

**Message of the Participants  
in the APDESAM and ASCAF JPIC Assembly,  
Juba, South Sudan.  
April 1–7, 2019**

Dear confrères,

It is with great joy that we come to you with greetings from Juba, South Sudan, where we have met to discuss issues concerning our commitment in the field of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. A special greeting goes to our confrères present in countries that have been – and still are – put to test by dramatic events (floods in Mozambique and Malawi, political tensions in DR Congo, dreadful consequences of a bloody civil war in South Sudan, ethnic and religious clashes in Central African Republic...), together with a brotherly embrace as a sign of our solidarity with them.

The theme of the Assembly was very solemn, if not breathtakingly challenging: “*Catholic response to Justice and Peace Issues in a Changing Africa*”. Many of us heard in a remote area of their brains a voice: “That’s an issue for specialists, not for us”.

That was not all. At our arrival at this first-even assembly of JP&IC Comboni commissions, we were astonished to find an official letter from the General Administration addressed to us. That letter (you can read it in the “Acts of the Assembly” you will receive in due time) awakened us immediately to a simple fact: we had come here to do ‘something’ that the entire institute considers important – in fact, of paramount importance – if the General Council felt the need to tell us: “The commitment to Justice and Peace is not a marginal one in our missionary ministry”. Father General and his Council specified: “Such commitment has been strongly stressed by the last General Chapter”. *Chapter Acts 2015* leave no doubt about it: “Reconciliation, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation are intrinsic elements of evangelisation” (n. 11).

No one of us ignores that this sentence has become an often-repeated refrain in missionary circles, since it was first written in the Final Document of the Synod of Bishop of 1971, titled *Justice in the World*. Before that Synod, various encyclicals and other documents had already dealt with the area of what was called “Catholic social teaching”. Of them all, only *Justice in the World* summarized, so clearly and succinctly, what the bishops were facing at that time – and we are still facing in our missionary work today. The insights the document contained, written for the first time with strong input from the perspective of those bishops who were victimised by globalised injustice, echoed many missionaries’ experience. The world they described was the world many elder confreres had experienced, but could not name. Those bishops declared: “Even though it is not for us to elaborate a very profound analysis of the situation of the world, we have nevertheless been able to perceive the serious injustices which are building around the world of men and women a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up of a more just and more fraternal world”. Then, all of a sudden, the real pearl appeared: “*Acting for justice and participating in the transformation of the world appear to us clearly as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and the liberation from all oppressive situations*”.

Since then, the statement has become “a tenet of the Catholic faith”: it cannot be brushed aside. The General Council itself, in its letter, feels the need to stress this point: “It should be emphasised that this commitment is a participation in the transformation of the world and its liberation; indeed, more precisely, in the structural transformation of areas such as politics, economics, legislation and education. It is a huge task, of course, which for this reason requires a multi-level collaboration network”.

The official presence of Fr. Arlindo Pinto, the in-charge of JP&IC at the General Administration level, convinced us that we had been called by the institute itself to gather in Juba for a special task, not a “secondary” one.

Yet, we soon realised that we are still far from what we are supposed to be and do. For instance, we were surprised to notice that some confreres “in charge” of JP&IC in their respective circumscriptions and/or provinces were not present. And for a simple reason: they were occupied in some other tasks, honestly deemed and felt “more important”, and had asked a confrère to represent them.

We all were impressed by the various inputs offered during the Assembly. Some of their contents were very challenging. Fr Arlindo, in his intervention, tried very hard to win us over to this “*unavoidable and noble cause*”. It was not easy to take it all in. Some of us needed further panel beating!

There has been a certain amount of pain in us in realising how far we are still from accepting – both with the brain and the heart – that the JP&IC ministry is “intrinsic” to our missionary work. If it is intrinsic and it is not clearly present, then our evangelisation is crippled, partial, lacking. The pain trickled down our faces when we listened to the various reports from the circumscriptions and provinces. Apart from quite a few successful initiatives of social transformation (see the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission, in Nairobi; the Laudato si’ Missionary Centre for the protection of the environment in Kinshasa; the various magazines published; the Radios managed by Comboni missionaries in Uganda), we all were forced to confess: “our JP&IC commission is dormant”; “our commission died when Fr ‘x’ left”; “our commission is moribund”; “our commission is totally inactive”...

Before and after our reports, the main ‘facilitator’ and ‘in-putter’, Dr. Aloys Otieno Ojore, offered us well-balanced descriptions of the situation of some of the nations we are working in, pointing out the various issues that must be faced by a truly committed Comboni commission of JP&IC.

The obvious conclusion was forced upon us by the situation in which we found ourselves in all the countries we were representing: *we must commit ourselves seriously to this “constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel”*.

The failures spelt out in our reports were due mostly, not to the fact that we do not believe in the necessity of this ministry, but that we all have many other tasks to deal with. None of us or of our confreres “in charge” of JP&IC Comboni commissions have been appointed to this ministry full-time. We and they have so many other important things to do, all of them felt as “constitutive dimensions of preaching the Gospel” as JP&IC itself. Yet, it is a fact that we have some commissions or secretariats that are blessed with a full-time coordinator! Are some more important than others? Where do we place JP&IC in the pyramid of our priorities?

At the end of the Assembly, we feel the need to share with you our conviction that something must be done about it. We are aware that the appointment of a full-time coordinator of JP&IC needs a lot of courage on the part of us all. Yet, all of us believe that JP&IC must be a ‘very high’ priority in the missionary activities undertaken by each of our circumscriptions. We should act accordingly.

One final point we want to stress: JP&IC stands also for a specific a “missionary spirituality”, which shares much with *prophetism*. Such spirituality should never fade away in us and in our evangelising mission, neither should we devolve our social responsibility and our call to social transformation entirely to the local Church. The *prophetic voice* of St Daniel Comboni should find echo in ours in all the situations in which we are engaged today. The Founder’s “unfailing loyalty to and love for the Church were rooted in his missionary charism” (*RL* 11). Such loyalty, however, should always be paralleled by our “untiring effort to move the conscience of the Pastors of the Church concerning their missionary responsibility so that Africa’s hour might not pass in vain” (*ib.*). Both attitudes are essential to our charism.

We have gathered in a booklet all the inputs, discussions, sharing, suggestions, and proposals we made during the assembly. Even by just glancing through them, no doubt, you will end up feeling what we felt during the six days we spent together: *we must be serious about Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation*.

We dare to spell out some *steps* of a possible “*way forward*”:

1. We strongly suggest that Comboni candidates in any formation centre (pre-postulancy, postulancy, scholasticate and International Brothers’ Centre) be passionately encouraged to make good use of the JP&IC materials produced by the General Secretariats of Mission and Formation. The topics proposed, together with other suitable texts, must be integral part of their formative journey, to help them to become convinced that today’s Comboni missionaries – like their Founder – must be champions of the “shalom” (*peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquillity*) God wants for his children.
2. We ask our JP&IC provincial commissions to find a way to link with Catholic parliamentarians in their respective countries, as well as with councillors and people’s representatives at county or region levels, aiming at creating grounds for lobbying and advocacy on issues of JP&IC, so as to have an impact in any law making process.  
[Kenya has already launched such an initiative, which has proved to be an effective tool. In DR Congo there are already chaplains in the Parliament: they could improve this presence and use it to champion issues of common good. Another initiative that could be studied and followed is the newly created Comboni Innovation Centre for Entrepreneurship (CEIC) Khartoum.]  
Similarly, we expect Comboni JP&IC commissioners to work in partnership [*network and collaborate*], whenever possible, with continental and regional organs of Episcopal conferences, such as the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa (*Association des Conférences Episcopales de l’Afrique Centrale, ACEAC*), the Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Region of Central Africa (*Association des Conférences Episcopales de la Région de l’Afrique Central, ACERAC*), the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA), and the Regional Episcopal Conference of French-Speaking West Africa (*Conférence Episcopale Régionale de l’Afrique de l’Ouest Francophone, CERAO*), to make it possible to be heard in matters of national interest: elections, situations of conflict or suffering, Lenten campaigns, etc.
3. We encourage collaboration and networking at all levels, beginning from parochial and diocesan offices up to VIVAT International and Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network AEFJN (a Faith-based International Network, established in 1988, present in Africa and in Europe, of forty-eight religious Congregations working for economic justice between Africa and Europe). We aim at becoming “affiliated” to these last two networks. A new AEFJN antenna was launched in Nairobi on February 16, 2018.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anyone who want to forward an issue (or more issues) to the United Nations or to the European Union, these are the two possibilities:

a) You can directly contact to offices of VIVAT International or AEFJN and present the case you want to be examined, by providing a full self-identification. Describe the case as fully as possible, adding the level of confidentiality you wish the case to be dealt with.

b) You may forward the case by using the Comboni contact person ([ipic\\_mcci@comboni.org](mailto:ipic_mcci@comboni.org)).

In both cases, precise information is required. The “*Five Ws*” are questions whose answers are considered basic in information gathering or problem solving. According to the principle of the ‘*Five Ws*’, a report can only be considered complete if it answers these questions starting with an interrogative word:

- *Who* was involved?
- *What* happened?
- *When* did it take place?
- *Where* did it take place?
- *Why* did that happen?

Some authors add a sixth question, *how*, to the list: • *How* did it happen?

*If photos and clips are provided, all the better. Confidentiality is assured.*

4. We will make use of legal channels wherever possible, especially in cases of human rights violations. Each Provincial JP&IC commission will make efforts to identify and establish a working relationship with some organisations that offer ‘legal services *pro bono*’.
5. We will ensure that our circumscriptions/provinces are veritable “champions of Justice and peace” by considering as matter of urgency the reviewing, the re-examination and, indeed, rectification of the working conditions of our employees, paying them adequate salaries and guaranteeing that their rights are not infringed upon.
6. We request the Provincials Superiors of the APDESAM and ASCAF to facilitate the continuation of this assembly with a regular frequency.<sup>2</sup>
7. In each province-circumscription we will revive as soon as possible past vibrant initiatives of JP&IC that proved effective but have died out or gone underground (e.g. Kutoka Network in the Nairobi slums). At the same time, we will strengthen existing initiatives.
8. We request the circumscriptions-provinces to ensure that there is a yearly budget for JP&IC commissions (and their activities), as it is being done for other secretariats and sectors.
9. We call upon circumscriptions-provinces to explore the possibilities of creating centres dedicated to furthering JPIC agenda, such as the case of *John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre* in Uganda and *Laudato si’!* in DR Congo.
10. We ask the Provincial Superiors and their Councils to care for the training and formation of personnel to be employed in our JP&IC commissions, so as to guarantee the credibility of their ministry. While appreciating the existence of other places of formation in this respect, we propose Tangaza University College as the institution we should take advantage of.
11. We demand that every circumscription-province revisit its directory/statutes of the Secretariat of Mission in such a way that language used therein features and captures the demands and the spirituality of the ministry of JP&IC.
12. We request that in every Comboni parish or mission there must be a JP&IC commission, and that the formation of their members be considered a priority of the parish pastoral team. We also strongly advise the creation of JP&IC clubs in schools and colleges present in our parishes or missions.
13. Finally, we dare to challenge all our provinces and circumscriptions, in particular their Councils, to share wholeheartedly the cherished dream of having a representation of AEFJN at AU level.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This Juba Assembly is of the opinion that once every two years would be an appropriate frequency. DR Congo and Togo-Ghana-Benin are proposed as the next possible hosting provinces.

<sup>3</sup> For the last two years, people in our Roman Curia have been reflecting on and aiming at establishing an office – a replica of AEFJN office is in Brussels – at the African Union. Two possible locations – Addis Ababa and Nairobi – are under discussion. However, Nairobi is considered more suitable for logistical reasons, as well as for the existence of democratic space. The problem is to find a person available for this task. Are the confrères in Kenya ready to take this challenge?

It must be an initiative carried out together by the members of AEFJN. They represent 45 religious institutes and 50,000 religious working in Africa. The case remains under serious reflection, and the APDESAM and ASCAF provincials are invited to take up this matter with Major Superiors of the member institutes for further reflections. It would be better if we managed to involve the Nuncio, who may give weight to the matter.