

**CHRISTIAN MISSION, STATE POLITY AND INTERNATRIONAL POLITICS FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF AN AIDS ACTIVIST IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:  
Implications For Church Action**

Joshua HK Banda  
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***Preamble***

*This Paper is an adaptation of two previous chapters of mine, each in separate publications namely, “Good news from Africa” (Regnum, 2013) and “African sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS” (PacaNet 2012) with a backdrop of illustrations from one other presentation, initially in response to Allison Herling Ruark and Edward C. Green’s Paper titled “Interrogating a Rights-Based Approach to HIV Prevention” presented at a Consultation on Human Rights and Africa – A Christian Perspective, hosted by The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA) in Abuja, Nigeria, June 27-July 1, 2011.*

**Introduction: Africa Yesterday and Today- Politics and More...**

Spanning an approximate total of 30.2 million square kilometers, Africa ranks as the world's second-largest and second most-populous continent, after Asia. With the inclusion of adjacent islands, Africa covers 6% of the Earth's total surface area and 20.4% of the total land area, inhabited by a billion people, who as of 2009, accounted for about 14.72% of the world's human population.<sup>1</sup>

At face value, it make rather sad reading to note that a fairly large number of the 54 sovereign African states have been dogged by corruption, instability, violence and in some cases, blatant authoritarianism over time.

For instance, from the early1960s to the late 1980s, Africa had more than 70 coups and 13 presidential assassinations. By 2012, there were over 200 coups recorded. Of the 200, 45% were successful, i.e. change in power at the top (displacement of the head of State and government officials, and/or then dissolution of previously existing constitutional structures). Of the 51 African states selected sample, only 10 countries have never experienced a coup d'état.<sup>2</sup> States without a successful attempted, or plotted coup d'état by end of 2012 were Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Eritrea, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa, and Tunisia.<sup>3</sup>

However, the good news is that a vast majority of the states are now well established as republics that operate under some form of presidential system of rule and which in recent years has

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<sup>1</sup> Sayre, April Pulley. 1999. *Africa: Twenty-first Century Books*

<sup>2</sup> Habiba Ben Barka and Mthuli Ncube. Sept. 2012. *Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups d'etat a Never-Ending Phenomenon?*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

catalyzed some fairly notable economic growth.<sup>4</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO, October 2010), the "African expected economic growth rate" was at about 5.0% for 2010 and 5.5% in 2011.<sup>5</sup> Today, this figure has progressed into the range of 6.6%. And it is projected that within 2014, Africa is now poised to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing economy after the countries in Asia.<sup>6</sup>

## Christian Mission and the Global Arena

In the last chapter of his ground breaking book titled *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*, Professor Paul Kennedy reproduced the following caption (quoted in part) from the Economist publication of 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1930:

The supreme difficulty for our generation...is that our achievements on the economic plane of life have outstripped our progress on the political planet to such an extent that our economics and our politics are perpetually falling out of gear with one another.<sup>7</sup>

So, is history repeating itself? What can be acknowledged at least is the fact that there are important lessons to learn from world history in general and Africa's past in particular that will assist our engagement with society today and tomorrow. One of my undergraduate professors often stated: learn from the past, obey in the present and shape the future!

In the foreword of one of the Edinburgh 2010 Regnum series, Rector of the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, Dr. Las G. Newman, observed accurately that "in the explosion of Christianity in the global south in the twentieth century, the church has had to contend with sharp socio-political issues such as poverty, greed, corruption, health, education and human sin in all its manifestations."<sup>8</sup>

It goes without saying that the present and the future of Holistic Mission, particularly in Africa, will encompass the issues listed above and even more. While reflecting on the Lord's Prayer in which we were taught to pray- "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma (2010) suggested correctly that matters of justice, peace, ...and wholeness" constitute God's "Shalom here on earth as it is heaven." Thus, in the context of our discourse, their definition of Holistic Mission in more ways than one, could serve as a confirmation of what our present and future tasks are:

"Holistic Mission...addresses all aspects of human and social life, and seeks not only to address problems of sin, the fundamental root of all injustices and poverty, in the individual, but also to address those problems at the community, national and international level."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Drysdale, Alasdair and Gerald H. Blake. (1985) *The Middle East and North Africa*, Oxford University Press US  
<sup>5</sup> [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org), accessed October, 2010

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Jeffery Sachs, Leading Economist and Director of the Earth Institute- Interview with Ritz Khan -

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, Paul. 1993. *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*, Harper Collins Publishers Ltd: Toronto

<sup>8</sup> Woolnough, Brian & Ma, Wonsuk (eds). 2010. *Holistic Mission: God's plan for God's people*: Regnum Books International. Oxford

<sup>9</sup> Woolnough & Ma, 2010 (preface)

## A Subtle and Slippery Global Arena

In June 2008, I was privileged to travel, for the very first time, to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS) High Level Meeting for Heads of States and other representatives of member States. One of the sessions in which I participated featured a presentation from a civil society activist who called, rather plainly, for the global recognition of prostitution as “legitimate labour.” From where I sat, I wrestled with a ‘grueling’ feeling deep inside that signaled to me that the time had possibly come to challenge this voice which, unfortunately, was not just an isolated one at such or similar fora. Clearly, this was and has been part of a well calculated and deliberate campaign by a myriad of human rights groups, select non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and various western United Nations (UN) member States who invariably also sponsor some of the lobby groups and advocates for certain so called human rights in the context of HIV prevention. The activist under reference took a swipe at religious organisations and basically labeled them guilty of “moralizing” generally and stigmatizing in particular, “sex work” which activity she vehemently defended as legitimate.

My comment in response to the said postulation by the lady activist was partially captured by Dr. Alison Herling-Ruark<sup>10</sup> who was an observer in the terraces at the time of the said session and was kind enough to send me the following email later that evening:

*Bishop Banda,*

*I am at UNGASS, and just heard your very powerful comments. I just wanted to applaud you for saying those things. I have been waiting for someone to make \*any\* mention of sexual behavior-- it is amazing how everyone gives the same comments over and over, and yet so much is not discussed at all. (I am here as a civil society observer, so don't have the opportunity to make comments anywhere.) FYI, I am sitting in the overflow room, not the main room, but there was enthusiastic applause from a number of people, mostly Africans.*

*For those of you who I am copying and don't know what Bishop Banda (of Zambia) said, here are my rough notes (and he is the ONLY one I have heard say most of these things): "What can be done to translate info into knowledge, and knowledge into behavior change? There are certain approaches that must change. There is lots of new evidence that must guide our programs. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work-- some things that I hear promoted as a one-size-fits all solution here will not work for Zambia. In Zambia, we have evidence that moral and religious teaching have played a very important role. We would like to put it on record that there is a role for FBOs and moral and religious teaching. We need sexual behavior change, and moral and religious organizations can promote sexual behavior change. Northern organizations need to listen to local organizations, to those of us working on the ground." I know that is very rough-- if you have a copy of your comments that you could share I'd love to have it. As a note to all of us, I was pleasantly surprised by this language in the 2001 UNGASS Declaration: "By 2005, ensure that a wide range of prevention programmes which take account of local circumstances, ethics, and cultural values, is available in all countries, particularly the most affected countries, including... [those] aimed at reducing risk-taking behaviour and encouraging responsible sexual behaviour, including abstinence and fidelity..." Had I had a chance to make a comment, I would have loved to ask the Assembly why there has been NO discussion of those kinds of programs or that goal at this meeting.*

*Depressed at UNGASS. (Allison)*

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<sup>10</sup> Then Research Fellow at Harvard Institute for Public Health

A bit later Dr. Edward Green (Allison Herling- Ruark’s co-author of Paper earlier referred to) sent me his own commendation regarding the recorded comment.

Ruark and Green’s impassioned quest for different voices to be heard as we fight HIV/AIDS is laudable, especially that we live at a time the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Mr. Erastus Mwencha, recently described as a period when many nations in the North appear to be “turning towards Sodom and Gomorrah.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Rising Global Interest in the Rights Agenda – The Neo-political Path**

In a Paper titled “*Interrogating a Rights-Based Approach to HIV Prevention*,” Ruark and Green were apt in pointing out at the very outset that “the field of HIV/AIDS, like other health and development fields, is dominated by a so-called human rights-based approach” which while possessing “many valuable aspects...has also taken on other meanings.” This is especially evident in the observable global interest the subject has generated. Building on this observation, I will highlight illustrative anecdotes that practically substantiate some of the key concerns raised by Ruark and Green. I will show in which respect the rights based approach has taken on “other meanings.” In so doing, I will affirm the co-authors’ conclusion that these manoeuvres have essentially been redefined *rights*, when they state:

It may or may not be news to you that behaviours such as prostitution, risky sex, and drug use are now deemed “rights” by many of those working in HIV prevention, including by such organizations as the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, which is the United Nation’s AIDS organization.

At the United Nations Special Session held on 8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, which was focused on universal access to treatment for HIV, nearly every Western State that made their statement to the General Assembly, included some sort of call for member States to recognize the rights of Lesbians, Gays, bisexuals, Trans-genders and Inter-sexuals (LGBTI), Injection Drug users and sex workers, along with open demands that member States where such practices are legally prohibited should decriminalize them. Inevitably, negotiating a consensus document as a corporate outcome of the session became very challenging. In the final analysis, out of 104 points in the political declaration from this sixty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly, number 29 read as follows:

Note that many national HIV prevention strategies inadequately focus on populations that epidemiological evidence shows are at higher risk, specifically men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and sex workers, and further note, however, that each country should define the specific populations that are key to its epidemic and response, based on the epidemiological and national context<sup>12</sup>

When the formal reading was finally presented to the floor of the United Nations, Brazil and Mexico were the Movers for support of the resolution, while Iran and Syria were allowed to voice objections. Therefore, the variation in the last half of the above provision was very fitting in stating - “*that each country should define the specific populations that are key to its epidemic and response, based on the epidemiological and national context*,” The two States argued for this variation on the basis of epidemiological, sociological, cultural and religious realities featuring in

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<sup>11</sup> H.E. Erastus Mwencha. Deputy Chairperson of African Union, Keynote Opening Address, ABLI, Kampala. Uganda. 03 August, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Objections by Islamic Republic of Iran & Arab Republic of Syria; Support for the original Motion led by Brazil and Mexico;

their nations as much as in many others. It ought to be plain to most readers that this exception balances the scenario appropriately and makes sound common sense.

In respect to the contestation surrounding the above resolution, Ruark and Green are correct in noting that “ it is unusual (and possibly unique) for the political agenda of human rights to be *elevated* to a major theme for disease prevention, as it has been for HIV/AIDS”.

Beyond the sector of disease prevention, it is of great concern to observe further elevation of gay rights, for instance, to the same level as the inalienable rights of children, women, and persons with disability. A case in point is a visit in February 2012 of the United Nations most senior representative, Secretary General Ban Ki Moon who, while paying glowing tribute to Zambia on various positive economic developments recorded in recent years, also shockingly went on to say the following in his first ever address to the people’s representatives in the Zambian parliament:

Now you have embarked on a transformation agenda – a process for a new people-driven Constitution that will be a foundation for Zambia’s progress, a Constitution that will stand the test of time. This offers Zambia an opportunity to lead once more by enshrining the highest standards of human rights and protections for all people – regardless of race, religion, gender, *sexual orientation* or disability.<sup>13</sup>

There we go again... “the highest standards of human rights and protections for all people.” It all sounds so politically correct and inclusive, right? And of course the sentence could not go without specific reference to “*sexual orientation*” which was cleverly thrown in the mix!

Prior to the visit to Zambia, Mr. Ban Ki Moon made a similar call before African Heads of States and their Foreign Ministers at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in January, 2012. Then before departure for his next State visit which was scheduled for the Democratic Republic of Congo, he held a “closed door” meeting with human rights groups in the Zambian town of Livingstone on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2012, which attracted widespread disdain from the Zambian public.

So what are these *human rights* in reality? Why are they being re-defined in this fashion? What should the church do about this global campaign, while staying focused on a holistic transformation of society? What are the eventual implications towards our basic understanding of human sexuality in general and state polity as well as international politics in particular?

## **Human Rights: A Cursory Overview**

In a Paper presented in Stellenbosch (2010), I mention Human rights as generally understood to refer to the rights and freedoms to which all human beings are entitled.<sup>14</sup> The most comprehensive compilation of fundamental human rights is the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) having developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, in part as a response to the Holocaust, and culminating in its adoption by the United

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<sup>13</sup> Speech by the Secretary General of United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, to the Zambian National Parliament

<sup>14</sup> Karel Vasak, “*Human Rights: A Thirty-Year Struggle: the Sustained Efforts to give Force of law to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*”, *UNESCO Courier* 30:11, Paris: [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization](#), November 1977.

Nations General Assembly in 1948.<sup>15</sup> In modern society, it is widely held that basic human rights include civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

Owing to the limited scope of this presentation, we will not delve further into the various theoretical distinctions that exist in regard to these rights. Suffice it to say that the division of human rights into three generations<sup>16</sup> was initially proposed in 1979 by the Czech Jurist Karel Vasak at the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It is said that he used the term at least as early as November 1977. Vasak's theories have essentially taken root in European law, as they primarily reflect European values.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of Africa, one needs to familiarize with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter) which is an international human rights instrument that is intended to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms in the African continent.<sup>18</sup> The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) is a quasi-judicial body given the task to promote and protect human rights and collective (peoples') rights throughout the African continent as well as to interpret the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and consider individual complaints of violations of the Charter.

### **The Way I see It: Some lessons From One of Zambia's Constitutional Processes**

From December 2007 until August 2010, I served as Chairperson of the General Constitutional Principles Committee of a 500 member statutory National Constitutional Conference (NCC), mandated by the then Zambian Parliament to examine, debate and adopt public proposals to alter the Zambian constitution which had been earlier drafted by a Presidential appointed Commission. As Chairman of the General Constitutional Principles Committee of the NCC of Zambia, I presided over committee sittings convened to cover specific terms of reference as mandated by the NCC, to exhaustively examine and recommend the adoption of underlying constitutional principles (inclusive of directive principles of State policy) to be enshrined in the normative section of the new Zambian constitution and upon which the rest of the substantive constitution was to be based. The committee consisted of 44 members including 8 Honorable Members of Parliament (MPs), among whom was the then Vice President of the Republic of Zambia and who was at the same time, Minister of Justice.

One of the most engaging sections of the draft constitution we wrestled with was focused on whether to place the economic, social and cultural rights in a substantive part of the constitution (in this case, the bill of rights, making them justiciable) or to have them under directive principles of state policy where they would be non-justiciable. The final decision was for the latter. In the public arena, outside the NCC, general debate calling for inclusion of the said rights in the bill of rights raged on, but notably led by donor aided civil society organisations, some of whom it was feared were projecting their funders' agenda. This was more so in response to the fact that the NCC draft had strengthened the marriage clause by specifying that marriage in

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<sup>15</sup> Karel Vasak

<sup>16</sup> His divisions follow the three watchwords of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The three generations are reflected in some of the rubrics of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes rights that are thought of as second generation as well as first generation ones, but it does not make the distinction in itself (the rights listed in it are not in specific order).

<sup>17</sup> D. Kaufmann • Chapter in Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement • Edited by Philip Alston and Mary Robinson. Human Rights and Governance: The Empirical Challenge

<sup>18</sup> Karel Vasak

Zambia should be between two adults (minimum age:18) of the OPPOSITE SEX. The draft specified further that SAME SEX marriages would stand prohibited. Although there were no specific public statements locally opposing this direction, the ensuing policies from many donor countries represented in Zambia indicated under currents that are likely to gain intensity in terms of pressure surrounding human rights issues.

This kind of pressure is likely to go on for a long time in Africa for as long as the budgets of African States are hugely reliant on donor aid. For instance, in the wake of global resources that are channelled into Africa to fight HIV/AIDS, there is now a general call from donor countries for African states to adopt a rights-based approach in HIV interventions.

A case in point happened in September, 2010. In my role as Chairperson of National AIDS Council of Zambia, I hosted His Excellency Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana who is Chairperson of a high profile organisation known as Champions for an HIV free Africa, made up of a group of former Presidents of several African countries. In a scheduled meeting with civil society representatives, the following submission was number 1 on a list of 5 items the civil society wanted discussed:

Legal and policy environment for Most at Risk Populations (MARPS)...there is a disconnect between the legal and policy environment: the penal code criminalises most behaviour the MARPS are engaged in i.e. sexual contact between members of the same sex, injection drug use, commercial sex work, etc.

What is becoming abundantly clear is that it's the highly emotive issues associated with sexual lifestyles that are more likely to continue topping the advocacy and policy agenda in many African States. The Church must therefore brace itself to engage the society as credibly as possible. Other human rights related topics likely to gain momentum include abortion rights and what is now termed "comprehensive sexuality education for young people."

In this Paper, I limit the consideration of the sexuality debate only so far as it relates to state polity in the context of what I have termed the *new human rights crusade*, whose topical priority practically appears to boil down to "*sexual orientation*" and other 'rights' issues, now inextricably tied to donor aid. The environment in many an African country has become fairly charged and intense. Nations are being subtly pressured into reassessing their laws and stating expressly where they stand on LGBTI issues. It becomes necessary now to focus a little more directly on homosexuality, as it is the *defacto* axis, hotly at the centre of global political debate and upon which other related sexual orientation matters appear to rest.

Simply stated, in the biblical context, *homosexuality* is without doubt regarded as wickedness (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Genesis 19) and must be recognized as such, else there is no hope for the homosexual who is asking for help to be extricated from his perverted way of life.

The Zambian law in its current form criminalizes homosexuality and related unnatural acts and has the following stipulation in the Penal Code Chapter 87 of the laws of Zambia where section 155 provides: "*any person who has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature or (c) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature; commits a felony and is liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for a term of not less than 15 years and may be liable to imprisonment for life.*"

What appears clear also is that various players in the global community are quite plainly pressurizing for a wholesale decriminalization of homosexuality, which is opposed strongly by the majority of African States. If the ‘uproar’ that raged on for weeks mainly from Western governments in reaction to the most recent Ugandan draft anti-gay law, one is able to understand why it seemed like President Yoweri Museveni may have stirred the proverbial hornet’s nest when he first attempted to sign the said controversial legislative document into law.

Looking back, one of the most defining public pronouncements made in recent times which illustrates how high on the global priority list the LGBTI agenda has ascended, is the high level statement made by Great Britain’s Prime Minister Cameron at the 2011 Commonwealth gathering in Australia, where he threatened that “...countries that ban homosexuality [risk] losing aid payments unless they reform.”<sup>19</sup>

The Guardian News Paper reported, however, that Mr. Cameron was quick to concede that "deep prejudices"<sup>20</sup> in some countries meant the problem would persist for years. Mr. Cameron stated plainly that Britain was "putting the pressure on",<sup>21</sup> though “it was not a problem that would be solved by the time Commonwealth leaders are next due to meet, in Sri Lanka in 2013,”<sup>22</sup> while warning Sri Lanka “to improve its human rights record or face boycotts of the 2013 Summit.”<sup>23</sup>

Further, the Guardian carried the following continuation of remarks by Mr. Cameron at the said Australia Commonwealth meeting of Heads of government:

Ending bans on homosexuality was one of the recommendations of a highly critical internal report on the future relevance of the Commonwealth, written by experts from across the member nations. "We are not just talking about it. We are also saying that British aid should have more strings attached," Cameron said on BBC1's Andrew Marr Show in an interview recorded at the summit in Perth. "This is an issue where we are pushing for movement, we are prepared to put some money behind what we believe. But I'm afraid that you can't expect countries to change overnight."<sup>24</sup>

A similar call was made by then USA Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, and which story was anchored as follows on the BBC:

The US has publicly declared it will fight discrimination against gays and lesbians abroad by using foreign aid and diplomacy to encourage reform. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told an audience of diplomats in Geneva: "Gay rights are human rights". A memo from the Obama administration directs US government agencies to consider gay rights when making aid and asylum decisions.<sup>25</sup>

## **A Matter of Dignity and Justice**

It will be noted that the above approach is reminiscent of a prejudicial construct that essentially minimises the worth of the African peoples, as they are often stereotyped chiefly by western media and portrayed wrongly as being *out-dated* in their attitudes to same sex behaviour and

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/oct/30/ban-homosexuality-lose-aid-cameron?newsfeed=true>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-16062937>



lifestyle. It amounts to a redefinition of *'human rights'* that, as stated earlier, are now re-prescribed conditionally for donor-aided nations. This amounts to a violation of the dignity of the African people and a total disregard of their worth. The normal course of justice demands a fairer way in which the people are respected for who they are and therefore allowed to determine their own course on such matters.

### **A Clash of Viewpoints on Human Autonomy**

It may well be contended here that what is at play in the whole scenario is essentially a 'clash' of viewpoints regarding human autonomy as understood by those in the north and those in the global south. For instance, the western concept of *human rights ad tolerance* is deeply located in an *individualistic* understanding of human autonomy that is at variance with the African value of *common good* that is deeply rooted in culture.

In this respect, some pertinent questions as raised by Canon Dr. Chris Sugden<sup>26</sup> in a similar context must be asked, one of which is "whether human rights are universal and are to be imposed *sui generis* in different cultures." Another line of inquiry for further reflection is: How is the question of cultural defence of human rights to be addressed in the face of such unguarded universal claims by donor countries? Is "inclusion" to be understood as inclusion of limitless individual preferences or is it to be related to "the common good?" Where is the balance to be found between *individual agency* and *common good*?"<sup>27</sup>

### **The Reality Behind the Current Re-definition of Human Rights**

Earlier, I preempted the question of why human rights are being "re-defined" in this fashion. It really points towards setting the global *agenda* consonant to donor interests. If not challenged sufficiently, these acts could amount to a new scramble for Africa that could render the infamous earlier scramble child's play by comparison.

In a masterful narration, Martin Meredith reported the following about the "Scramble:"

"During the Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, European powers staked claims to virtually the entire continent. At meetings in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals, European statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of interest they intended to establish there. Hitherto Europeans had known Africa more as a coastline than a continent..."<sup>28</sup>

If the little known Africa attracted that much foreign interest then, how much more interest will the current Africa that has been extensively explored, draw? It is clear that the human rights agenda appears to be merely adding impetus to a much bigger global agenda. Ruark and Green caution rightly that "we should not need the impetus of AIDS to make protecting human rights a matter of prime importance and urgency. The danger is that the cause of human rights may be

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<sup>26</sup> Sugden, Christopher. Concept note on *Human rights and Sexuality* Consultation [unpublished]

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Meredith, Martin. *The state of Africa: A history of fifty years of Independence*. Free Press. London. 2005

used to justify investing significant resources in programs that have little or no prevention impact on HIV infections.”<sup>29</sup>

It is desirable then that Africa prioritizes what is most important to her, without outside interference. This will give her chance to construct her own relevant approaches towards matters of sexuality, informed by her own felt needs and priority areas.

## **Implications for the Church**

What should the church do about this global campaign, while staying focused on a holistic transformation of society? What are the eventual implications towards our basic understanding of human sexuality in general?

A rather worrisome scenario is an apparent dichotomy that still exists within some church circles where in state policy makes, particularly, politicians appear to be more or less stigmatized largely as persons who may not always keep their word. Also, in certain church circles, politics is viewed as a “dirty game” existing in a ‘world’ different and distanced from the church.

Our engagement in the social sector through the extensive humanitarian efforts in various communities has provided for unique interactions with state policy makers. These interactions have revealed that politicians and other state policy actors tend to face a certain degree of ‘loneliness’ or ‘isolation.’ In our conversations, some have expressed such strong appreciation for the times when they felt the church had reached out to them with some level of understanding of the challenges they face. Often, these political leaders have openly requested for prayer!

The church needs to recall that it is not just a non-governmental organisation (NGO) *per se*, merely part of a greater civil society movement out there. While civil society has evidently become one of the most influential public policy movers in many nations, the church is much more than that. It has a mandate from God Almighty to be “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13-16) in this world. This is a definitive role sufficiently outlined in the scriptures.

My convictions in this respect have been shaped over a while. A brief look at my personal story helps to illustrate some delicate facets of the Zambian churches’ posture *vis-à-vis* the socio-political engagement during the past quarter of a century.

2014 marks an eventful 32 years ministry journey, spanning church planting and pastoring, bible college teaching and administration, massive international travel, crusades and of late, intense engagement in public policy advocacy, owing to various national and international roles held (including extensive interactions with local policy makers, presidents, ministers, members of parliament and ambassadors alike). It is the latter engagement that forms the key slice of this concluding section of the Paper. It all begun with one unique invitation...

## **The “Rainbow” Invitation**

In 1992, while heading the Trans-Africa Theological College, I was invited to be one of the Keynote presenters at a conference hosted by Rainbow Monitors, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) then

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<sup>29</sup> Allison Herling-Ruark, and Edward C. Green’s *Paper. “Interrogating a Rights-Based Approach to HIV Prevention.”*- Abuja. Nigeria, 2011. [Unpublished]

engaged in advocacy for human rights and good governance. The meeting was organised for key national and community leaders. The topic of the Paper I was requested to deliver was- “*The role of the Church in crime preventions,*” a subject way my *forte*, at the time. However, I was determined to simply seize the opportunity as a learning curve.

## **New Territory**

As I set out to search for what could be identified as the church’s contribution in the said area of crime preventions specifically, it became clear abundantly, that this was uncharted territory. It is said, “*necessity is the mother of invention.*” So, I quickly turned to the Lord in prayer for fresh ideas and guidance and was very encouraged when a plan began to unfold.

The plan involved carrying out a snap survey of some sort, through oral interviews with key persons in the Zambia Police. My first interview was with a senior officer by the name of Francis Musonda. I was shocked to learn from him that up until this point, there was no record or history whatsoever, of the church’s engagement in crime prevention initiatives. However, it was heartening to learn that the Zambia Police were actually looking for ways to collaborate with churches, due to their comparative advantage of presence within communities, where people reside.

## **Why the Church?**

Mr. Musonda explained that he saw the Church as a ‘sleeping giant.’ In his opinion, the Church was the most credible entity for anyone to partner with, for effective community service. The simple truth came with such power and freshness that I was inspired to anchor the entire Paper on it. Therefore, composing and delivering the Paper at the Rainbow Conference, to a great extent, became a turning point in my understanding of how imperative it was for the Church to engage both, spiritually and socially with community.

I argued in the Paper that the mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ was for the Church to actualise their being “*Salt*” and “*Light*” (*Matthew 5:10-13*), in a world that was faced with various forms of decay and darkness. In specific regard to crime preventions, I suggested practical steps such as the need to raise individual levels of awareness about crime prevention strategies, through tailor made civic education programmes. Further, that apart from reaching prisoners during their incarceration, the Church could establish “*half way houses*” for rehabilitating past offenders, following their release from prison.

I concluded, delightedly, by indicating that the strategies for prevention of crime were adaptable and therefore could extend to the prevention of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, which had already reached epidemic proportions. This process enriched my advocacy so much that the next two decades marked defining levels of my personal engagement in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

## **Re-tracing The Church’s Involvement in AIDS Work in Zambia**

As in most affected countries, AIDS work in Zambia traces its beginnings in the health sector. From the perspective of actual engagement in the health sector, the Zambian church’s involvement obviously predates HIV/AIDS work, since its health interventions go as far back as the early 1800s.

The church efforts in the health sector are attributable initially, to the Churches Health Association of Zambia (**CHAZ**, formerly **CMAZ**, formed in 1970). Currently, the Church’s coverage in this respect,

represents approximately 35% of Zambia's total healthcare provision, in general and over 50% of Zambia's rural health care provision, in particular. This is well within the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that Faith based Organisations (FBOs) provide between 30-70% of health care in Africa. Historically, in specific reference to the AIDS response, there are 3 distinct phases to the progression by the Church: The *early days* (1984-1990), the *awakening of a latent conscience* (1991-2000) and the *constructive engagement of church congregations* (2001 to the present). We take a brief look at each phase.

### ***The 'Early days' (1984-1990)***

This was a period when social issues like HIV/AIDS were avoided on the pretext that they were allegedly, purely medical and had little relevance to the spiritual mandate of the Church.

### ***Awakening of a 'latent conscience' (1991-2000)***

During this period, sporadic holistic responses commenced, resulting in more visibility of the faith-based response. It was acknowledged widely that a 'conscience' that lay latent for so long had now been awakened.

### ***Constructive engagement of Church Congregations (2001- Present)***

During this latter phase, a considerably greater level of broadened understanding and holistic application of the gospel message has emerged. It is now fairly common to note the acceptance generally, of the fact that the gospel message is not single sided, but double. A number of church congregations, including our own (Northmead Assembly), now demonstrate in more ways than one, that evangelism and social action should not be separated.

### ***Congregational Response Is Key***

Notwithstanding the significance of the contributions cited above, even as late as late as the 1990s, it was still by many that the Church was *not really* engaged in the AIDS fight. What appears to have been expected rightly and long anticipated, was the actual involvement of CHURCH CONGREGATIONS. This realisation is what marked the re-packaging, re-direction and expansion of the Church's effort. As sporadic Church-based initiatives emerged, it became clear that a mechanism was needed to coordinate these noble efforts and fill the existing gap.

### ***A Closer Look at the ECR***

The Expanded Church Response (ECR) to HIV/AIDS Trust was formed in 1999 to fill that gap. Working with a dear friend (Dr. Helmut Reutter, head of Go Centre and Chreso Ministries Lusaka, Zambia) and with the financial support of World Vision Zambia, we mobilized 220 Church leaders to discuss the dire need for collective action to confront the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Part of the outcome was the formation initially, of a Task Force (team) that I was privileged to chair.

Later on, the ECR was registered (2003) as a legal Trust, with the mission of coordinating faith-based AIDS responses. At this point, the journey to fetch financial resources for the Churches, begun. The funds were to assist towards empowering and equipping the Church to have an expanded, comprehensive, coordinated and compassionate response to AIDS, in every community in Zambia.

## Results

Currently managing an annual budget in excess of US \$1.5 million, the ECR has cumulatively built the capacity of hundreds of Church leaders, congregations and over 94 Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) and health facilities. This has resulted in the delivery of high quality care, support and treatment to more than 28,270 beneficiaries in six of Zambia's ten provinces.

## Comparative Advantage

The comparative advantage of ECR, which includes working with more than 16,000 individual churches and millions of potential volunteers, is its ability to harness this high volume of human resource, coupled with the ability to act through established infrastructure, already existent throughout the Churches. ECR is also, particularly effective at working in the rural areas, that most NGOs, especially those spread over multiple countries, have considerable difficulty reaching.

What ECR has achieved since inception<sup>30</sup>, is testimony to the strength, capacity and overall comparative advantage of the Church as a key player in the AIDS fight, while delivering life saving services and development, in a sustainable manner. The sustainability in reference is anchored in the assured perpetuity that lies in Local Churches, as they are in the community for long term good.

For instance, Northmead Assembly of God Church in Lusaka, Zambia, has implemented successfully, several AIDS interventions, three of which are namely, the *Lazarus Project, Operation Paseli and Circle of Hope Clinic*.<sup>31</sup> These models are replicable even in locations where resources may be thought to be extremely scarce or limited, because the community always has something in hand.

Considering the afore-going and all said and done, what exactly could the church do, going forward?

- 1. The Church must determine to hear God afresh concerning Africa while taking steps carefully to clarify its belief base and increase on its witness***
  - What is God saying about the current distortions regarding the gift of human sexuality? Remember, He still speaks to his own
- 2. The Church must assist Africa to set the Agenda and shape the discourse on sexuality and the interplay with HIV/AIDS***
- 3. The Church must employ contextualised reflection on its praxis through rigorous evidence-based research in the face of the AIDS pandemic***
  - *Develop balanced sexual reproductive health messages from a faith perspective*
  - *Build on our history encompassing documentation of best practices*

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<sup>30</sup> Over time, the ECR has managed to grow a highly qualified team with extensive experience and a history of successful grant management. In specific regard to AIDS programming, ECR has implemented successfully, both USAID and non-USAID programs including the following: Global Fund programs, in conjunction with the Churches Health Association of Zambia (CHAZ); Swedish Caritas; AIDS Relief; RAPIDS<sup>30</sup>; Zambia Prevention, Care and Treatment programme (ZPCT) in conjunction with Family Health International (FHI); and Community Faith-Based Regional initiative for Vulnerable Children (FABRIC), also with FHI.

<sup>31</sup> LAZARUS PROJECT: Provides holistic care to orphaned and vulnerable children (OVCs), their families and communities. OPERATION PASELI: is an Outreach to, and rehabilitation of, Commercial Sex Workers who patronise night life along Paseli road, where Northmead Assembly is located. CIRCLE OF HOPE: Provides free anti-retroviral treatment-ART- and community outreach to thousands of persons living positively with HIV/AIDS.

4. *In the quest towards holistic transformation, the Church must be more deliberate in its witness to the Marginalised and Most-At-Risk Populations (sex workers, etc) including LGBTI persons*

## **Conclusion**

The die has been cast. The Church must monitor exactly where the state polity and international politics agenda is headed. Human rights vs sexuality appear to be high on this agenda. The church must do whatever needs to be done for the families of our continent at large to be protected from violation of their values and heritage. Where possible, effort must be made by the Church to participate in national matters including constitutional processes for the sake of posterity.

I thank you all!