerment programs that would equip them with skills such as tailoring, entrepreneurship and computer skills.
- Organize women’s meetings with men.
- Global solidarity through prayer for women especially in Africa.
- Enhancement of the legal structures to deal with the perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence.
- Organize a women’s conference across neighboring countries that were affected by the war. They specified Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ghana.

### ***1.7 Church Leaders Meeting***

After meeting with representatives from the Women’s Group the team were taken to the Head Office of the Liberian Council of Churches for a delicious lunch hosted by the Women’s group associated with the Council.

The next meeting was with church leaders at the St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Sinkor. The team was told that that this was the church building where during the war in 1979, about 700 hundred people who had sought refuge in it had been massacred and the building had been burnt down. The church leaders shared their stories of faith,



courage and determination to rebuild their nation. They asked for support in education and in the creation of jobs for both adults and young people.

“Churches are the beacon of hope for the people of Liberia.” These were the words of Dr. Benjamin Lartey, General Secretary of the Liberian Council of Churches, during the meeting with the church leaders. The church played a significant role in the restoration of peace in Liberia. They were in the forefront in spearheading dialogue among warring parties, during the war. Dr. Lartey set a high bar for the churches role in reconstructing Liberia. He advocated for a holistic approach in rebuilding the country. This would involve building schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers for drug abusers and creating human rights awareness among others. One of the pastors added that the majority of people were still suffering from the war’s trauma. He therefore, advocated for psychosocial support especially counseling to heal many people who are still hurting. This, he said, included the church and its leadership.

Church leaders raised similar sentiments as the team had already heard from the youth. Instead of seeking forgiveness, perpetrators of war (who are known to the people) deny their involvement when speaking at the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The session closed with a brief worship and deeply moving prayers. The team truly felt God’s presence with and among the group. The next day the team left Monrovia for Free Town, Sierra Leone. The team wishes to take this opportunity to express their appreciation for the sisterly and brotherly love received from members of the Liberian Council of Churches under the leadership of the General Secretary Dr. Benjamin Lartey. Some of their members including Rev. Williams who accompanied the team to the airport in Monrovia, from where the team flew to Free Town on November 4, 2008.

## **SIERRA LEONE**

### ***2.0 Meeting with the Head of State of Sierra Leone***

The team arrived at the Lungi airport in Sierra Leone and were taken by ferry to the office of the General Secretary of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone in Free Town. The team was warmly received and from there taken to Hotel Cabenda, where they stayed for the rest of the trip. Like Liberia, our sisters and brothers here too great care of the team. Indeed they demonstrated in no small way Christian love and hospitality. They shared with the team what was in their hearts and minds.

On the afternoon of November 4, 2008 the Living Letters team together with the leadership of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone (CCSL) visited the President of Sierra Leone (who is also a Christian and a Methodist), His Excellency Dr. Earnest Bai Koroma at the State House. He is a humble and a gracious man.

Bishop Mensah informed the President of the purpose of the visit and also thanked him the important role he had played in the search for peace. His Excellency, the President, in turn informed the team of the important role the churches in Sierra Leone had played during and after the war. He said the war has been over since 2002 but that the churches still have an important role to play in promoting peace in the post conflict Sierra Leone. He challenged the churches not to give up now that the nation is fully engaged in peace building and national reconstruction. He said that the government is currently studying, with a view to implementing, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). He also said that his government is ready to work with the church, as "all of us need to work harder with focus and the right leadership."

The President said that; "Sierra Leone has overcome violence through divine intervention and the commitment and sacrifice of every Sierra Leonean." He urged the churches to continue "leading in consolidating peace" and noted that "the chairman of the TRC is a church member." The role of the church in giving hope and praying for the country was appreciated. He described Sierra Leone as having gone through a humanitarian crisis and that it was time to economically develop the country. In relation to the decade to overcome violence, the President was optimistic that; "by the time the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence comes to an end, Sierra Leone will have something positive to show where peace and justice are experienced by his people and outsiders as well.... by 2011, Sierra Leone will be a shining example."

The Living Letters team presented His Excellency with a Peace Candle as a sign of hope and a symbol of continuing solidarity with the people of Sierra Leone. The visit was broadcast in the national media in Sierra Leone.

### ***2.1 Meeting with the Minister of Trade, the Honorable Alimamy Koroma***

The next day, November 5, 2008 the team met the Honorable Alimamy P. Koroma, Minister of Trade and Industry, who was the immediate past General Secretary of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone (CCSL). As the former general secretary of the

Christian Council of Sierra Leone, Koroma had played a key role in this history and now tries to work from the perspective of a government which does all it can to ensure that sustainable peace can be achieved. It was a pleasant reunion with some members of the Living Letters team. The meeting with the Minister was both challenging and hopeful. He shared with us the many struggles the country faces as it tries to rebuild peace. He too affirmed the role the churches had played in brokering peace in the country, particularly through the inter-faith council, and he spoke of the need for the churches to continue to be vigilant.

The Minister told the team of his long involvement in the ecumenical movement. He said that; “the work of the movement was still deep in his heart.” He asked the team to remind the world that Sierra Leone and Liberia are no longer at war, because the world still looks at them as if they are warlords. According to the Minister the world has forgotten that these countries ended their wars some six years ago and after a shaky start now both have democratically elected governments. When asked why the country had sunk into a war, he spoke of the disillusionment of the youth who were manipulated and pushed into taking up arms. He spoke of the Sierra Leoneans as essentially a gentle people. He said that Sierra Leone must be allowed to set its own agenda and develop at its own pace.

The Minister also pointed out some of the social injustices caused by the imbalance in relationships between the North and the South (developed and developing countries). He told the team that like other African countries, Sierra Leone has been coerced into a world economy that is inherently unjust, favoring the strong over the weak. We live in a context where the weak and the weaker economies have to participate in a world trading system, with constantly changing goal posts, and are punished if they do not follow the rules of the wealthy nations. He spoke of agricultural subsidies as an example of this. He said that African governments lack the political will to get together to challenge this injustice because of their dependence on the world for their very survival (he said that Sierra Leone depends on donors for some 60% of its economy.) Giving the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as an example, he observed that, there cannot be partnership between nations which do not have the same bargaining power.

He added a self critical comment when he stated that; “Africa lacks the political will to rightfully bargain for its own agenda. Instead, those in government set up systems to suit themselves.” This has resulted in plunder, corruption and conflict which have led to wars in Africa. According to Hon. Minister Koroma; “when greed overcomes the mortal man the results are grave. Corruption of those with political power, negligence in leadership and idleness” are some of the ingredients of war.

## ***2.2 Sub-Theme: Make Peace not War***

The Minister assured the Living Letters team that Sierra Leone is a peaceful country and that the past six years demonstrate this. He encouraged the team to help them in the re-branding of a peaceful image of the country despite the past war.

His advice to developed countries was that, “there has to be political will and correctness to create an enabling environment. This would be through transparent policy frameworks, dialogue and partnership with all stakeholders.” Additionally,

Africa needs to speak with one voice, and come together as one block when bargaining with developed nations.

He reiterated that both countries, i.e. Liberia and Sierra Leone are working towards consolidating the peace they have won. He also acknowledged the involvements of churches and civil society organizations in the processes of healing the memories of war and in peace building. He stressed the role that the global community of churches can play to be a moral guarantor for weaker nations.

### ***2.3 Meeting with Ms Battu Jambawai: Human Rights Leader***

The team met with Ms. Battu Jambawai, who informed them of the work that she and other women's groups have done in the peace building process. She spoke about the culture of violence that the war had left in Sierra Leone, and the negative impact that it is having on the country and the challenges it poses for peace building programmes.

She described the fight against domestic violence is one of the new wars in the country. One way of fighting this war is by creating awareness on human rights among the populace. She is a staff member with an International NGO and a human rights activist supportive of women rights and a committed Christian of the Methodist Church. According to her, "in Sierra Leone violence against women has always been present. However, the war has aggravated it further." She added that; "concerted efforts among churches, civil society groups and community groups have come out strongly to overcome the abuse of women." Their efforts have begun bearing fruits. One success story is that of women lawyers with other groups in Sierra Leone. Their persistence in advocating for respect of women's rights has led to the enactment of three legislations that address violence against women. On 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, the parliament of Sierra Leone passed three gender justice Acts namely; The Domestic Violence Act, The Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, and the Devolution of Estates Act that have immensely improved the legal status of women in Sierra Leone.

### ***2.4 Triennial Assembly of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone and the Gift of Cake***

The team departed by road from Free Town to Bo in southern Sierra Leone, for the 4<sup>th</sup> Triennial General Assembly of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone.

On November 6, 2008 the team participated at the General Assembly of the CCSL, where Bishop Mensah shared with the Assembly the purpose of the team's visit and had each member of the team to say a few words of greeting from their countries. In addition, Bishop Mensah presented the cake of reconciliation and solidarity that the team had brought from Liberia to be presented to sisters and brothers of Sierra Leone. In his remarks the Bishop reminded the people in the assembly of the scripture text from Jeremiah 33 which speaks of rebuilding and restoration in verses 6-12. He shared with the General Assembly the message of reconciliation from the churches in Liberia symbolized by the gift of the cake. The team represented the words from the scripture: that healing, rebuilding, restoration and reconciliation may be embedded in peoples' lives.

In a Christian spirit of love and as an act of forgiveness the cake was received by the President of the CCSL Bishop Dr. Thomas J. Barnett, of the Lutheran Church in SL in the presence of the Mayor of the Bo city, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Heads of Churches of CCSL and other dignitaries. The cake was cut and distributed to all participants present at the Assembly. There was great rejoicing and thanks giving to the Lord who through this gift had symbolically united these two nations in their healing process.

Pieces of the cake were given to members of the team for them to share with the wider Christian communities around the world including the WCC in Geneva. *(An important additional note: When Bishop Mensah returned home, he shared the piece he had with members of the General Purposes Council of the Methodist Church Ghana, a body that represents the whole membership of the Methodist Church Ghana. So the Methodist Church Ghana received the cake of reconciliation and solidarity building from Liberia to Sierra Leone on behalf of the Churches in Ghana and the entire people of Ghana as a witness to the process of peace building that has started in the West African sub-region. The significance of this sharing of the cake is that Ghana played host to Liberian refugees for about 18 years during the war in Liberia.)*

The sub-theme Make Peace not War, calls on the churches to “join the resistance movements against the old and new wars.” As Minister Alimamy had described it, the absence of war in Sierra Leone means that there is peace in the country. However, the definition of peace is not merely the absence of war; it’s the harmonious and cordial environment in every aspect of life in society. This means a just and equitable environment for all. It’s the availability of food, housing, education, health care, sanitation, and all human needs, in people’s livelihood. Sierra Leone like many African countries has yet to realize this kind of peace. This means that there are new kinds of wars in the country. There now wars to combat poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, HIV/Aids and death of curable diseases like malaria among others.

### ***2.5 The Child Protection Agencies: Family Support Unit***

In the six years since the cessation of the war, programs to create awareness of human rights, especially among women, have increased. Structures to address human rights abuses continue to be established. One of the structures is the Child Protection Agencies: Family Support Unit (FSU), Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs.

The team visited the FSU in Kenema in Eastern Sierra Leone on November 7, 2008. Additionally, in Kenema the team met with about 60 children who were once living in the streets after the war. They are now being supported by the CCSL.

The Family Support Units were established in 2001 soon after the war ended, by the government through the Sierra Leone police department. This was one of the recommendations of the TRC. Ms. Esther Kamara, a senior police woman, is in charge of the FSU in Kenema. She said that, “the role of the FSU is to investigate all physical abuses, sexual abuse and child cruelty.”

The FSU’s receive complaints of abuse from victims. When they register a complaint the victims are first taken for medical examination in order to seek court redress.

Medical examination is one of the stumbling blocks for victims of gender and/or domestic violence, because the majority of people cannot afford medical fees. FSUs have since filled that gap. However, cultural barriers still stifle the fight against gender and domestic violence. Many still see it as a taboo for a woman to take her husband to court regardless of violence. The team learned that in some communities, a husband beating their wife is “a form of love.” In most families, men are the sole financial providers. Women in such marriages fear divorce should they take action against violent husbands. Thus, there is a tendency to settle cases of domestic violence within the families involved. This hinders prosecution of cases. Ms. Kamara told the team that more awareness and sensitization programs are in place in order to overcome gender/domestic violence. The biggest challenge though, is the lack of safe ad temporary protection homes for women, when they do file a complaint.

| <b>Kenema, FSU statistics of reported cases of abuse</b> |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Year   | Number of cases reported |
| 2004   | 97                       |
| 2005   | 78                       |
| 2006   | 125                      |
| 2007   | 130                      |
| January – November 17 <sup>th</sup> 2008                 | 165 (64 sexual violence) |

The FSU faces a similar challenge in cases of **abused children**. Children are either victims or offenders. Esther Kamara told the team that most children offenders do not commit crime out of their own will, but are used by adults. All child protection work is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender & Children’s Affairs. The team learned this from Mr. Matthew Sesay, a social development worker related to the Ministry who was also part of the meeting. The Ministry collects data and monitors gender issues and child affairs. It also deals with cases of neglect in the family. In such cases it mediates and conducts a follow up to see if the child’s needs have been met. The Ministry encourages dialogue to find peaceful solutions. Provision for foster homes are sought where need arises. Mr. Sesay said that one of the challenges in child protection is street children. He distinguished between children in the streets and children on the streets. Those on the streets have motives and goals to achieve - some are either sent by their parents to beg and others are used by adults to engage in petty crimes such as the snatching of hand bags. Children in the streets are either orphans, abandoned children or those who run away from abusive homes for their safety. Child offenders are put on probation. However repeated offenders are taken to approved schools.

After the war, the Ministry extensively intervened with young people who had been “child soldiers.” It advocated for all minors to be referred as children and urged people not to refer anyone as a “child soldier.” This helped overcome stigma and discrimination associated with “child soldiers.” Both government and child agencies engaged in a series of activities (sports, psychosocial activities, capacity building etc) to overcome the problem.

The team also visited an NGO called Defense of Children International, a child protection agency that advocates for the rights of children.

## ***2.6 Children Supported by the Christian Council of Sierra Leone***

CCSL also has a children's program, based in Kenema. They are currently supporting 60 children who were living in the streets after the war. They cater for their school fees, meals, books and all other needs related to their education. The children are day scholars. They live in foster homes or with well wishers. The school fee of a pupil in junior school is 60,000 leones or US\$ 20. In senior school the fees is 75,000 leones or US\$ 25. The total cost for the 60 pupils is US\$ 1,200. However, this has been a big challenge for Rev. Patrick Kamara, the coordinator of the program, as the expected funds have not been received and there are no funds to pay for the current term. The 60 pupils are faced with the risk of missing school this term.

## ***2.7 Theological Students and the Just Peace Declaration***

On November 8, after returning to Free Town the team met with approximately 40 theological students at the Sierra Leone Theological College and Church Training Centre – a college associated to the member churches of the CCSL. A full day seminar had been organized with the students to reflect on the role of theological education in Sierra Leone today and to speak of what should be included in a declaration on just peace. The seminar included students and lecturers from The Evangelical College of Theology (affiliated with the evangelical churches) and St Paul's Major Seminary (a Roman Catholic Institution).

The team had a lively workshop with them. It was led by the dynamic Rev. Mrs. Olivia Wesley who is Principal of Sierra Leone Theological College. She said that the focus of theological education has been not just academic but also pastoral because of the role the churches have to play in Sierra Leone today in helping people deal with the memories of the war. Dr. Conteh of the Evangelical College spoke of the need for the continuing need for the unity of the churches to have a real impact on SL. The Evangelical College has focused on a ministry with amputees of the war and in empowering youth to cope with the burdens of their history.

The Roman Catholic theological students from St. Paul's Major Seminary read their justice peace declaration that they had drafted (in appendix with this report). In sum, they advocated for virtues and morals in society upholding virtues like respect, love, humility, tolerance, kindness, honesty etc as the answer to myriad problems that face humanity today. According to the students Sierra Leone needs leaders of integrity to lead the country towards peaceful coexistence and economic prosperity.

In groups, the students reflected on traditional beliefs but also theological justifications for violence as they identified resources from their culture and in the Bible that challenges Christians to engage in peace-making. The team observed that the students wrestled with the role that tradition plays in legitimizing violence against women – domestic violence, abortions, female circumcision, secret societies etc.; and also on the after effects of the war that has left behind a culture of violence. They spoke of the increase in criminality, trafficking of women and children, street children, but also bad governance and corruption. The students concluded with the conviction that the Bible needs to be re-read and reinterpreted, and that theological

education needs to challenge theological justifications of violence and inhuman cultural practices.

In the midst of singing and prayers the students demonstrated that in spite of differences in theological and doctrinal positions of the schools and churches they represented have a united voice and that the only way the churches can play a transforming role is if they contribute to the consolidation of the peace the country has won.

On the November 9, 2008 the departed from Free Town to their various destinations after spending some time reflecting on what the whole experience meant to each member and the significance of this visit for the Decade to Overcome Violence.

### **VOTE OF THANKS**

The visit to both countries was powerful and inspiring. These two countries are among the poorest in the world and yet the resilience of the people, the governments and the churches is commendable. It would not have been possible without the helping hand and support of the councils of churches in the two countries. The team places on record its thanks to Dr. Benjamin Lartey, the General Secretary of Liberian Council of Churches and Mr. Sahr Kemoore Salia General Secretary of the Christian Council in Sierra Leone. To the staff of the councils, the Rev. Williams in Liberia and Ms Eburn Abeni James in Sierra Leone and all the others that have not been mentioned by name, thank you for your great hospitality and assistance to the Living Letters team. Our sincere thanks go to the member churches and church leaders in both countries who took our visit seriously and welcomed us warmly. Our gratitude goes to all the people the team visited in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Thank you for your trust and sharing your experiences with us. May God abundantly bless you all and the nations of Liberia and Sierra Leone.

### **CONCLUSION**

In both countries that the Living Letters team visited, they were enriched by the power of the stories of faith, hope and courage that sprang from the experiences of the people coming out of wars and their determination to continue the process of peace and justice building that they had embarked upon. The cake of reconciliation and solidarity from Liberia to Sierra Leone that has now gone to all the four corners of the world is a strong symbolic testimony of the determination of the two nations to pursue peace in the aftermath of violence. Beginning from their hearts, to their homes and communities they have now sent a strong witness to the world about the power of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to unite nations that had once been at war.

For the Living Letters team the time together was a great learning experiences, the team spirit was high and we thank the WCC for bringing us together for the visit.

The cake that the church in Liberia gave to the Living Letters in the spirit of reconciliation was a valuable gift. It brought us great joy everywhere we went. It



became a thread that bound every place that we visited. The cake reminded the team about of the Living Letters guiding verse; “you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered to us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of the human heart.” (2 Cor. 3:3) It added life to our visit and indeed the cake became a “living letter.” It was our hope that the spirit of peace and reconciliation that the cake symbolized may reign in both countries forever. It was our prayer that the seed of peace already beginning to sprout in the two countries may flourish. This is not only in the two countries, but in every country that has experienced strife, turmoil, violence, conflict or war. May the spirit of the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6) reign in the universe so that we can loudly proclaim together at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011: **“Glory to God and Peace on Earth”**. *Amen.*

## **Appendix 1**

### ***Where Peace Fears To Tread***

We are living in a world where peace fears to tread  
The people are divided the soldiers are united and war is the diktat  
The cries of poor people are spreading in every nook  
Politicians are ignoring much they could  
Mother earth is also crying no one listens to her too  
Cant escape these atrocities and her last days are coming soon  
Power, greed and segregation are dominating the world  
Giving little chance to peace to show its worth  
The disarray leads us only to torment  
But who can make these powers realize  
That their doings should come to an end

**by Anam Gill**

## Appendix 2

### SPEECH DELIVERED ON JUST PEACE<sup>1</sup>

It gives me the greatest pleasure, on behalf of the students of St. Paul's Catholic Major Seminary, to tender in this consultative meeting, our contribution to the development of an Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace in 2011.

The Hebrew rendition of the word peace is "Shalom". It does not only imply the absence of war as is often mistakenly thought but the situation of having both physical and spiritual resources sufficient to one's needs. The word shalom embraces everything that the human person most deeply desires such as health, prosperity, joy, and fulfilment now and hereafter. It is said as a daily greeting in Israel but no one dares to say "shalom" to his neighbour when his heart was corrupted with guilt and foul suspicion. Thus "shalom" was an affirmation of the anthropological transcendence of the human person.

Justice or "Justitia- est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuens" i.e., the constant and perpetual will of giving to someone what is his own, is inextricably tied with the idea of peace to the extent the "if you want peace, work for justice". This means that peace is the fruit of justice; peace comes automatically when there is justice. Thus we have the idea of Just Peace- a peace built on the foundation of justice.

This idea of Just Peace is not a reality in our world today. People continue to live under the threat of violence and armed aggression. People continue to await their liberation and emancipation while their rights and dignity remain trampled upon. In Africa, bad governance, which is anchored on poor leadership, has existed for decades. People continue to perpetuate the distorted and truncated logic that power, coupled with corruption, is the only road to immediate wealth. Military coup d'états and civil uprisings evolve due to impatience on the side of political leaders to pursue the democratic process. On the other hand, administrative and managerial ineptitude, establishment of 'monarchical democracies' result into bad governance and ultimately breed tensions and instabilities. Religious intolerance also poses a serious threat to global peace and security. These are some of the sources of the political instability on the African continent and the world at large.

The Church must respond adequately to these problems that hinder Just Peace. And so, action on behalf of justice and peace and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to the Church as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation. Put differently, the Church must be engaged in this world to bring about justice and peace.<sup>2</sup> Constitutive here

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<sup>1</sup> This is a Speech on Just Peace delivered by the Roman Catholic students from St Paul's Major Seminary, at the one day seminar on the Just Peace Declaration organized by the Sierra Leone Theological College in Freetown. It was the contribution of the students to the WCC's just peace declaration.

<sup>2</sup> Justitia in Mundo,6

underscores the centrality and indispensability of the work of justice in the preaching and living of the gospel. Without it, the Church would not be true to herself or to her vocation. Engagement in the cause of justice and peace is not peripheral to what the Church is about nor is it optional. Rather, it is intrinsically linked to realising the kingdom of God even now amidst the economic, political and social realities of human existence. Hence, in pursuance of this, we would like to advance proposals for cultivating and enhancing a culture of just peace.

## **RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE**

People who express different faiths are to dedicate themselves in a special way to working for peace and justice by exercising tolerance and engaging in dialogue for the advancement of humanity. It is not a secret that most of the bloody wars fought in our world today have their roots in religious ideologies. People usually result to violence to persuade others to accept their faith stances or practice them. It should be noted that whoever wants to lead a rational soul to faith needs to be able to speak well and to reason in the proper way. Faith is the fruit of the soul and not of the body; therefore spreading the faith by threat, violence or strong arm is contrary to the nature of God.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Church must fight for the respect of life and religious freedom.

## **CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S PROACTIVITY IN WORKING FOR JUST PEACE**

The Christian Church has the mandate to be vocal in the face of unjust and intolerable social, economic, and political structures. Our vocation is to be present in the "heart" of the world by proclaiming the Good News of liberation like our Lord and master. The Church, in examining her sacred history and the progressive realization of God's plan of liberation and salvation, must come to the conclusion that the promotion of Just Peace in the world is an integral task of her mission of continuing Christ's work of healing the world and making it a better place to live. To proclaim the gospel of Christ is to announce peace because he himself is the prince of peace [cf. Isaiah 9:5].

## **THE EQUALITY OF HUMAN PERSONS**

A fundamental recipe for erecting a structure of Just Peace is the Church's cognizance of the essential equality of human persons [both man and woman], which springs from their common transcendental dignity. The extremely grave deprivation afflicting many people especially in Africa has become so conspicuous that the Church cannot be silent. The numerous poor, suffering in the hands of the few rich and despotic power hungry politicians, the marginalized women, should not be left unaided. Not only materially, but also spiritually, the church must challenge these oppressive structures making them [poor and marginalized] what they are rather than what they should be. We are not unaware that there are those who see the Church's mission as primarily spiritual in nature and are therefore resistant to her involvement in the political arena or who fear that the gospel would be emptied of its transcendent meaning and reduced to a religious justification for social change. It should be noted that the views of such people are highly respected. But if we do not be their vocal

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<sup>3</sup>. Benedict XVI, Lecture on Faith, Reason and Islam, Regensburg University, 2006.

cords then we would not only find ourselves running away from the mission of God like Jonah but also relapsing to a dereliction of fraternal amity and care.

### **ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS**

Ecology is another concern. There continues to be an undue and selfish exploitation of the environment. Many have blamed the Judeo-Christian tradition for giving credence to the selfish destruction of nature. They contend that Genesis 1:28 which reads “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...”, means a license to inflict a war on nature. This distorted hermeneutics must be properly interpreted. “Be fruitful and multiply; subdue the earth...” means to be custodians, stewards and masters of God’s creation. Thus if humanity seriously desires a Just Peace it must increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology or respect for nature and human ecology<sup>4</sup>. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human co-existence.

### **OBSERVANCE OF NATURAL LAW**

Finally, the norms of natural law should not be viewed as externally imposed decrees or restraint upon human freedom rather should be welcomed as the call to carry out faithfully the universal divine plan inscribed in the nature of human beings. Guided by these norms, all peoples within their respective cultures can draw near to the greatest mystery, which is the mystery of God. Today too, recognition and respect for natural law represent the foundation for a dialogue between the followers of different religions and between believers and non-believers. As a great point of convergence, this is also a fundamental presupposition for cultivating a culture of Just Peace.

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<sup>4</sup>. Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace 2007.

## **Acronyms**

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|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AACC    | All Africa Conference of Churches               |
| CCSL    | Christian Council of Sierra Leone               |
| EPA     | Economic Partnership Agreements                 |
| FSU     | Family Support Unit                             |
| G.S     | General Secretary                               |
| LCC     | Liberian Council of Churches                    |
| N.G.O   | Non Governmental Organization                   |
| TRC     | Truth & Reconciliation Commission               |
| UN      | United Nations                                  |
| UNIOSIL | United Nation Integrated Office in Sierra Leone |
| UNMIL   | United Nations Mission in Liberia               |
| WCC     | World Council of Churches                       |