

Bishop Dr. Alex Malasusa, the Chairman of Christian Council of Churches in Tanzania and the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Stefan Reith, the Resident Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Sheikh Suleiman Lolila, Secretary General for BAKWATA, Chairman Tanzania Interfaith Partnership, Board Member Interreligious Council for Peace Tanzania

Sheikh Khamis Haji Khamis, Chief Kadhi of Zanzibar

Sheikh Abubakar Zubeir, for Tanzania Mainland Mufti

Reverend Dr. Simone Sinn and Reverend Dr. Elieshi Mungure, Lutheran World Federation

Hon. Jordan Rugimbana, Kinondoni District Commissioner on behalf of Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner

Religious Leaders in various Capacities

Academicians

Experts

Members of the Press

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed honoured to be invited today to officially open this Interfaith Dialogue on Peace Building, Democracy and Development: A Call for Active Citizenship in Sub-Saharan Africa.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the organizers – Lutheran World Federation, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania together with their partner Mission Eine Welt and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung – not only on hosting the Interfaith Dialogue in a very timely manner; but also on the choice of the venue. Tanzania being the ‘Island of Peace’ offers herself as the natural venue to share experiences on Peace-Building.

I have been made aware that an Interfaith Team comprising of members from Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Christian Council of Churches in Tanzania and BAKWATA met in September 2013 in Arusha and March 2014 in Dar es Salaam to jointly make the initial preparations.

I am told that the majority of participants come from Tanzania however; participants also include Christians and Muslims from Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa.

It can be noted that historically these countries have had long-standing experiences in interreligious coexistence, but are recently facing some challenges in interreligious relations against the backdrop of societal changes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am mindful of the fact that today the word “Peace-building” has unfortunately become a buzz word. This is the result of the altered interreligious relations triggered by many factors. We are guided less by facts and more by negative perceptions about others. We are forced to watch **what** we say; **how** we say it; **when** we say it; and **where** we say it! Potentially a very negative development. We are well aware that if we do not act **NOW** this situation could degenerate into disturbances and then riots.

Political and religious leaders are called to act together and to act now. The joint effort will demand trust; tolerance; transparency; time; energy; commitment; open and timely communication; monetary and non-monetary resources. The joint effort might require mind-set-change. **It will not necessarily be easy; but it is possible. Together we can make it happen.**

This brings me to the theme of my keynote speech namely: **“Strengthening Peace, Good Governance and Sustainable Development – Joint Responsibility for Political and Religious Leaders.”**

Let us not lose sight of the fact that Political and Religious leadership are there to serve the same community!

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1963, the Late President John F. Kennedy said, and I quote: *“Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however un-dramatic the pursuit of peace, that pursuit must go on”* – end of quote.

To achieve what Late President Kennedy has put so well; political and religious leaders have to jointly take ownership and leadership of peace-building. Jointly they have to observe peace as a process and not an event; jointly they have to work towards eroding old barriers; jointly they have to build new structures to promote peace.

By hosting this Interfaith Dialogue you are heading towards eroding old barriers and creating not only new structures to promote peace but also a new way to address real or perceived differences. These differences if not addressed tend to threaten peaceful coexistence.

Political leadership can create an environment conducive for peace and peace-building. This can be achieved through appropriate legislation, community policing, people-centred budgeting, mainstreaming gender, poverty eradication, environmental protection, and the like. But we all know this will not be enough!

Religious communities play an important role in empowering their members to be active citizens that contribute to peace. They lead by example and show how mutual support and care for one another contributes to peace in their neighbourhood and in their society. For all religions, peace and reconciliation are important concepts. Religious teachings provide a strong motivation to overcome violence and hatred, and to build trust and solidarity among different people and communities. People of faith believe that God is the source of peace who enables us to live peacefully with others. It is the role of religious leaders to strengthen such commitment to peace. Once a conducive environment has been created and the empowering of the people is in progress; peace and peace-building shall be strengthened.

Under the prevailing peace, good governance can be demanded by the community. The community members have time to know and appreciate their responsibilities and their rights. This approach shall put the political leadership on guard as leaders are accountable to the community. The inherent temptation by the political leadership to 'over-ride' the community decisions for whatever reasons shall be held in check.

Striving for peace and promoting good governance aim at allowing development to take place. The political and religious leadership have to jointly give the development a direction through their actions. Shall the development be equitable? Shall it be sustainable? Shall it be oppressive? Shall it be exploitative?

The nature of development jointly promoted by political and religious leaderships shall have direct impact on good governance and peace!

Political and religious leaders cannot afford to play the 'blame-game'. As I said at the beginning – they both have responsibility for the wellbeing of the community! When issues run contrary to expectations it is their duty to meet and assess the situation and determine the most positive approach to take.

Political and religious leaders have to be **pro-active**. Political leaders have to learn to mutually reduce their own political differences and power struggles. On the other hand, the religious leaders have to learn to come together, listen to one another and form a unit bigger than their own group of followers.

This bigger unit shall provide a space where they establish relations between them to discuss issues of joint concern, and shall allow them to speak as 'Religious Leaders' as opposed to a leader of a certain faith. This provides a platform to positively interact with the government and/or political leadership. As the famous African proverb says: *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

Should the religious leaders succeed to create a collective vehicle it shall enable the government and/or political leadership to be confident that by speaking to the collective vehicle they shall be speaking to **ALL** religious leaders.

As matters stand today – this cannot be claimed to be the case. The present vehicles do not permit the government and/or political leadership to speak to say **ALL** Christian leaders or **ALL** Muslim leaders.

In this aspect what has been achieved is no small feat. But like all good things, it can also be improved.

I want to believe that your Interfaith Dialogue shall strive to have agreements, recommendations and the way forward. I can assure you, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, as a key stakeholder for peace, will be happy to receive recommendations from this Interfaith Dialogue. The Government remains committed to work together with All Religious Leaders to maintain peace, good governance and promote sustainable development. My door will always be open for this noble cause.

May I conclude with a quote from Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali: *"Democracy is an objective. Democratization is a process. Democratization serves the cause of peace because it offers*

the possibility of justice and of progressive change without force.” End of quote.

I wish you all pleasant deliberations and I have the pleasure to declare the Interfaith Dialogue officially opened.

Thank you for your attention!