

AFRICA
EUROPE
FAITH & JUSTICE
NETWORK-UK

Annual Report to Provincials

2017

Introduction

2017 has been a year of consolidation, growth, adaptation and a new outreach to our African brothers and sisters to empower them in their struggle for economic justice amidst the many forces which threaten African countries today.

Consolidation and growth

We have continued the pattern of residential meetings in March and November held at Wistaston Hall, Crewe, where the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have given us a warm welcome. Three new members joined us, including two from Malawi, their contributions greatly enriching the discussions.

Our programmes have included videos on *Trade with Africa* and the film by Al Gore: *Climate Change – An Inconvenient Truth*, both demonstrating the catastrophic impact these can have on the livelihoods of people in Africa, especially in those areas where they are engaged in subsistence farming and depend on the land for their very survival.

We have also been fortunate in obtaining excellent specialist speakers, from **CAFOD** on *Climate and Environmental Justice* and from the **Jubilee Debt Campaign** on *Africa's Debt – the UK's Role*. This less well-known issue exposes a new crisis seriously affecting Ghana and Mozambique, but which is spreading across other African countries, with high debt levels. This crisis is made worse by tax evasion, the rise of corporate power and the recent crash in global prices for commodities – raw materials such as oil and metals on which African economies depend.

In June we held a half day meeting in Archway, London. We were delighted to welcome Gino Brunswick from the Brussels Secretariat who gave us an enthralling insight into AEFJN's activities in a number of African countries where corporations are engaged in land grab, exploitation of natural resources, violation of workers' rights and damage to the environment. His report also included initiatives towards the formation of AEFJN national antennae in Africa each fostered by one of the European Antennae, a major step towards empowering the local people to resist corporate injustice and defend their human rights.

Adaptation.

As a group we have had to face the current realities of aging members as well as that of younger members who carry heavy burdens and the continuing ministries of their congregations, with little time to spare to participate in the administrative work of the Antenna. We are making full use of digital communication and the opportunities it provides for sharing of information, discussion and decision making.

A new outreach to Africa –a Kenyan Antenna

Just a year ago, one of our longest serving members received a request from Shisanya Johnstone a CFC lay Associate in Nairobi, for help in starting a new Antenna. Fortunately, Fr Chika Onyejiuwa CSSp, Executive Secretary in the Brussels Office of AEFJN, was planning to visit Nairobi and was able to include a meeting in his busy schedule. The subject of a Kenyan antenna was put to the JPIC committee of the major superiors, RCSK and AOSK, who agreed to support the project. We in the UK Antenna have been in constant contact with Shisanya throughout the year and now, December, a proposal has been drawn up for a two-day Orientation Course for forty people to take place in Nairobi in mid-February 2018. Fr Chika will represent the AEFJN and guide the orientation process.

There are already two **franco-phone** African antennae, the Central African Republic and DR Congo, but this will be the first English speaking antenna and a landmark both for AEFJN and for Africa. We in the UK Antenna are keen to support and encourage this new venture, in any way we can, with the hope that it may lead to closer cooperation between the two antennae, in sharing information on practical issues.

Action

The common aims and issues for the AEFJN Network are coordinated by the Brussels Secretariat in consultation with the Executive in Rome and antenna representatives at their annual meetings. Updated information on these issues is published monthly in English and French on the AEFJN website, www.aefjn.org under the title **ECHOES**.

This year the website received an exciting and attractive new format, easy to navigate and with excellent material under the main headings, **Trade, Corporate Justice, Food Sovereignty, Health, Spirituality and Africa**.

Each member is encouraged to work on these issues in whatever ways are available to them, keeping themselves informed, signing **petitions** to MPs organised by other NGOs, encouraging others to do so, and raising awareness whenever the opportunity arises.

Africa is facing unprecedented threats to the future welfare of its people as outlined in an article by the well-known Senegalese journalist, Ken Brugel, entitled "*The Black Continent will Destabilise the World*" (September 2017) available on the AEFJN website.

As Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical ***Laudato Si***: “It is possible that we do not grasp the gravity of the challenges now before us” (#105) **and he warns** us that “To take up these responsibilities and the costs they entail, politicians will inevitably clash with the mind-set of short-term gain and results, which dominates present-day economics and politics. But if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility” (#181).

Let us pray earnestly for our politicians and do what we can to encourage them to brave the costs of selfless responsibility in defence of the poor and vulnerable people of Africa today.

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