



***AFRICA***

***EUROPE***

***FAITH & JUSTICE***

***NETWORK-UK***

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***Annual Report to Provincials***

***2016***

The most striking impression of the past year has been one of challenge, growth and development.

In March, we organised our first residential Antenna meeting at Wistaston Hall, Crewe – an experiment to replace our previous meetings in London - as we felt that costly travel was taking up too much of our time and energy. We found that the residential element gave us the benefit of longer sessions interspersed with breaks which provided opportunities to share our concerns and ideas at a deeper level.

We faced the challenge: “**Why do we as AEFJN-UK continue to exist?**” and reaffirmed our aims:

- to promote economic justice for African countries in their current exploitation by powerful multinational companies,
- to lobby policy makers in our national government and in the European Parliament in order to influence legislation on Climate Change and trade treaties most affecting Africa,
- to respond to the call of Pope Francis, especially defined in *Laudato Sii*, to attend to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate dominated by more powerful interests...there is no room for the globalisation of indifference.” *para 52*
- to support our African congregational members and empower them to speak up against injustice.

We explored ways of developing a more effective two-way relationship with the AEFJN Office in Brussels and of raising the profile of the organisation in the wider church in order to encourage more people, both religious and lay, to participate in this important work. In June, we were delighted to welcome five newcomers to a one day meeting held in London to introduce them to the AEFJN organisation and to our current issues of concern: **Climate Change, Land Grabbing and Trade.**

Encouraged by the March experience we held a second residential Antenna Meeting at Wistaston Hall in November. This time we were able to extend the sessions on our issues and discuss ways of working on them more effectively.

### **1. Trade with Africa – a “new colonialism”**

We considered the background of trade as it operates today, especially the effects of **Free Trade Agreements** on the poorer countries of Africa. Flawed structures enable the richer countries to exploit the poorer while powerful multinational companies plunder the precious natural resources of Africa with impunity, especially its minerals and fertile land. Foreign companies are buying up huge swathes of land to grow palm oil and other food crops for export and for biofuels, depriving the local people of their means of livelihood, threatening Food Security and causing widespread poverty and malnutrition.

**Agribusiness** companies force African farmers to buy GMO seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides which destroy both soil fertility and the environment and prevent farmers from using traditional methods which have been successfully passed down from generations.

## 2. The Climate Change Crisis

As Pope Francis has told us: “There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, by replacing fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (*Laudato Sii* 26)

The Paris Agreement was due to come into force at the Marrakech Climate Change Conference 7-8 November, where the nations of the world would continue their work of strengthening the global response to Climate Change, focusing on implementation and support.

The outcome was bitterly disappointing. “All the developed countries did was to try to evade and postpone their responsibilities to provide funding for poor countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change.”

While the race is on to develop more effective ways of generating **sustainable energy** sources, such as solar, wind, wave and hydro-electric power, together with systems for **carbon capture and storage** it is equally imperative that deposits of fossil fuels be left in the ground if Global Warming is to avoid surpassing 2C.

## 3. Land Grab

Nearly every country in Africa is an object of land grabbing but there are also **signs of hope**. Many opportunistic business people and companies who switched to land grabbing after 2008 are now bankrupt and, more importantly, there is growing resistance from local communities and organisations, often thanks to educational programmes such as those of the *Africa Faith and Justice Network* in the United States and initiatives taken by our office in Brussels.

AEFJN-UK has chosen to focus on ‘FERONIA’ a company which has three vast areas of palm oil plantations in the DRC. In a recent report three areas of concern are highlighted: Feronia’s right to the land, its relations with its workers and local communities and the suspected diversion of development funding. This case is of particular interest to us in the UK because Feronia is being funded by the CDC Group (*Commonwealth Development Corporation*), a company wholly owned by the UK government.

### **The Future: Brexit?**

Nobody, not even our Prime Minister and government, seem to have any clearly defined plan as to the effects of UK’s withdrawal from the EU, especially with regard to our trade relations with the rest of the world. Some NGOs, like *Traidcraft*, are expressing grave concern that the poorer countries with which UK has had long established trade links will suffer hardship. In addition, the UK will no longer be entitled to seats in the European Parliament so our influence on future legislation will be lost.

How all this may affect our work in AEFJN-UK is unknown but we will continue to raise

awareness of economic injustice to Africa and to lobby our own government whenever the need arises.

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