



For immediate release

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Future joint Christian campaigns to focus on food and AIDS

Participating organizations in the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) have agreed to begin a new campaign on food “in order to overcome hunger and to improve livelihoods in harmony with creation and social justice.” They also chose to continue the EAA’s HIV and AIDS campaign and to conclude with appreciation the eight-year trade campaign. The decisions were taken during the EAA’s General Assembly held in Rome, 17-19 November.

“The EAA has the potential to foster even closer collaboration, to strengthen its role as a network hub where we share information and devise strategies on these two issues,” stated Erik Lysen, head of the policy unit, International Department of the Church of Sweden.

The EAA, created in 2000 to coordinate the advocacy of churches and church-related and other Christian organizations on selected issues has focused on HIV and AIDS and global trade since its founding. Every four years participating organizations decide on whether to continue the same emphases or choose a new issue for joint campaigning.

In selecting to focus on food in a new campaign, participants highlighted the breadth of areas that are impacted by food.

Andrew Kang Bartlett, associate for national hunger concerns, Presbyterian Church (USA) reflected that “Christians are concerned about the hungry, so we need to focus on the broken food system. Christians are concerned about water, and we ‘eat’ more water than we drink. Christians are concerned about climate change, so we need to recognize that food production is the biggest contributor to global warming gases. We must find ways to make food production more sustainable.”

For Forbes Matonga, National Director for Christian Care, Zimbabwe, the EAA’s involvement in addressing food will help churches in Zimbabwe, who are currently involved in food provision, “to raise it to the next level and ask questions about why do people not have enough food?”

For Matonga, the privatization of food production and the ways in which modern technology have caused people to move away from using traditional methods have in essence “privatized the seed” and people need to regain an understanding that “God is the owner of the intellectual property of the seed.”

Malcolm Damon, executive director of the Economic Justice Network of FOCCISA also pointed out the critical dilemmas around agrofuels: “Instead of producing food for people we are producing food for fuel.”

“Food is one of the most essential basic requirements of life,” says Hielke Wolters, director of the World Council of Churches’ program on Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation. Thus, he emphasizes, “the food crisis is physical, spiritual and economic and it draws the church to take action on all three levels.”

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Lysen agreed, stating “Given the global food crisis and renewed emphasis on agricultural strategies, it’s good for us as an ecumenical family to see how we coordinate actions more closely for greater impact at national and international levels.”

Georgine Kengne Djeutane, African Regional Secretary for the World Christian Federation, reflected on the level of poverty, hunger and malnourishment particularly in the southern part of the world and in conflict zones. “We need to look at the fundamental issues around hunger and how many people have access to food.”

For the HIV and AIDS campaign, Djeutane hopes that the campaign can “strengthen the issue of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support”

Sophie Dilmitis, HIV and AIDS Coordinator, World YWCA, states “we need to keep pushing the target of universal access.” But, she added, “we also have to start talking about universal standards – how we achieve that target,” noting the different human rights standards of countries particularly related to people living with HIV and those most vulnerable to HIV transmission.

Robert J. Vitillo, special advisor on HIV and AIDS to Caritas Internationalis, hopes that through the EAA, churches will continue to be “key promoters of additional access to medication, with special focus on the situation of children.” He also noted that work needs to continue in eliminating stigma and discrimination. Expanding networks and actions involving people from other parts of the world who are more newly affected by the pandemic, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, are also needed, stated Vitillo.

A number of participants pointed out the links between the two campaigns. “Without food, we will not achieve universal access to treatment,” emphasized Karen Sickinga, Executive Director of the Churches Health Association of Zambia.

The connection of food to the previous trade campaign was also noted. Said Wolters, “Trade needs to address access to food.” And Lysen pointed out previous work by the EAA on the right to food: “Having undertaken case studies on the right to food, we can explore how we can take that even further, nationally and internationally.”

In other business, the Assembly established EAA as an association under Swiss law effective January 1, 2008 and elected eight members of a Board of Directors responsible for governing the EAA over the next four years:

- Nithiya Sagayam Antony, Pax Christi International
- Andy Bowerman, Tearfund
- Richard Fee, Presbyterian World Service and Development
- Elenora Giddings Ivory, World Council of Churches (*ex officio*)
- Georgine Kengne Djeutane, World Student Christian Federation
- Prawate Khid-Arn, Christian Conference of Asia
- Rebecca Larson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Juergen Reichel, EED

Three vacancies will be filled later by the Board to include representatives of the two campaigns and improve gender balance.

EAA participants include Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Orthodox churches and related organizations. There are currently 111 participants ranging from international organizations – such as the World Council of Churches, Caritas Internationalis, World YWCA and World Vision – to regional and national churches and organizations such as the Christian Conference of Asia, Norwegian Church Aid,

Christian Care (Zimbabwe), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. EAA participants represent tens of millions of Christians around the world committed to putting their faith into action.

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The **Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance** is a broad international network of churches and Christian organizations cooperating in advocacy on global trade and HIV and AIDS. The Alliance is based in Geneva, Switzerland. For more information, see <http://www.e-alliance.ch/>