

PROCMURA/ CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF GHANA WORKSHOP FOR THE HEADS OF CHURCHES AND LEADERS OF LOCAL COUNCILS OF CHURCHES TO REVIVE INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN GHANA

Held on March 17, 2011

Brief Narrative Report



Participants of PROCMURA's Interfaith Revival Workshop

Background to Workshop

Since 2006 the Ghana Area Committee of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) which also doubles as the Interfaith Education wing of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) has not been as active as it was in the preceding years. This situation remained a case for concern within the PROCMURA fraternity and outside Africa. Some of PROCMURA's partners, especially ICCO & Kirk in Actie and EMW wondered why such a vibrant Area Committee suddenly slumped into near oblivion.

After several consultations ICCO & Kirk in Actie offered to provide funding for the revival of the Committee and to assist it to reorganise the Council's programmes for good interfaith relations in Ghana. As a result of this, a workshop was organised for Church Leaders of the Christian Council Member Churches with representatives from the Ghana Pentecostal Council, the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches, and Local Councils of Churches from the Southern Sector of Ghana.

Aims of the Workshop

The main aim of the workshop was to call the attention of the Church Leaders to the reality of Islam in the continent and the need to reactivate the PROCMURA Area Committee as a body that would assist the churches in its one time proactive and ongoing programmes on Christian-Muslim relations within the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG).

Date and Duration

The workshop was held on March 17, 2011, for a full day at the Ampomaa Hotel in Accra.

Invitations and Participation

Invitations were sent out to **65** Church Leaders of the various categories. Of this number **52**, participated and stayed throughout the session. Among the participants was the Most Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah the Vice President of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), who represented the AACC. He chaired all the sessions.



The Most Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah (standing), he is flanked by Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini to the left and Rev. Dr. Mbillah to the right.

Presentations

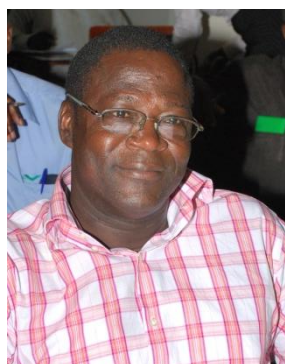
There were two main presentations at the workshop by the Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah, the General Adviser of PROCMURA and Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, the Area Adviser for Ghana.

Dr. Mbillah presented an overview of Christianity and Islam in Africa highlighting the Muslim majority countries, the Christian majority countries and the countries over which each of the two religions is claiming majority over the other. It became clear from the presentation that there is no peace and peaceful coexistence in the countries in which there are claims and counter claims of who are the majority. Nigeria was the most typical example of them all. It also came out clearly that the countries with Christian majority populations experienced greater peace and freedom of religion than countries with Muslim majority especially in North African and the Maghreb countries. Sub-Saharan Africa where PROCMURA concentrates its work, had the potential of Christians and Muslims living alongside each with freedom of religion being entertained. This has to be worked at though.



Rev. Dr. Mbillah, General Adviser of PROCMURA

For his part the Rev. Dr. Samwini traced the foundation and the activities of the Islam Committee of the Christian Council of Ghana (1963) through to the PROCMURA/ Interfaith Committee (1990-2006) and how the Committee worked assiduously across the country to achieve greater understanding between Christians and Muslims. Through the Forum of Religious Bodies, which was hosted by the Christian Council several serious religious misunderstandings and in some cases conflicts in Ghana were resolved?



*Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini,
Area Adviser of
PROCMURA for Ghana*

The aggregate of all these activities was the present peace and peaceful coexistence that is enjoyed in Ghana at the moment.

He also highlighted the events that led to the dissolution of the Forum of Religious Bodies, which was replaced by the Ghana Conference of Religions and Peace. In addition to how those events and a restructuring exercise in the Christian Council of Ghana in 2005/2006 led to the inactive situation the PROCMURA/Interfaith Committee of the Council finds itself.

Both speakers emphasised the need to revive the PROCMURA/Interfaith Committee which will lead the Council in its drive to foster good relations with Muslims in Ghana and to engage them for the social, economic and political wellbeing of society in general.

Plenary Discussions

During plenary sessions three issues came out clearly:

- That many people were surprised by some of the revelations of the presentations
- That the Church Leaders became more and more convinced in the reality and importance of Christian-Muslim relations for the life and ministry of the churches
- That there is the serious need to have the PROCMURA/Interfaith Committee in place at the Council, to lead in the Christian community's desire to relate with and engage Muslims for social action when the need arises

Impact of the Workshop



Rev. Dr. Fred Deegbe, General Secretary of the CCG

From the welcome address of the General Secretary of the Christian Council and the opening response of the Chairman for the sessions, to the questions, comments, contributions and suggestions, it became obvious that the workshop had made a strong impact on the participants.

The General Secretary of the Council, the Rev. Dr. Fred Deegbe in his address reminded participants that they were “invited to a very reformatory workshop or seminar so as to learn more about interfaith relations”. He recalled that he recently met the Iranian Ambassador to Ghana who was a Muslim. The Ambassador, according to Dr. Deegbe, said that there was no difference between Christianity and Islam because both religions worshiped one God. Dr. Deegbe said the Ambassador made a suggestion that

he should be invited by the Christian Council of Ghana for one of their meetings which the General Secretary accepted to grant. The Ambassador then said “in Iran marriage could be between people irrespective of their different religions”. This for him meant that Christianity and Islam were acceptable to each other.

In his opening speech as Chairman for the sessions, the Most Rev. Dr. Aboagye-Mensah, one of the Vice Presidents of the AACC, suggested that through the Christian Council of Ghana the Iranian Ambassador should be welcomed to make him feel that he is part of us despite his religion.



Cross section of participants follow the proceedings intently

He stated that “a country that makes peace as a result of interfaith relations develops better”. He said he was happy that Ghana was an example of cordial relations between Christians and Muslims in the region and hoped that Ghana would continue to work hard to maintain this relationship between Christianity and Islam.

He agreed with Rev. Deegbe that the aim of the workshop was to strengthen Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. Generally four things could be noticed:

- All the participants agreed that the setting up of a new Area Committee was very necessary.
- That the scope of the Committee should be broadened to include the Ghana Pentecostal Council and National Association of Charismatics and Christian Churches.
- That the Committee should be set up immediately. No need to delay.
- More of such workshops for the Church Leaders were important to delve deep into issues on Christian-Muslim relations.

Appreciation

We in Ghana can only express our gratitude to ICCO & Kirk in Actie whose financial input made this revival workshop a reality. It remained a dream, then a concern and now a reality. We are very thankful to you, friends.

For the Future

It is planned that immediately the Council reconstitutes the Committee, which is to be soon, a three day educational and sensitization workshop will be held. This will allow members to be oriented on PROCMURA’s philosophy and approach to Christian-Muslim relations and the members duties and responsibilities.

Conclusion

We are grateful to God who has been with us and enabled us to keep the light of PROCMURA burning amidst the difficulties we encountered along the way, and look forward to the formation of a new Area Committee that will reinvigorate the good work in Christian-Muslim relations.

We are grateful to the PROCMURA Central Office in Nairobi and to the General Adviser and his team for always working with us to ensure we revive the work of the Area Committee in Ghana.

Humbly Submitted:

Rev. Nathan Iddrisu Samwini

Area Adviser

March 31, 2011