



Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique



**Statement of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations
in Africa (PROCURA)
on the COVID – 19 Pandemic.**

27th May 2020

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), a pan African Christian organization established in 1959 to promote Christian constructive engagement with Muslims for peace in the wider society, and peaceful co-existence between adherents of the two religions, towards the holistic development of the human family and the environment;

Having received updates from its Area (country) Committees on the COVID – 19 pandemic and what churches and mosques, indeed the leadership of the Christian and Muslim communities, and the Area Committees are doing to prevent the spread of the virus and support the needy and the most vulnerable in society;

Having carried out extensive consultations with its Area Advisers, Regional Coordinators, consultants, and Muslim communities involved in PROCMURA's activities;

Being conscious that Africa is a religious continent and its people, therefore religious people, with Christianity and Islam and for that matter Christians and Muslims constituting the majority in the religious landscape of the continent;

Informed by the African Union report that all its 55 Member States have now recorded COVID – 19 with Lesotho being the last and latest country to report an infection;

Convinced that the pandemic has truly become “Africandemic” and therefore requires a total African continental approach and commitment to deal with the virus within the contextual framework of each country;

Recognising that this is not the time to complain or embark on any blame game but rather a time to explain to all and sundry that COVID – 19 is no respecter of persons, and that we are in this together as long as we are human beings;

Aware that when the lines between reality and fiction are clearly drawn it has to be acknowledged and accepted that COVID – 19 is real and no one can behave and live as if it is fiction;

Do hereby recognise the existential reality of COVID – 19 and deem it most appropriate and relevant to come up with a PROCMURA voice to add to the many other voices of religion and religious people on the pandemic.

With this conviction and in the context of the world and the Africa that we live in, we do hereby state the following:

1. That a Global Pandemic Requires a Glocal Action: By this PROCMURA is appealing to all nations of the world to think globally as they act locally to deal with the pandemic. This is important since each country's actions or even inactions has the potential to affect or infect other countries and eventually the world. This is one of the big lessons COVID -19 is teaching humanity. It is simply reminding us that the world is indeed "a global village" whereby none can insulate themselves forever against that which affects human beings.

2. That an "Africandemic" Requires a Unified African Action: In the context of Africa, PROCMURA's area of work, it can, for the lack of appropriate expression be said (as mentioned earlier) that COVID – 19 as a pandemic is indeed "Africandemic". This "Africandemic" as PROCMURA Area Committees in different parts of Africa have reported to the Central Office, is epidemic as it affects all communities, and endemic as some particular areas get more infected than others. In the light of this, all hands must be on board being conscious that as much as the saying goes that our 'lives are in our hands' and COVID – 19 requires that we wash our hands always, does not mean that we wash off our responsibilities. It means in this context that we keep our hands clean so that we do not jeopardise our health and wellbeing. In this sense our lives apart from God is in our clean hands.

Following these, PROCMURA's clarion call, indeed plea, to the world, to Africa, indeed to all people who dwell on earth, is to ensure that our collective and individual actions do not in any way appear to promote the spread of the virus, and that our inactions do not also in any way promote the spread of the virus either.

In this light we appeal to governments of the world with a focus on Africa our area of work that in the easing of restrictions which is gradually gathering momentum in some countries, we do not unduly overlook the stated imperative requirements for the prevention of the spread of the virus as stipulated by the WHO. There is still a dire need to remain proactive in working towards the prevention of the spread of the pandemic.

To this extent we strongly re-advocate for the observance of the mandatory requirement of 'Social Distancing' and ensuring that we live up to the catch phrase 'Stay at Home' if you have nothing essential to do outside your home. The frequency of washing of hands and if at all possible and available, the use of sanitizers as required, should form part of our mandate to inform all others. This remains our plea.

Now on the religious front and specifically addressing the Christian and Muslim communities who are the primary focus of PROCMURA's work, but not to the exclusion of others, we put forward the following Four-Fold Approach to attend to the COVID -19 menace:

1. A time for Orthopraxy: It is well known that Christianity and Islam more often than not in their teaching focus on Orthodoxy (right belief) and not so much on Orthopraxy (right practice). In the wake of COVID – 19, PROCMURA calls on Christians and Muslims to focus on orthopraxy so as to ensure that the pandemic which has truly become “African-demic” is confronted on all fronts in terms of the doing that attest to what one believes. COVID – 19 is an existential issue that requires action. There is a dire need therefore for sharing and providing the means of livelihood to the marginalised and the disadvantaged in society as they struggle to make ends meet, as a result of the economic hardship COVID -19 has caused.

Perhaps an appropriate analogy of this call, comes in the book of James which reads: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:15-17).

2. A Time to Embark on Diap Praxis: At this critical time in human history when lives are threatened PROCMURA calls on all those who embark on interreligious relations as PROCMURA does, and those who principally focus on interreligious dialogue, to let us all embark on Diap Praxis – tangible action together. This in plain language means “walking the talk” or embarking on the doing together than the talking together. Interestingly PROCMURA's initial response to COVID – 19 focused on diap Praxis even if it was not action together but action for all (Link)

3. A Time to Pray and Act: As it dawned on the world that COVID – 19 was a pandemic and not an epidemic in China as some initially misconstrued, and that it is real and not fiction, Christians and Muslims as well as people of other religions have fervently embarked on prayer. Many governments in Africa set aside national days of prayer to combat the spread of the virus, healing for the infected, and comfort for those who lost loved ones.

Prayer as a spiritual act of talking to and with God is innate in PROCMURA as devotions are conducted daily before staff begin work. However, PROCMURA operates within the monastic principle of prayer and work (Ora et Labora). It holds the view that prayer and action are intertwined and prayer without action has sometimes been described as ‘noise-making’.

On these grounds PROCMURA calls on Christians and Muslims to embark on prayer as their respective religious traditions require them to do, but ensure that such prayers are followed by action. This needs to be done, being mindful that true religion in essence must be transforming lives here and now for the better and not deforming lives here and now for the worse.

1. A Time to Cooperate and Collaborate for the Common Good: As COVID -19 is a human tragedy and not a religious one, PROCMURA entreats Christians and Muslims to work together with people of religion and all others to confront the pandemic that threatens humanity. In other words there is a dire need to collaborate and cooperate with other religious groups, governments and civil society organisations towards a collective action to prevent the further spread of the pandemic.

In line with this we call on the African Union, regional bodies and governments of African countries, to continue to have consultations with religious leaders whose constituencies cover entire countries so as to ensure that they work together and that none builds and the other pulls down, for we are in this together – all hands on board.

To conclude we would like to call on our PROCMURA Area Committees to be mindful that PROCMURA as a movement sees life before death as important as life beyond death, and implore them to remember the Liberia Area Committee Catch Phrase during the Ebola Crises - “Protect yourself and stay alive!”. In doing so let us add a phrase: “Protect others so that they may stay alive”. In doing so do not forget PROCMURA Central Office recently evolved phrase: PROCMURA, We care.

The saying is true to you all as it is to us all Let us light the candle of hope to overcome the darkness that COVID – 19 brings to humankind.

May God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17: 28) remind humanity that we may be afflicted in every way but cannot be crushed (Acts 4:8) – Amen and Amen

The Procmura Team