

**Report of The Meeting of the AU-Interfaith Dialogue Steering Committee, Abuja,  
Nigeria, 11-12 March 2010**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In furtherance of the decision of the Preparatory Workshop on Inter-faith Dialogue held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 5-6 November 2009, the Steering Committee on Interfaith Dialogue met at the same location from 11-12 March 2010 to finalize the details of the preparation for the Interfaith Dialogue Forum in May 2010. These includes the African Council of Religious Leaders – *Religions for Peace* (ACRL-RfP), All African Conference of Churches (AACC), Hindu Council of Africa, Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), African Women of Faith Network (AWFN), Forum for Religious Leaders and Faith Organisations (PLeROC), Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) and some religious scholars, amongst others. The Committee was composed of designated representatives of the main religious groupings on the continent with the African Council of Religious Leaders as the convener. Also in attendance, were representatives of the African Union Commission and rapporteurs from civil society.

The Steering Committee deliberated and took decisions on the purpose and objectives of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum, its role and inputs as a committee, the precise timing and dates of the dialogue, the scope and size of participants, the criteria for the choice of these participants, invited guests and observers, participation of the host government, expected outcomes, the work programme and other related preparatory measures.

**II. OBJECTIVES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

The Steering Committee agreed that the objectives of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum would be as follows:

- a) To develop an inclusive, practical and sustainable working relationship between the AU and faith-based organizations capitalizing on their shared values and mutual interests;
- b) To harness the capacity of faith-based organizations to the work of the African Union in promoting peace, security and development on the continent, particularly in the areas of peace building, conflict prevention and resolution, humanitarian action and refugee support, promotion of good governance, socio-cultural and political stability, development and climate change.
- c) To sensitize both the AU and faith-based groups to the demands of cooperation in this respect and use this to jointly define an agenda of action and the framework for its implementation.

- d) To share experiences associated with this programme of action within and outside Africa and to rally and mobilize faith-based constituencies to support the objectives of this partnership.
- e) To further develop guidelines that would enable the effective development of this framework of partnership between AU and faith-based groups in Africa, including mapping out clear channels for structured inputs by faith-based organizations into the processes of decision-making in the AU and vice-versa.

### **III. THE ROLE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE**

The Committee recalled that the Preparatory Workshop of November 2009 in Abuja had assigned it a cardinal role in the preparation of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum in Abuja, Nigeria, in May 2010. It then identified the precise elements of this role as follows:

- a) To ensure that the modalities for the AU Interfaith Dialogue Forum are put in place;
- b) To finalize the related details and requirements for the meeting and take active steps to facilitate and ensure its success.
- c) To rally and mobilize faith-based constituencies in the various countries and regions of the continent to send appropriate designated representatives to the Dialogue in order to ensure its success and effectively enable the follow-up actions that would be contingent upon its outcomes.
- d) To coordinate arrangements with the host government and the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in order to garner support and facilitate the success of the meeting.

### **IV. TIMING AND DATES**

The Steering Committee agreed that the meetings would be held for three days from 18-20 May 2010. Religious Leaders would arrive on the 17<sup>th</sup> and departures would begin on 20 and continue on 21 and 22 May 2010 depending on travel connections.

### **V. SCOPE AND SIZE OF PARTICIPANTS**

The available budget is about USD 250,000 including USD 35,000 to be provided by the African Council of Religious Leaders. The Steering Committee estimated that the budget will support the participation of about 60-70 participants.

### **VI. GENERAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS**

- a. Participants to consist of senior religious leadership from Pan African constituency faith-based organizations
- b. Participants to be drawn from the national-based interreligious councils, sub-regional inter-faith communities and Pan-African inter-faith organs

- c. Participants from the inter-religious councils should, apart from Christians and Muslims include African Traditional Religion practitioners, Hindus, Judaism, and any others that are part of the interreligious councils
- d. Gender sensitivity should seriously be taken into consideration in the choice of participants.
- e. Participants should include youth and religious scholars.
- f. Balancing the regions – West Africa, North Africa, East Africa/Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Indian Ocean Islands, Central Africa be taken into consideration

## VII. DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Proposed total number of participants	60-70
Proposed number of Christian participants	20
Proposed number of Muslim participants	20
Proposed number of African Traditional Religion (s)	4
Proposed number of Hindus	5
Proposed number of Judaists	1
Steering Committee	9
Others	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>

East/Horn of Africa	North/Central Africa	West Africa	Southern Africa/Indian Ocean countries
20 Participants	9 participants	25 participants	11 participants

Male	48 participants	Inclusive 2 youth
Female	17 participants	Inclusive 2 youth

AU-RL Conference	Total	Christians		Muslims	AR	Hindus	Judaism	Steering Committee	Others
		Catholics	Protestants						
East/Horn	20	3	3	5		2		4	2
West	25	4	4	8	2	1		4	3
Southern/Indian Ocean	11	2	2	2	2	2	1		
North/Central	9	1	1	5				1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

## VIII. GENDER REPRESENTATION

Every effort will be made to ensure adequate representation of women.

## **IX. INTERVENING CONSULTATIONS**

The Steering Committee urged for frequent consultations between the Steering Committee members as it finalizes the plans to successfully hold the Interfaith Dialogue Forum. The Committee mandated the Secretary of the African Council of Religious Leaders – *Religions for Peace*, Dr. Mustafa Ali to specifically consult the Nairobi-based members, or those coming to Nairobi to continue to meet frequently in Nairobi to consider ways and means of facilitating the success of the Dialogue and to share the results of such consultations with other members of the Steering Committee for decisions, as appropriate.

## **X. OBSERVERS AND INVITED GUESTS**

Some observers and invited guests will be invited to the Forum. The opening ceremony will be an open session to which members of the diplomatic community will be invited. The ceiling for the closed session will be ten observers. Six other civil society organizations will be invited as full participants in the Dialogue.

## **XI. THEME OF THE FORUM**

The theme of the meeting will be “Advancing, Justice, Peace, Security and Development: Harnessing the Power of Religious Communities in Africa”

## **XII. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- An Inter-faith Dialogue Forum (IDF) for the purposes of bridging the gap between this important and strategic segment of the civil society and the African Union is established;
- Experience on inter-faith dialogue is shared;
- Increased awareness and participation of FBOs in AU initiatives, policies and programmes is created;
- An agenda for action and framework for its implementation is developed ;
- A work plan for the institutionalization of inter-religious dialogue and the partnership between the AUC and FBOs is developed;
- Religious harmony and tolerance amongst all religious and faiths in the continent is promoted;
- The place of FBOs in a people-driven and people-owned African Union is located;
- The FBOs contributions to the AU’s work in the areas of Governance and Human Rights, Elections, Conflict Management and Development Action and Climate Change amongst others is harnessed;
- Information material on the virtues of religious dialogue and inter-religious tolerance is produced and disseminated.

### **XIII. OTHER PREPARATORY MEASURES**

Deliberate measures will be taken to elicit cooperation, active participation and logistical support of the host government. The assistance of senior religious leaders through NIREC will be required for this purpose. Two representatives of AU, two members of the Steering Committee along with the Archbishop of Abuja, His Grace - and the His Eminence, Alhaji Said Abubaker will meet with host government officials sometime in April to engage the Nigerian government in order to enable effective preparations for the meeting.

### **XIV. AN ADVANCE TEAM**

An advance team comprising representative of the AU and the Steering Committee will arrive in Abuja, Nigeria on 11 May 2010 to facilitate preparations for the meeting.

### **XV. CLOSING SESSION**

The Secretary of the African Council of Religious Leaders, Dr. Mustafa Ali, presided over the closing session. In the course of the session, representatives of the religious groupings, thanked the African Union in general and the Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Mr. Jean Ping, in particular, for staying the course on this important initiative. They also expressed the conviction that the initiative will fill a critical gap in the integration agenda of the continent and contribute significantly to the advancement of peace, security and development in Africa.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Ali observed that the two day meeting had achieved the objective set for it by the Preparatory Workshop in December 2009. He acknowledged the interest and hardwork of all members of the Steering Committee that had made this possible and urged each and everyone to continue the same to assure the success of the actual dialogue in May 2010. He also thanked the AU and its representatives for their support and contribution to the process. Dr. Ali concluded that this AU-Interfaith Dialogue process is unique and would set a pace and pattern for all other international organizations, including the UN and other regional organizations around the world to follow.