

Overcome Violence Through Peace

A NEW global campaign against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is beginning to take shape. A news article recently stated: "Churches are well placed to address the relevant social, economic and political measures needed to reduce the demand for small arms." I wish to briefly express my opinion concerning this from an African perspective.

It is imperative that the churches be at the forefront of this campaign as champions of peace, reconciliation and the upliftment of marginalised people. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has declared a Decade to Overcome Violence at the same time that the United Nations took up a similar theme.

This historical opportunity in which secular society (the UN) and churches worldwide are working together to deal with, among other things, the illicit trade in small arms and light

weapons, must be seen as a God-given chance to establish a global ethos of peace and non-violence. Churches and other non-governmental organisations can help to organise campaigns of micro-disarmament in the interest of socio-political development.

The objectives of such campaigns have been clearly stated by Sverre Lodgaard and Ivor Fung, namely to explore strategies of conflict prevention and resolution as well as post-war consolidation. An atmosphere of security is needed to encourage socio-economic development and donor-supported upliftment projects.

When wars end there is always an upshot of crime and banditry. The abundance of available arms breeds cultures of violence. This is clearly seen in South Africa, which has gained the infamous reputation of being the crime capital of the world. For that matter, Africa as a whole is a storm

centre of violence and wars.

There are encouraging signs of hope on our continent though. Some governments are working towards strict arms control and peace-building. On December 10 1999 the heads of 16 West African nations adopted a series of measures to prevent armed conflict, resolve violent conflicts, undertake peace-building initiatives, step up arms control and curb the availability of light weapons. Bilateral co-operation between South Africa and Mozambique has existed since 1996 to stop the illicit cross-border trade in light weapons and to destroy arms caches pointed out by paid informers in the two countries.

In Mozambique "Hoes for Guns" is a disarmament programme which has been mobilised by the Christian Council in Mozambique. It encourages people to hand in their weapons in exchange for sewing machines,

bicycles, plows and other items which can be used in local development.

Encouraging too is the response of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to the challenge of the WCC to work for the overcoming of violence. In a joint meeting with the Africa-based members of the WCC Central Committee, the General Committee of the AACC undertook to make it their top priority to wage a campaign to end wars, overcome violence and to work for peace in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya, March 21 2000).

Yes, the churches are not totally asleep. Some are trying to live out their mission. But there are far too few such commendable projects in Africa. Although those good things are going on right on their door-steps, those governments now still involved in armed conflicts seem not to have heard about the new approach of turning swords into plough-shares.

Here is where the church ought to step in and do the work of advocacy. The churches have the prophetic task of proclaiming to war-mongering states the new way to peace, development and prosperity.

In preparation for the Decade to Overcome Violence, the churches should urgently organise workshops and seminars to inform their members about initiatives and movements for disarmament and peace that are in process. I was surprised to discover the abundance of information on the various websites of the WCC and other peace bodies. The churches must let their voices be heard in the efforts at micro-disarmament that are taking place, and must devise their own strategies and actions to promote peace.

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God."

Steve Titus, WINDHOEK

Plea For The San To Uplift Themselves Professionals, Coaches

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