



COMMISSION EPISCOPALE JUSTICE ET PAIX RWANDA

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EPISCOPAL COMMISSION JUSTICE AND PEACE (CEJP Rwanda) IN OCCASION OF #KWIBUKA30

« And be renewed in the spirit of your minds» (Eph 4, 23)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, resurrected in this Easter season as we celebrate the love of Father towards us, the love which was manifested by the death of his Son who died on the cross ; because « For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.» (Jn 3, 16).

Dear brothers and sisters,

This year we experience Easter joy by commemorating another painful event in our country. This is the 30<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994, which took more than a million innocent human lives. This crime caused misfortune and pain, the gravity and magnitude of which only God knows. Hearts still bleed, wounds are still fresh. First of all, allow us to send a message of consolation and closeness to the survivors of the Genocide in this moment of deep pain for the loss of their loved ones.

Nevertheless, the journey all along the 30 years has been long and was characterized by many actions aiming at reconstructing the country in all domains. This time allows us to look back into the painful past and opens for us a bright future which we wish to live together as a national community. We praise the Lord who has always accompanied the Rwandan people across the ups and downs of life towards personal and community resilience.

### **The value of human life**

The Holy Scriptures tell us that God created man in his image and likeness (Gen 1:27) and he has the power to know and love his Creator. God made him responsible and protector of other creatures. The human person carries within himself the image of God and his nature. Contemplating this greatness of man, the psalmist says: « *When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place. What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, put all things at his feet* » (Ps 8, 4-7).

Man had the privilege of having the image and heart of God. Therefore, he deserves to be respected in his dignity regardless of his skin color, his race, his origin and his history. He deserves to be respected and loved.

Coming back to the human life dignity, the Pope John-Paul II writes: « *Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills*» (Evangelium vitae, 39). He continues by saying: « *The sacredness of life gives rise to its inviolability, written from the beginning in man's heart, in his conscience. The question: "What have you done?" (Gen 4:10), which God addresses to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel, interprets the experience of every person: in the depths of his conscience, man is always reminded of the inviolability of life-his own life and that of others-as something which does not belong to him, because it is the property and gift of God the Creator and Father*» (Evangelium vitae, 40).

Unfortunately, it is noticed that, in the different parts of the World, the spirit of indifference and violence ignores and disrupts life. Whoever has come to know the value of life would do nothing but defend it, especially the weakest and most precarious life? Rich or poor, powerful or weak, we all share the same dignity because we were all created in the image and likeness of God.

### **Why have we forgotten the value of human life?**

The atrocities of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 are a clear proof of the indifference of life. The perpetrators of these crimes considered the victims as less worthy, less men to be eliminated without further action. Human madness had gone beyond the limits, because of group interest. Material goods and narcissistic interests had taken priority over life and the dignity of the human person.

If we had respected the law of nature and our conscience which inspires us to do good and repel evil, we would not have allowed ourselves to be tossed around by the barbaric madness which claimed human lives. We should have recognized that we share the same fate, the same destiny and the same Creator. The Rwandan people regret the brotherhood violated in 1994, the friendship broken, the hearts broken and the humanity denied. It was the Rwandans who attacked their brothers and killed them even though they shared everything. The psalmist returns to it in this way:

*« For it is not an enemy that reviled me—that I could bear not a foe who viewed me with contempt, from that I could hide. But it was you, my other self, my comrade and friend, you, whose company I enjoyed, at whose side I walked in the house of God »* (Ps 55/54, 13-15).

In this period of the 30<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi, let us meditate, each personally, on certain attitudes. How did I behave before, during and after the genocide? Were my attitudes good? How did I overcome the temptations of evil? How did I get involved into crime? Why did I let evil settle in my heart? What can I do to prevent evil from spreading in my heart and in my family?

## **After the Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We praise the Lord who allowed the Rwandans to come back to life after those dreadful events. Apart from human lives, Genocide brought the entire country to its knees in all its spheres, public and private infrastructures were destroyed, a good number of orphans without a future, widows without support, refugees in the countries bordering areas, thousands of prisoners, the prevailing genocidal ideology inside and outside the country, etc.

The Church intervened during the emergency period to rescue the people living in precarious conditions. Charitable and parish interventions at this time claimed several lives at the grave. On the other hand, through the Justice and Peace Commission, the work of healing wounds and providing psychological support was urgent. Psychosocial facilitators and paralegals placed in parishes played a leading role in the work of rebuilding the country.

Then the extraordinary synodal process on ethnicity organized in all the dioceses of the country between 1998 and 2000 prepared Christians to enter into the jubilee celebrations, the jubilee of 2000 years of Christianity and that of 100 years of the evangelization of Rwanda. The recommendations resulting from this synodal process reflect the firm determination of the faithful never again to forget their brotherhood in Christ. We ask the Christians to rediscover the wealth contained in these recommendations and to rebuild the brotherhood founded on the Rock which is Jesus Christ.

We are happy of the fruit of the pastoral work of unity, reconciliation and resilience after 30 years. The Church in Rwanda is making great efforts in this direction alongside the country's administrative authorities. We continue this work by also fighting against genocide ideology and negationism.

## **Towards the horizons, let us renew our spirit**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We pursue the path of peace and reconciliation, sprinkled with forgiveness and tolerance. *“In the wake of a conflict, tells us Benedict XVI, reconciliation – often pursued and achieved quietly and without fanfare – restores a union of hearts and serene coexistence” (Africae munus, 21).* We put forward forgiveness as a remedy for our evil.

Forgiveness requested, given and received, constitutes the foundation of good human, interpersonal, intra- and inter-community relations. We encourage pastors of soul who offer their time and themselves in this dynamism which rebuilds the human and Christian community. We also urge those who have been convicted of the crime of genocide to humble themselves and sincerely ask for forgiveness and the survivors to offer this beautiful gift of forgiveness. Indeed, *“it is by granting and receiving forgiveness that the traumatized memories of individuals and communities have found healing and families formerly divided have rediscovered harmony” (Africae munus, 21).*

Dear brothers and sisters, forgiveness requires, beforehand, surpassing oneself and one's own interests. It is an opening towards a brilliant and peaceful future. Therefore, we urge you to renew yourself through a spiritual transformation of your judgment (Eph 4, 23) to live turned towards the Lord Prince of peace.

Kigali, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

**+Anaclet MWUMVANEZA**  
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