

## AEFJN 2018 SEMINAR AND PLAN OF ACTION

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Members of the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) had their 2018 seminar on March 15, focusing on developing a four-year Plan of Action (PoA) for advocacy and lobbying at the EU. AEFJN is a network of 48 male and female religious congregations advocating and lobbying for economic justice between Europe and Africa, at the European Union headquarters in Brussels.

The process started in October 2017, with a questionnaire sent to member congregations. The questionnaire asked each congregation to identify and suggest, from the experience of their members on the ground in Africa, particular areas for advocacy, while bearing in mind EU's economic policies in the continent. Focus suggestions for advocacy will enable AEFJN's secretariat in Brussels to develop concrete strategies that bring out opaque economic policies which are not in the interest of the poor in Africa. It also empowers the secretariat to advance alternative and people-centred economic policies that will intentionally embrace the poor in Africa. The secretariat collated responses from the questionnaire, from which they produced a draft PoA. Focus areas that emerged from the responses were climate change, extractive minerals and corporate social responsibility, food sovereignty, good governance, migration, and trade.

Chika Onyejiuwa CSSp, the network's executive secretary, presented the draft PoA to the participants, highlighting some contextual changes in the economic relationship between

Europe and Africa. Last year, through the initiative of the government of Germany, the EU proposed a Marshall and compact plan with Africa, which is put forward as a “new partnership for Development, Peace and a better Future” in Africa. Another economic bloc, the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) presents another emerging and interesting economic context in Africa: lobbying the EU involves knowledge of the economic policies of the BRIC nations in Africa. It is also essential to pay attention to the actions of Trans National Companies (TNC) in Africa, some of whom neither follow due process in their business deals nor respect human and environmental rights. Aided by corrupt and rent-seeking African elites, these TNCs continue to impoverish millions on the continent which produces the raw materials that propel global post-modern industrialization. The Executive Secretary emphasized that AEFJN’s new PoA should take these and other emerging issues on board in designing efficient and effective strategies for advocacy and lobbying at the EU.

Twenty-two participants representing different male and female religious congregations participated in the seminar. They worked in three language groups on the draft PoA and identified priority areas for the network’s advocacy in the next four years. Participants agreed that many of the issues in the PoA are interconnected, since one issue is necessarily linked to others, and effective advocacy on one issue will affect others. Underlying these issues is the question of poor governance and oversight responsibility on the part of governments in Africa, not forgetting the greed and profit-driven business initiatives of TNCs. Given the complexity of the context and the multifaceted nature of the actors, the participants advised the secretariat to focus on one or two areas.

Participants emphasized the need for formation and training on the use of advocacy to advance the mission of member congregations. They also emphasized the need for formation and training in the use of advocacy to advance the mission of member congregations. They suggested establishing more local antennae of member congregations at the grassroots. These antennas will form the bedrock of local AEFJN advocacy while assisting to provide the secretariat with credible information for advocacy at the EU.

Member congregations were invited to the antenna meeting in Namur Belgium, from the 11–13 May 2018. The meeting will bring together representatives from different European antennas. Representatives from Africa will join the meeting via skype. Religious congregations who wish to join AEFJN’s initiatives are invited to contact François de Paul Hougue, SMA by email.

For more information, please visit [AEFJN](#).

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