

Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa

Association des Conseils Chrétiens et Eglises en Afrique de L'Ouest



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Office of the Secretary General

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PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CHURCHES IN WEST AFRICA

"Churches call to speak out on Food Justice in West Africa"

To the Churches and People of Faith in West Africa,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I greet you in the precious name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The year 2014 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). The IYFF aims to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by alleviating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and allowing a sustainable development, especially in rural areas. The goal of the 2014 IYFF is to reposition family farming at the central of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agenda by state parties to identify gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development.

As we celebrate the Churches' Week of Action on Food Security and Nutrition from October 12 – 19, 2014, we are called to reflect together on the importance of family farming by speaking together on food justice issues. We must continuously raise awareness during this week about food production and distribution systems, re-examine our own food consumption patterns, and call for policy changes that will ensure the maximum supports for family farmers. Family farms make a major contribution to food security, better living conditions, poverty reduction and preserve the environment and diversity of species in rural areas.

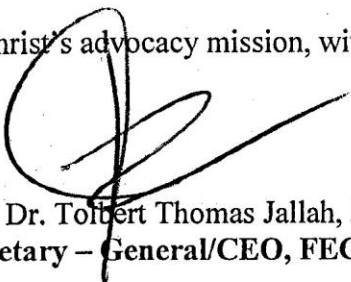
This year, the Churches' Week of Action will be held from October 12 – 19, 2014 which incorporates the International Day for Rural Women (October 15), World Food Day (October 16) and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (October 17). During the entire week, churches in the region are called to speak out and advocate for improving the quality of life of hundreds of millions of smallholders family farmers, fisherfolk, livestock breeders and indigenous communities. They are the source of 90% of the food consumed in West Africa, and must obtain formal recognition in each country.

Churches must support the International Year of Family Farming in advancing agriculture and promoting local economies. Family farmers should be recognized as pillar of local economies, and sustainable development. They guarantee food sovereignty, peace and stability in West Africa. Churches should give recognition to women's role in food production, from farmer, to housewife, and working mother as the major food providers and the foundation of our food system. Shamefully, they are the most vulnerable, most hungry, facing malnutrition, maternal and child deaths. This is injustice, and the churches see the situation as unfit and unrealistic in the 21st century which is contrary to God's purpose for His Creation.

During this week, we the people of faith should call on our respective national governments to ensure appropriate policies to support family farming and to increase the market power of family farmers, with focus on local and regional markets. We also call on churches and faith leaders to actively promote agro-ecology and organic agriculture as God's way of family. Agro – ecology and organic agriculture should be used in our theological dialogue, bible studies and sermons and calling for farmers' control over their production, especially their own seeds. Churches and church leaders must see family farming as the solution to combating hunger and poverty in West Africa. However, a single year dedicated to raise emphasis on family farming is also very insignificant to the important role farmers played in boosting local economies and sustainable rural development. Churches therefore must call on the United Nations and the African Union to declare a decade to support family farming, and not backing large scale agribusiness or plantations heavily supported by International Donors.

Please put smallholder farmers in your prayers, and hold public events in churches and church – owned schools to raise awareness of the strengths of family farms, appreciating and emphasizing the significant role they played in our communities. Remember always, that our faith in Jesus Christ compels us to be on the side of the poor, the hungry, the sick and those who are hurting.

In Christ's advocacy mission, with vision,



Rev. Dr. Tolbert Thomas Jallah, Jr.
Secretary – General/CEO, FECCIWA