

## **WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION**

### **Inter-Regional Program On Identity, Diversity, And Dialogue (IDD) In Partnership With The Council For World Mission (CWM)**

#### **Journeying Towards an Affirming and Inclusive Community: Dialogue on Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities and Expressions.**

### **COMMUNIQUÉ**

We, participants of the WSCF Inter-Regional Program on Identity, Diversity, and Dialogue (IDD) in partnership with the Council for World Mission (CWM) held on July 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya. From diverse identities but together belonging to the Federation's ecumenical family of SCMs and churches in 20 countries namely; Kenya, Zimbabwe, DR Congo, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar, Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria, Canada, Brazil, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Australia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, United Kingdom and Lebanon commit to carrying forward the process of constructive dialogue which has just started for the first time in Africa in the hope of building an inclusive community for justice and peace where people of different sexual orientations and gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics are affirmed and celebrated. To this end, we express our shared understanding and prayers that this may serve to ground the framework of this continuing dialogue.

In the last seven days, we engaged in re-reading the Bible and developing our theological understanding of Human Sexuality, listened and reflected on the context and realities within the global North and South, and analysed the intersections of poverty, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and citizenship from listening to the stories and experiences of discrimination from the LGBTIQ<sup>1</sup> refugees, rescued children, and women living with HIV/AIDS. In the process of dialogue, we acknowledged our diverse opinions on SOGIESC<sup>2</sup> and interpretations of the Bible, particularly on homosexuality. Despite having diverse opinions, the group agreed to engage in dialogue on IDD.

### **LGBTIQ IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICA**

Africa is home to many LGBTIQ people suffering in silence as they cannot come in public because it is taboo by culture, a crime by law and believed as a sin by the Church. They are rejected by their own families, the society and even by the church. Most African countries have laws that criminalize homosexuality. As a result, LGBTIQ people live in fear or hiding or have fled their countries to seek asylum in countries that are safer. Living as refugees, they also go through very traumatic experiences of harsh laws, public humiliation and attacks. African culture and the Church condemn homosexuality as a sin against God's design of the creation of humankind and does not welcome or embrace LGBTIQ people.

While a minority of religious leaders are inclusive of LGBTIQ people, the dominant

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<sup>1</sup> A common abbreviation used to refer to people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer

<sup>2</sup> Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expressions and Sex characteristics

understanding and culture within the Church deny LGBTIQ people their right to worship. In African culture LGBTIQ people are often treated as outcasts and branded by the Church as demon possessing, requiring exorcism and deliverance.

The combination of cultural beliefs, exclusion from the Church and the anti-homosexuality laws in African countries silences dialogue and prevents safe space for expression. People who may want to include LGBTIQ people feel unsafe talking about homosexuality for fear of attacks and insults from their communities. This has led to many LGBTIQ people disengaging from their families and society to live in isolation. It is difficult to find political will in African countries to address LGBTIQ issues. Even in countries that have liberal constitutions, communities still have biased views towards same-sex relations and gender identity.

## **BIBLE AND THEOLOGY**

Through a faith-seeking understanding of gender and sexuality, we affirm that God's creation of humankind in God's image mirrors human sexuality in diverse and multiple sexual orientations. However, we wrestled with many varied challenges pertaining to LGBTIQ issues and questions; whether "homosexuality is a sin" and "what does the Bible say". While some unspoken homophobia persists in many hearts and minds, many have been seeking and open to the fact that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality and persons of multiple sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTIQ). Though some participants quoted certain "lobber texts" (gay-bashing texts) e.g. Lev. 18:22; Romans 1: 26-27; Genesis 19, etc. as "proof-texts", the rich pool of input resources shared by all the resource persons drive home God's beautiful creation of humankind in the divine image reflecting persons of multiple and diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. And God loves and affirms this creation of humankind. Participants reminded themselves that Jesus' new commandment of love for one another as he has loved and of neighbor as yourself must be our faith-hope imperatives in the process of struggling with the truth that all human persons of diverse sexual and gender identities come from God. As God is a God of justice, it is our imperative to journey with all marginalized peoples (Lev 19:15).

## **REJOICE IN HOPE**

We are hopeful to create a violence-free society. There are countries within the African continent and other parts of the world providing safe spaces for LGBTIQ people. For example, Mozambique and Botswana have recently decriminalized same-sex sexual relations. Other countries that are protecting the rights of some or all LGBTIQ people include India, Philippines, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Bangladesh (recognizing the trans people as the third gender).

Recently, Africans are talking openly about rights of SOGIESC which may result in opening spaces for other Africans government to:

- a. Repeal the laws that criminalize LGBTIQ people
- b. Start providing safe public space for expression and association
- c. Training and providing basic knowledge in caring for LGBTIQ people who seek asylum

Within Africa and the world, there is a rising number of faith-based ministries and communities that are welcoming LGBTIQ people. The church continues to reflect on its

past and current role in the treatment of LGBTIQ people and what it means to walk with the marginalized as Christ calls us to do. Gradually, churches are beginning to welcome LGBTIQ people with love as we have with others on the margins.

In some countries, civil society continues to provide safe spaces, raise public awareness and apply pressure on the government to recognize the rights of LGBTIQ people.

## **ACTION**

Participants from both the second and the first Inter-Regional Programs on IDD acknowledged the diverse theologies and contextual understanding of member movements. However, our common ecumenical identity and prophetic witness as WSCF compels us to continue journeying towards building an affirming and inclusive communities. Therefore, the participants of the two programs recommended that the IDD continue to engage the Federation in dialogue through the mandate that will come from the 37<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in June 2020 in Berlin.



**Delegates of the IDD Inter-Regional Program, July 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2019.**

**Desmond Tutu Conference Centre, All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)  
Nairobi, Kenya,**

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*Endnote:*

*In the spirit of our theme “Journeying Towards an Affirming and Inclusive Community: Dialogue on Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities and Expressions”, we share this Communique to the wider ecumenical community worldwide. However, we would like to acknowledge and put on record that some individual participants have voiced their*

*disagreements with this Communique. Based on their various cultural understandings and drawing from a few Bible texts that homosexuality is wrong or sinful, God's creation of humankind reflects only heterosexuality and not sexual orientation.*