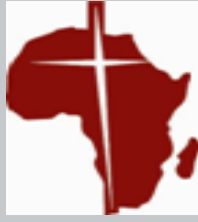


# The *African Christian Pulse*



August 2008

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# Challenges Facing the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: From Colonial to Economic Liberation

**The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) was founded in 1963 amid the excitement of Africa's newly claimed independence from colonial rule. As the dust settled from this momentous period in Africa's history, the continent and the church were left wondering how best to build nations after decades of repressive colonial rule.** These

initial struggles of political liberation have evolved into issues of economic liberation for the continent today.

## **Resources Endowed Continent**

Africa is a continent endowed with numerous resources.

A major challenge facing both the church and African governments today is to focus our God-given resources for the welfare and prosperity of the African people and formulate policies through which they will seek to fulfil their responsibility as custodians of those resources for the welfare of the people. This challenge calls for concerted efforts by the church, governments and other stakeholders.

## **Economic Violence**

To comprehend the current African situation, one must understand that colonialism left a painful legacy, which still affects the African society today. Education and health care were sidelined before African independence. To date, they continue to be ignored in the policies of international financial institutions. The limitations such institutions place on the recipients of their aid is the worst form of economic violence. The resulting economic conditions reflect this damaging situation and "poverty is no doubt the worst form of violence that remains pervasive in Africa."

## **Opportunity for Entrepreneurial Partnership**

Yet despite the bleak backdrop of injustices, both past and present, the church in Africa is not hopeless. For example, the opportunity for strengthened relations with Africans in Diaspora is encouraging. Already the links between the two are strong as evidenced by the amount of financial resources coming into the

continent from Africans in the Diaspora. In several countries including Kenya and Somaliland, the money coming in from these sources is far more than these countries receive from the international Aid Institutions.

The existing links between the Diaspora and Africa offers opportunity for a practical partnership between the church in Africa and the Diaspora e.g. the church could begin a financial service institution for facilitating financial transactions for improving our economic situation without holding out a begging bowl.

## **AACC's Vision for Self-Sustainability**

Africa is still facing numerous challenges inherited from a past full of harmful exploitation and divisions - from poverty in our communities, to divisive ethnicism in the society and in the church, and corruption in government circles. AACC's vision is to transform the continent from the sense of victim-hood to victor-hood. This vision comes alive with AACC's pursuit of self-

sustainability as well as through accompaniment of our global neighbours. ■

*(Excerpts of a speech by the Bishop Mvume Dandala, AACC General Secretary to Baptist Convention in*

*USA. A PDF version of his address can be downloaded from the AACC website: [www.ceta.org](http://www.ceta.org)).*

## Africa Pleads for Justice, Says AACC General Secretary



*AACC General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala*

**Africa has been described as a continent bleeding from injustices, war and violence. Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala, General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) said this when he addressed a pastors Conference organised by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2008, in Nakuru, Kenya that was aimed at giving pastors a chance to reflect, repent, pray together and be transformed to become agents of healing and reconciliation to the nation of Kenya.**

During the post election violence, Kenya's church was

accused of partisanship and for failing to guide its followers to rise above negative ethnicity. This severely dented the image and credibility of the church.

In February, 2008, NCCCK on behalf

of the church took responsibility for the post election violence. The move marked the start of a process of healing and reconciliation, was which the pastors conference was part.

In his message, Dandala emphasised that justice, peace and reconciliation are the bedrock of our Christian ministry and called on the church to be concerned about how the three are managed in the nation.

### **Justice is Churches' Central Mission**

He underscored the centrality of justice in God's design of national life by invoking the

unique role God assigned to the prophets as champions of justice. He said that the church today is called to arouse the conscience of the nations for them to embrace justice as a divine law from God. It is therefore befitting to challenge the church whenever it is aloof to injustices meted against people. In such situations people desperately ask for the visibility and tangibility of the mission of the church as the teacher, trainer and moulder of the societal conscience, he said.

### **Character of a Nation in the Hands of the Church**

He said the church should not play politics but instead have a grasp of the intensity and depth of justice borne of its character formation programmes. He exuded the church's unique responsibility of teaching and training people. Dandala stated that the character of the nation is moulded by the church

In the past, according to Dandala, the church

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understood itself as a community of justice. He therefore called on the church to re-examine itself if this understanding still exists in the church today.

Dandala noted that Peace and reconciliation are important social goals in the work of

God's creation and in the mission of the church, noting that the three elements are inseparable without inviting catastrophic results for society.

Dandala condemned the use of violence noting that it is not a solution for social problems adding that violence only

creates new and more complicated problems. He added that oppression in Africa is both political and economic. He urged for justice, goodwill and brotherhood to prevail among the people of Africa. ■

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## Educational Crisis and Rights of the Child

**The church in Kenya has expressed concern over unrest in Kenya's secondary schools which have been rocked by riots resulting in massive destruction of school's property. In July 2008 alone, over 300 schools went on rampage leading to closure of most schools way ahead of August holiday break.**

The problem has been in government schools, in private and in church sponsored ones. The situation was so severe that the Kenyan government considered re-introducing caning to curb indiscipline in schools.

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa has responded to the situation and issued a press statement guided by the theme of "Generation Building," derived from 2 Kings:4-7 (about

a man who served God faithfully and failed to secure his family's future resulting into enslavement of his children upon his death).

The church attributed the unrest in schools to among other issues: generation gap, drugs, media and lack of steward-ship.

In this regard, the church is calling for:

- Strengthening of the family institution as the springboard for responsible citizenry;
- Strengthening of chaplaincy, pastoral care, guidance and counseling;
- For media to exercise social responsibility;
- Role modeling.

The church is also recommending the use of other holistic approaches of producing physically, mentally, socially and spiritually wholesome person.

### Deprive Students of Modern "Wants"

Responding to the crisis, the Commission for Education and Religious Education of the Kenya Episcopal Conference faulted the government for contemplating use of the cane saying "violence of any sort bleeds more violence." Among the solutions the church has proposed are:

- Prolonged exclusion from schools of repeat offenders of serious offences
- Punishment that is commensurate with crime

- 
- Deprivation of some modern 'wants' for students (alluding to mobile phones)

The Commission observed that there was nothing of substance - in terms of punishment - which was put in place to replace caning and took issue with Kenyan courts for showing greater sympathy for students to the extent of instilling fear in

teachers. (In Kenya, teachers are afraid of canning students for fear of reprisals).

### **Between a Rock and a Hard Place**

The government of Kenya is a signatory for the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and has ratified various conventions that protect children. The crises facing the government now

threaten to erode the gains made for child rights.

### **Churches Role in Education**

Churches in Kenya sponsor a significant number of schools but their role has become increasingly weak because of their low involvement by the government in the running of educational facilities. ■

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## **Eminent Persons Program for Peace in Africa**

**Conflicts have been a common feature on the African landscape. Despite a multiplicity of peace initiatives, ending these conflicts has remained difficult and elusive.** It is against this backdrop that three ecumenical organizations namely; the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Church World Service (CWS) have come together to re-launch their Eminent Persons Ecumenical Program for Peace in Africa (EPEPPA).

The re-launched Epeppa now has a conflicts early warning mechanism, which is set for anchoring within the National Christian Council's and the

Councils network of churches that spread out to the grassroots. Grassroots reach is an important prerequisite for obtaining information on potential conflicts before they erupt.

### **Epeppa Model and Justification**

Prominent persons and African institutions have often called for the establishment of an eminent persons team to be an instrument for conflict prevention and resolution. The eminent team model resonates with the role of respected elders in African traditional societies who were considered invaluable reservoirs of collective wisdom and their involvement, guidance and wisdom was often sought on

crucial matters of peace and justice in society.

### **Role of Eminent Team**

Epeppa enlists distinguished, experienced and respected persons from Africa to form a team that will:

- ◆ mobilize local constituencies;
- ◆ Gain access to political powers;
- ◆ Successfully mediate a potential or an ongoing crisis.

The value Epeppa brings to existing peace initiatives, with which it endeavors to work closely, is the ability to put forth the commitment of African churches to promote peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa. The program re-affirms and

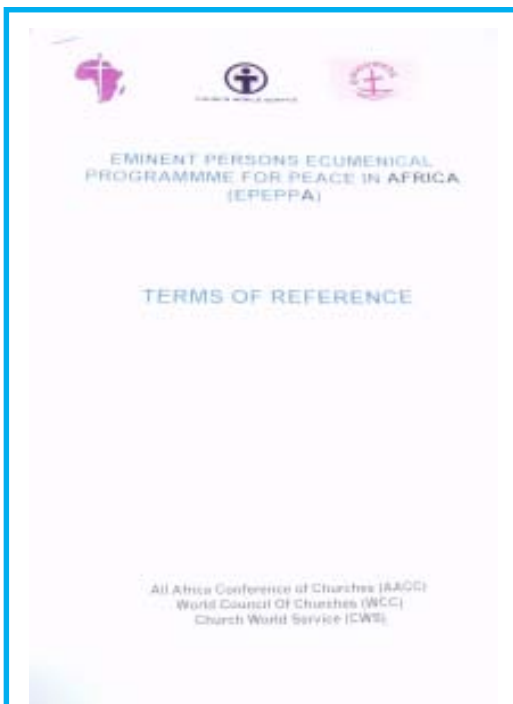
strengthens the prophetic role of the church to resolve and manage conflicts.

### Early Warning Mechanism

Typically conflicts evolve through five stages namely pre-violence, escalation, endurance, de-escalation and post violence. Epeppa focuses attention on all the five stages with particular emphasis on the pre-violence stage with a view to predict and intervene before conflict erupts. Common approaches to conflict resolution in Africa have been criticized for their focus on managing crisis instead of engaging in preventive measures and strategies.

history of mediating conflicts in Africa such in Nigeria (Biafra war), in Sudan (the 1972 Peace Agreement, the Comprehensive Peace

churches right up to the grassroots coupled with their long history of providing social services and staff who are familiar with the struggles and the needs of the people in the continent.



*EPEPPA'S Memorandum of Understanding signed by the three partners in August 2008*

### Three years of experience

Epeppa was conceived in 2003 and officially launched in October 2005. The program has now been re-structured after three years of learning experience and is now poised to be a more proactive instrument for curbing and resolving conflicts in the continent.

Epeppa team has in the past been deployed to Côte d'Ivoire and to Kenya following the disputed Dec. 27, 2007 General Elections. ■

### Combining their Strength

The tripartite organisations have combined advantage of a long

Agreement), in Mozambique and in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the three have extensive infrastructure of

## Year of Prayer for Africa: a Lectionary for use by African Churches Through 2008

The above lectionary was prepared to rally prayerful support for the continent and for the AACC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The lectionary which was published in all AACC languages; English, French and Portuguese, was availed in soft or hard copy to all AACC members.

We have been receiving very encouraging reports from churches indicating that they are using the lectionary for their weekly devotions. For example the Methodist Church of Southern Africa uses it for their weekly devotions; Procmura staff use it as well and

individuals from all over the continent are using it.

Please contact the AACC website ([www.aacc-ceta.org](http://www.aacc-ceta.org)) to download weekly devotion materials. We would appreciate to hear your feedback concerning the lectionary. ■



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## Africa Church Growth in the West

*A professor of theology who is also an ordained church Minister was eager to attend a church service upon arrival from Europe. After the Sunday worship service as is the practice back in his home country of Benin, he made his way to the front to congratulate the local minister who had shared the Word. On seeing the worshipper advancing towards him, the local minister hurriedly made his way out as he reiterated his earlier pronouncement that 'the service is over.' The worshipper who by now was only a few steps from the minister, read what was in the minister's mind and turned back with deep feelings of dejection. Meanwhile, the pastor walked away thinking 'yet another needy immigrant.'*

### Local Church in Foreign Land

There are many reasons why people in foreign countries prefer to worship on their own.

This was the main discussion of a Core Group Planning consultation on 'sending' and 'receiving' churches, which met in Geneva, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, July, 2008. The objective of the consultation; which was attended by participants from both receiving (European) and sending (African) countries, was to create a platform for dialogue between the two groups. According to the meeting, the leading African countries diffusing Christians to Europe are Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroun, Madagascar, Nigeria and Togo. The 'receiving' countries

are mainly Italy, France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland.

### Phenomenal Growth of Immigrant Churches

The phenomenal growth of immigrant churches in Europe against a backdrop of declining European church membership is causing concern not just for the European churches but also for the sending (cum losing) churches in Africa. Attributable to the trend, at a cursory glance, is a multiplicity of factors - cultural, economic to social - which need to be addressed for the sake of unity of the church in both regions.

### Africa Too is Affected by the Trend

This trend is not unique to Europe only but is replicated all over Africa. In Malawi, for example, immigrants often have their own services. In Kenya; Tanzanians, Somalis, Germans, Francophones and other common interest groups have come together to organize their own fellowships, services and other activities without necessarily involving or enlisting the support of their host churches. The reasons for



Sending and receiving church consultation members (Mr Shoo, Mrs Akakpo, 4th right)

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this are varied, they range from language to worship practices among other preferences.

### **Alarming Trend**

Even though this trend has not been a cause for alarm for the losing churches in Africa, it warrants concern and attention by both European and African Churches. At the recent Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops (July 16 to August 3<sup>rd</sup>) the matter was discussed. In addressing the issue of African Bishops who are planting churches elsewhere, the conference recommended

that African Archbishops should desist from setting up alternative churches. The proposal is aimed at preventing the Anglican Communion from sliding towards a permanent split, according to a Kenyan Daily (*Daily Nation*, July 30).

### **Way Forward**

The aim of the Geneva Core Planning Group of nine representing AACC, World Council of Churches, Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), and Communauté Evangelique

d'Action Apostolique (CEVAA), was to prepare ground for a bigger meeting in Nov. 20-23, 2008 in Italy for dialogue between concerned churches/groups. The Italy meeting will bring together church leaders of African, European and Immigrant churches.

The AACC is committed to facilitating dialogue aimed at finding an ecumenical solution to the challenges presented by this phenomenon and point to opportunities that exist for all the parties concerned. ■

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## **Nothing Good Will Come to Africa from the West**

**Africans have been urged to neither envy the West nor look upon it for solutions to their problems, but rather to turn to Jesus as the ultimate provider. This was in a message by Rev Cyprian Yobera, a Kenyan missionary to the United Kingdom, who described the West as undergoing social crisis. He was delivering a sermon on 24<sup>th</sup> August at a Kenyan Church.**

Rev. Yobera noted that moral conduct in the West has plummeted to its lowest ebb which has affected the youth many of whom are growing up

as social delinquents. He added that many people in the West are leading lonely lives, which he said is contrary to God's own design when he created Eve to be Adam's companion.

### **Declining Church Membership**

Rev. Yobera said that the church is rapidly becoming irrelevant in the lives of people in the UK especially among the youth as a result of which church membership has drastically declined. During the six years he has been in the UK to promote youth ministry in the church, Rev Yobera claimed

that he has only managed to convince 15 young people for the Christian ministry. He added that people there have resisted the message of Christ and in certain cases rejected even Christ's messengers.

### **Future Wellbeing of the Church is in the Youth**

He lamented the absence of the youth in church citing Manchester City's biggest Cathedral which he said has a membership of only 500 people majority of whom are senior citizens. He said that it is the youth who hold the key for the future wellbeing of the church.



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He called on Africa to nurture faith and send more missionaries to Europe. ■

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## Healing And Restoration of Africa

A sermon by Bishop Dandala based on the story of the Man with Unclean Spirit (Mark 5:1-13)

*A story is told of two girls who in old, dirty and torn clothes, met an old man whom they asked, "Sir, tell us where the house of the king is?" The old man looked down on them and responded, "Who do you think you are?" The girls, with their heads held high replied, "We are the daughters of the king we belong in this house."*

Africa is in need of healing and our task is to proclaim the healing power of Jesus and each one of us is a messenger for proclaiming the healing. This was the message of Bishop Mvume Dandala in a sermon he delivered at the AACC Chapel during staff's weekly worship on August 25, 2008.

In his sermon based on the biblical account of the man with an unclean spirit (Mark 5: 1-13) Bishop Dandala said that some biblical scholars, think that the man with the unclean spirit might have been a survivor of a Jews massacre during the time of Herod and that the tomb in which he was

living could have been a mass tomb for the massacred.

Furthermore, he added the unclean man's madness could have been as a result of his own deep hurt and trauma perhaps for having witnessed his family's massacre, or it could be that he simply had demons. The bottom line, Dandala said is that the man was deeply hurt. Unfortunately, continued Dandala, besides the hurt of this man by the world he himself continued to inflict further hurt and pain upon himself (verse 5).

Africa, Dandala observed has mass tombs such as in Rwanda and elsewhere and some mass tombs remain undiscovered.

"Africa is hurting. The world has hurt it but as if that is not enough, Africa continues to inflict harm on itself and has also turned against its children, women, and other disadvantaged members of its society," Dandala observed.

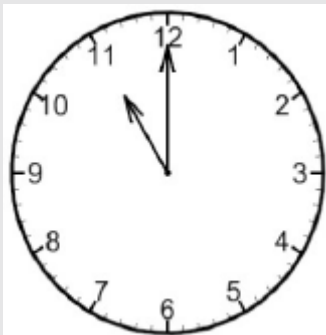
### **Jesus is our True Healer**

The world offered the man healing in form of chains and ropes to tie him down (verse 3,4). "This is no healing and

God's Mercy knows when healing is no healing. Africa needs Gods mercy for true healing and restoration. Africa we have a true healer, our healer is Jesus Christ and we are agents of his healing even for those who have turned against themselves," Dandala affirmed.

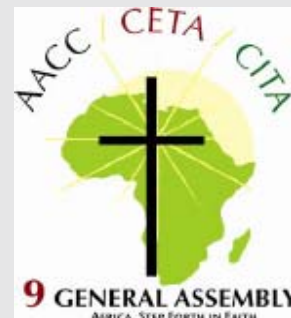
### **Africa to Shun Negative Brand**

When the man with the unclean spirit was asked for his name, "legion," he responded (which means the oppressed), Jesus immediately recognised that that was not his name. Likewise, Dandala said, Africa's name is not poverty, conflict, war, drought or famine and called on Africa not to allow itself to be called names that condemn it to hopelessness, despair and failure. He said names have meaning and importance and called on Africa to accept only names that carry and convey hope and positive aspirations. He challenged Africa to rise above the names it has been branded. Africans, lift your heads up high and go forth and heal the groaning world, he ended. ■



Fourteen Weeks to go

## AACC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: *Africa, Step Forth in Faith!* Maputo, Mozambique 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008



### Pre-Assembly for African-American Christians

The AACC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly will be a unique forum offering a marketplace for the free flow of ideas and thoughts for the wellbeing, growth and development of the African continent. It will therefore be open to every person or group with something to share or contribute towards this end. One such group is the African Christians in Diaspora who, under a new vision branded the Nehemianic Vision, will present their views and thoughts to the African Churches in Maputo, Mozambique from 7-12 Dec. 2008.

#### Background of the Nehemianic Vision

In 2007, Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala, AACC's General Secretary visited the United Kingdom where he held discussions with African Christians in Europe and

listened to their concern for Africa. A visionary concept dubbed Nehemianic Vision emerged based on Nehemiah 2:17. The vision is an expression of the strong desire by African Christians in Diaspora to contribute to rebuilding, renewal and restoration of the African continent. The ideas and thoughts from this meeting gave rise to a Pre-Assembly of African American Christians in the USA.

The US Pre-Assembly which will take place at the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis from August 24-27, 2008, will bring together historical African American Churches namely:

- ◆ Presbyterian Church (USA)
- ◆ Progressive National Baptist Convention

- ◆ National Baptist Convention
- ◆ African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
- ◆ Disciples United Church of Christ,
- ◆ Trinity United Church of Christ-Chicago
- ◆ International Council of Community Churches.

#### A Vision for Africa

The key elements of the Nehemianic Vision are: it emanates from Africa; it is owned by Africans; steered by Africans and it is about Africa.

#### Ecclesial 'Partnership for Africa's Development'

The objective of the Nehemianic vision is to build a mutually beneficial and long-term global church partnership for rebuilding the continent by



mapping the Diaspora to audit their potential and capacity and by empowering Christian leaders to carry out this vision. One of the strategies is to organise meetings to synthesize the thoughts for the Nehemianic Vision.

### **Not Strangers to the Assembly**

African Americans in the Diaspora have participated in the past AACC General Assemblies without direct

influence on the assembly business. But this time their input will feed into the business life of the assembly through the workshop discussion on the theme of Global Pan-African Solidarity. Their participation in the Assembly is taking shape as members of Diaspora meet with an AACC delegation led by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Nyansakoni-Nku, the President of the AACC, accompanied by Rev. Dr. Japhet Ndhlovu,

continental coordinator of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

Rev. Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc. will lead the African American Christians, and Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., USA is the contact person in charge of logistics and planning the Pre-Assembly.

## **AACC Members News Roundup**

### **Burundi**

The *Union des Eglises Baptistes du Burundi* (Union of Baptist Churches of Burundi) celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 1-5 May 2008 during which Rev. Julien NSENGIYUMVA was elected president and Rev. Geoffrey NDAGIJIMANA his vice. The momentous occasion was also marked by a seminar on Democracy.

### **Togo**

The *Eglise Méthodiste du Togo* (EMT) held its biannual conference under the theme "Turn Us, O God of Our Salvation" during which Rev Charles KLAGBA-KUADJOVI was elected to head the church.

Rev. Klagba-Kuadjovi formerly a theological consultant for the World Council of Churches' programme on HIV and AIDS (Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative for Africa – EHAIA) for francophone members was inducted on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2008 at a ceremony conducted by Rev Dr Simon DOSSOU, AACC General Committee member and President for Africa of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Dr Comlan Prosper DEH, AACC Regional Director for West and Central Africa represented the AACC at this ceremony which was also attended by AACC members from Togo, Ghana, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire.

### **Zimbabwe- Methodist Church**

Bishop Simon Madhiba, a Member of the AACC General Committee is the new head of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Harare West District. Prior to his appointment he served as the Administrator of the Conference.

In a congratulatory letter to Bishop Madhiba, AACC expressed her readiness to continue supporting the Church in Zimbabwe especially in the current political and economic difficulties that are facing the church and the people of Zimbabwe and wished Bishop Madhiba God's blessings as he serves the Church in his new

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capacity.

## **Zambia**

by *Mulenga Chilambwe*

The General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Zambia Rev. Susan Matale has called on the church in Zambia to remain united and to seek God's guidance at this time of mourning of the country's President, Dr. Levy Mwanawasa who died on 19th August 2008, in a French hospital while undergoing treatment for a

stroke he suffered while on duty in Egypt attending an African Union summit in June 2008. Time has come for Zambians to stand upon the word of God, humble themselves and pray during this period when the country mourns its president.

Rev. Matale in her tribute said that Dr. Mwanawasa was dedicated to national and regional development and will be remembered for his legacy of unity and reconciliation and

as a champion for the fight against corruption in Zambia. His death is a blow for the talks towards a peaceful resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis in which talks he positively contributed.

Constitutionally, the country will hold a presidential by-election within 90 days from the date of his death. ■

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## **Upcoming Events**

### **Christian Communicators Workshop**

Church communicators from all over Africa will meet in Nairobi from 15-18 September, 2008 for a two day workshop organized by AACC Advocacy, Research and Communications Directorate.

### **WACC-AR Assembly**

World Association for Christian Communication

Africa Region will meet in Cape Town from 2 – 5 October, 2008 followed immediately by WACC Congress 6-10 October 2008

### **AACC Executive Committee Meeting**

Nairobi, October 6, 2008

### **AACC General Committee**

Nairobi, October 7-9, 2008

### **Sending and Receiving Churches Dialogue Meeting**

AACC, World Council of Churches, Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), CEVAA and VEM, will meet in Nov. 20-23, 2008 in Italy for dialogue between Sending (African) and Receiving (European) churches.

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# **WE WELCOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PULSE.**

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