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Regionalism, Ethnic Conflicts and Democracy in Africa

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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Ike, Obiora F.
Publisher	Printed and bounded by BEW IT LTD
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Download date	2026-09-16 03:19:09
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166336

Chapter Fourteen

Regionalism, Ethnic Conflicts and Democracy in Africa

It is with profound joy and the spirit of African communality and solidarity that I welcome all of you to this peaceful and vibrant part of our continent, Enugu, the evergreen Coal City.

As you very well know, Enugu was the centre of one of the most heinous, most brutal and most violent ethnic-tribal conflicts on the continent of Africa (1967-1970), which has been known as the Biafran War. It has remained a classical case study which justifies the *raison d'être* and the urgency of this International Colloquium on "Regionalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy in Africa". This topic is apt as the continent remains very tensed up on issues bordering on this topic. How many million lives have been lost? What untold sufferings have been unleashed on people, many of whom are innocent children and women? How many are now refugees, with Africa's 15 million refugees taking the first place on the global statistics of migrants and displaced persons?

As co-organizer of this very important Colloquium which has been strongly initiated and solidly supported by the German Foundation of the Konrad Adenauer Regional Representative Office in Cotonou, Benin Republic and also in my capacity as the Director of the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace; it is pertinent to note that this Conference has been a long time in realization and planning. Far back in 1990, the CIDJAP organized an Inter—continental Symposium on "Catholic Social Teaching enroute in Africa" with the participation and attendance of the continents renowned academics, ecclesiastical dignitaries and Human Rights activists to assess and re-direct the continent's 'permanent crisis', elevate her joys and solve her sorrows. Dr Volker Monikes, Director of the KAF, then in Kinshasa, Zaire, was present at the Conference. It was at this time that proposals for a regional West Africa.

KAF activity were mentioned and concrete activities in this direction started. The good understanding of the KAF central office in Germany made it possible for Dr. Monikes to be posted to Benin Republic for the West Africa

region after the unfortunate and ongoing deterioration and anarchy in Zaire under Mr. Mobutu.

It is my delight. Therefore, to say WELCOME to Dr. Monikes to our country, Nigeria again and we look forward to years of better, fruitful and patient cooperation for mutual benefit in the areas of economic, political, social and cultural growth.

The KAF will notice, and all of you participants at this International Conference will agree that our countries are devastated by problems of all Sorts; natural catastrophes and disasters, manmade political and economic destruction of the right order of things, foreign intervention and continued debasement of the African personality.

Right now, virtually every African country from Algeria to South Africa, from Kenya to Liberia, Cameroun, Sudan, Somali, are all faced with unquantifiable mess and the consequences are here with us.

Africa appears to be the last in the line this thus explains why the CIDJAP has decided to become positively involved with the ongoing attempt to provide solutions to the problems of Africa, even if in a very modest manner. The German way of speech expresses this mode: "*Es gibt viel zu tun, packer; wir es an.*"

We cannot with a human and Christian conscience keep quiet in the face of such challenges facing Africa as if business would continue as usual. We are encouraged by the Scriptures to take a Gospel option and to support the positive elements in mankind's history.

Permit me, therefore, to introduce to you, even if in a glance, the aims and activities of the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace in Enugu. The work of the CIDJAP is rooted in the Pastoral and Social Teachings of the Church as this has been articulated in the Social Encyclicals and relevant documents of Vatican II as developed in the tradition of the Church, based on biblical foundations and contextual realities of the times. It is hoped that the Institute can adequately assess and identify the needs of the local church, scientifically research into the problems and prospects of Christianity in our land and make its findings relevant for the daily lives of the people of God. The CIDJAP intends to achieve these aims through various means:

- To awaken God's people to the full understanding of their part and duty in the fields of Development, Justice, Charity, Peace, Human Advancement, Human Rights and to promote projects related to these aforementioned areas in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.
- To provide information and formation through education of persons, publication of books, booklets, pamphlets, distribution of same through the CIDJAP CARITAS bookshop and library aimed at enlightenment of the people, animation and conscientisation of the people on the issues that touch their own lives as well as training and involvement on local, national and international matters which enhance the dignity of man.
- To sponsor the technical, practical and academic education as well as further training of talented young people of suitable character within Nigeria and abroad.
- To foster international cooperation by promoting African studies, culture, economic justice, democratic culture and enhancement of contacts and development projects between various interest groups, international Catholic agencies, non-governmental organizations, world bodies and government bodies.
- To arrange meetings, workshops, colloquia, symposia, group discussions, lectures, and community development ventures on various levels of local and international participation and on different topics. To participate actively in projects related to health, social housing, promotion of women, academic research, youth employment and vocational training.
- To promote art by organizing events and giving support to artists.
- To champion the cause of the oppressed and the marginalised as well as speak out against injustice and oppression, maintain and fight for human rights, prisoners' welfare and civil liberties of persons generally.
- To recruit and train volunteer workers who are prepared to work in remote areas, in the villages and in rural development programmes with relevant technical skills.

- To develop and deepen pastoral reflection and action, theological ideas and Christian ideals in the context of a developing theology in Nigeria.
- Spread the social teachings of the Catholic Church as has been urged by the various Papal Encyclicals such as "*Mater et Magistra*", "*Pacem in Terris*", "*Populorum Progressio*", "*Laborem Exercens*" and other relevant encyclicals, as well as seek for avenues to participate and accentuate integral human development policies in the milieu of a developing nation as well as promote development and related issues by means of concrete projects.
- To promote dialogue between the Catholic Church and different Christian denominations, Muslims, non-Christians, non-believers, African traditional Religions and the State, with an aim of promoting peace, tolerance and coexistence in the light of Christian social principles.
- To promote agricultural training and increased food production.

After all that has been said and done, we shall be judged finally by what we tried in the face of crisis and not just by the good will we manifested in acknowledging the existence of crisis in an uninvolved manner. We must take sides. To be neutral in the face of injustice is a betrayal! CIDJAP should continue as a non-governmental organization in her work for the Humanization, the Civilizations and the rejuvenation of the children of God who live on this continent. Together with the KAF and all positive organizations of human progress, the peace, development and Freedoms of Africa remain our goal.

Finally, it is my hope that the deliberations in this international Colloquium in the quiet coal city of Enugu, a city that was once a war front victim on ethnic and tribal levels will be fruitful and beneficial, not only to the participants but to the larger sub region and the world in general.