

EASTER MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN TANZANIA (ELCT)

OUR NATION, OUR PEACE

A. INTRODUCTION

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy”. (Proverbs 31: 8-9).

Dear beloved ELCT members,

To all the people and the family of God in our Nation

"Peace be with you!" Christ has risen (John 20:19).

When our risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to his worried disciples as they had shuttered themselves inside for fear of the Jews, He greeted and revealed Himself to them by wishing them peace. Dear people of God, in our unity, we bishops of the ELCT, we salute all of you by wishing you peace. Our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed risen - Hallelujah!

He is our peace and peace for all people who have good faith. By His resurrection, love has overcome the hatred; humility has overcome the arrogance and brutality; light has won over darkness; justice has prevailed against injustice; forgiveness has won vengeance; courage has overcome fear; and therefore life has overcome death.

In 2017, our Church celebrated 500 years of Church Reformation. As today's reformers, we have been reminded again that human beings are only saved by the grace of God: Salvation ***is not sold; a human being is not sold or bought; and Creation is not sold***. The whole church and the world in general are called to stand together and explain this fact that sets our conscience free (John 8: 31-32).

Reforms are a biblical concept. Since the times of the Old Testament, God at various times appointed His messengers to present His message for society and for world rulers. For His goodness, He raised women with men for the purpose of prophesying, namely, God's message to the community or rulers. He sometimes raised the prophets to speak for people who have no voice. Prophecy and Reformation are God's ways of executing justice and promoting freedom and peace.

In a special way, prophets like; Daniel warned about the leadership that builds its legitimacy on the majority of people who agree with that leadership even when it is in error. It was not easy in human terms, to criticize the system like that but God used the prophets to speak to such a system. The book of Daniel 3: 7 records, **"Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the statue of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up"**. Here we see clearly that, the leader's fault in making a statue, has caused people's fault who accepted to worship that statue.

We have reflected critically and believed that, a leader's fault or system, does not eliminate the guilt to those who follow the leader or follow the system, even when they vowed to obey the leader and the system. Before God there is no principle of collective responsibility. Every person through his/her own conscience is solely responsible before God. On the other hand, even with individual responsibility, the Prophet Ezekiel reminds us and warns us that, if we did not warn and stand by our turn, the guilt and blood of the innocent, will be claimed on our hands **(Ezekiel 33: 8-9)**.

The celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (the Passover) in this 500th anniversary of the Church's reformation, urges us to reflect on the Church's mission in the community in our time. We are invited to send a message of peace to all people and stand with audacity in speaking for the voiceless in the community for honouring the spirit of the Passover and the Reformation in our

time. As the Church and in our individual selves, we are called, to teach, advise and encourage. On the other hand, we are called to warn, reprove, criticize and direct with all patience and love (**2 Timothy 4: 1-5**).

We are duty-bound as bishops, since this is a call and a mission which cannot be avoided. To all people of faith, this responsibility has no substitute. We are commanded to encourage building bridges of reconciliation and dialogue in love and peace, and to oppose all systems that promote hatred and separation. In so doing, we are obliged to speak clearly the message of peace, love, respect, dignity, patience, and harmony.

Any system that is built on compliance to law without love; honour without freedom; and peace without justice, is built on a very weak foundation. Neglecting this call has consequences for our society. It is like building a house on the sand (**Matthew 7:26**). We beseech you through tears, to be wise and creative builders who build your houses on the rock (**Matthew 7:24**). The rock that we ought to build our nation on has many religions, different parties, and different tribes, has been mentioned in the main prayer of our nation, namely, "**MAINTAIN FREEDOM AND UNITY**". Without Freedom there is no unity which can bring development; and without the national unity, there is no freedom that can bring sustainable peace. Due to the power of a clean conscience which is the moral compass of our national vision; we are obliged to obey God rather than any human being. (**Acts 5:29**)

B. OUR NATION AND OUR PEACE

In celebrating the commemoration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do mindfully realize that our Church's mission in our nation is being carried out in the midst of several challenges. Since the Church is part of society, it is affected by those challenges. By being together and praying for our nation, we the ELCT bishops, have

pondered and identified some of those challenges. Through Easter greetings, we bring you three challenges to increase the burden of praying for our nation and its leaders.

1. Society and Economy

The essence of our mission in the society leads us in good faith to the economic life and social solidarity. The Word of God teaches us that "**A man cannot live by bread alone**" (**Luke 4: 4**). Also the word of God assures us that our Lord Jesus Christ came in order for us to have **life -life in all its fullness** (John 10:10). We are inspired in our union of leadership, to congratulate our government for the efforts made to improve the welfare of its citizens. We have witnessed the efforts and good intentions on harvesting and owning of the national resources for the benefit of the whole nation. In addition, we congratulate the tax collection efforts that enable the government to finance social services. However, without undermining those efforts, we are gratified to advise the following:

- I. The private sector and faith-based organizations are the development partners, and are not the Government competitors in contributing to national development. An unfriendly environment to these stakeholders is a barrier to the solidarity between the government, private sector and the faith based organizations in contributing to that development. Effective and regular efforts should be taken to eliminate the concept of competition between Government and these stakeholders in order to strengthen the good relations between the government and the private sector.
- II. For the tax collection system to be sustainable; efforts to collect should be in line with education for taxpayers. The emphasis on patriotism should be in line with the welfare of taxpayers in their business activities. Non-productive tensions between taxpayers (traders) and tax collection authority, fosters the widespread hostility which reduce the tax collection and influence corruption. A Tax system that renders bankruptcy to the business community does not intend to build an industrial economy.
- III. Due to an increasing number of unemployed young people; clear efforts and deliberation should be made so that the impetus of industrial economic development to match the tangible optimism among the unemployed young people. The Private sector, the investors and other stakeholders, should be legally

guaranteed the security of their capital. If this is implemented, it will be a good catalyst for industrial construction.

- IV. Industrial economy (small and large) is in line with investments in the agricultural sector in rural areas. Agriculture and livestock are the sectors with a wide range of industries that affect the lives of many Tanzanians. Arbitrary tax deduction and crop tax offset disappointment of agriculture stakeholders. Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists on the one hand, and farmers / herdsman and investors on the other hand, do not attract investment in the agricultural sector.

2. Political Life

In our joint mission, we recognize that good leadership and pure and clean politics are the fundamentals of our lives in Tanzania. The introduction of a multi-party democracy in 1992, did not eliminate the significance of these principles but expanded the use of democracy which has been built on the freedom of speech.

A nation is a collection of different institutions and individuals, with one goal but different ways in reaching the goal. The nation should be placed above party politics, institutions and groups.

The nation is governed by the Constitution which is the highest law of the country. It is not governed by any party manifesto. The government is governed by the Constitution, laws, principles and good tradition (foundations and national values).

Government is governed and overseen by an independent parliament which is the voice of the people. The people are the source of parliamentary authority. The Parliament is not governed by any party manifesto or political party or anybody else.

Contrary to the laws, procedures and our national values; we are now witnessing events that are contrary to the principles and values of our nation. Some of these events are:

- I. Fear based on actual events such as abduction, torture, disappearance of people, attempted assassination of political leaders, threats, false accusations, and misuse of the law enforcement agents against the people.

- II. The shrinking space for the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of information. In this regard, there is a fear that even freedom of worship is beginning to shrink.
- III. Shrinking of the independence of Parliament, the judiciary, and the Electoral Commission. Furthermore undermining of the Local Government Authorities which contradicts the devolution concepts.
- IV. Unfavourable environment that do not support the right and freedom to vote and to be voted for in various elections. All by-elections have been dominated by, killings, brutality, violence, trickery, and threats.
- V. Implementation of developmental plans based on political affiliation, has created discrimination in the nation that has never been experienced before. This action has enhanced ideological discrimination in our nation and has promoted divisions among citizens.
- VI. There is a growing trend of hatred in the hearts of people which leads to revenge, desperation and a low voter turnout during elections and failure of citizens to participate in political affairs.
- VII. Misuse of the concept that “**development has no political face**”, Devaluation of the concept is done by using a lot of resources to conduct by-elections to the constituencies where their member of parliament resigns to support the ruling party in development. The question is if development has no political face, why should a person leave one party to join another for the reason of bringing development? This situation costs the nation a lot of money, it costs life of people, wounds people and causes the destruction of properties.

These situations are threatening and undermining the unity and peace of this nation.

3. Cross cutting issues

The church is a symbol of hope in society. Its mission is to bring within the community the message of hope. If the church is silent or fails to address the issues that affect the community, it has failed to deliver its mission. The prophetic voice of the church is not owned by any person but God; it is the source of hope and tranquillity. Through critical reflection of our conscience, we have recognized the presence of God's specific time (*Kairos*) in our nation. We have been called to understand crosscutting issues among the community members and advise as follows;

- i. To conclude reforms in our education system in order to stop the possibility of every Minister coming with his/her own reforms. We realize that the education system is a sensitive area of national prosperity, thus, it should not be recklessly changed all the time. All sector's success rely on the success of the education system.
- ii. Support of all youth to get higher education loans rather than discriminating against them according to public and private universities, science and arts, wellfare parents and poor parents, students who studied at private or public school etc. Since this is a loan to the student and not the parent, efforts should be put in place to make sure that the loan recovery is sensitive to circumstances..
- iii. The law enforcement organs should be seen to provide justice to all without creating doubts of impartiality and inequality before the law
- iv. The role of the government in protecting the lives of the citizens should be done in a manner that citizens will be satisfied without pointing fingers to the government. If the government failed to protect the lives of citizens then a group of people might use that chance to abuse the right to life and link it to the government. The bloodshed of innocent people will have an inpact on this and future generations. Until now we have witnessed bloodshed that creates tensions amongst us and other institutions. God is calling out to us Tanzanians as He called out to Cain **"Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground"** (Genesis 4:10)
- v. The value of life cannot be measured. Life should be protected by actual deeds and not slogans. If there is loss of life under any circumstances, then a free, fair and transparent investigation should be conducted and legal actions be taken so as to have citizens who trust their government and its law enforcement organs. Incidences of killing of policemen, killing of citizens, attempt assassinations of political officials, abduction and torture, if not properly investigated and reported on, will lead to threats and bitterness within the citizens. A society that is full of fear and bitterness cannot develop and love their nation.
- vi. In order to get sustainable solutions to the entire analysed issues now and in future, we advice the 5th phase government to revive the process of getting a

new constitution which was proposed by the citizens through the Judge Warioba Commission. The majority of Tanzanians, believe that a NEW CONSTITUTION will have the answers to the existing and future issues of the nation. The PROPOSED CONSTITUTION chaired by Warioba is widely agreed by citizens as their opinion as it had representation from different sects of the nation.

- vii. We advice all the citizens to use their local forums to demand for the adoption of the NEW CONSTITUTION. It will be fruitful if the NEW CONSTITUTION will be in place before the next elections in 2020. The good things that are done by the fifth government will be permanent if there is a new constitution in place to protect them. A nationalistic leader is not an alternative to the NEW CONSTITUTION. A developed, unified and peaceful Tanzania is a result of all ideologies, religion, tribes and institutions under the NEW CONSITUTION.

C. CONCLUSION

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is fundamental to the church Reformation. In the midst of hopelessness, fear and desperation, Jesus Christ was raised from death and brought in new hope. Further, in the midst of the church loosing power and voice, the Holy Spirit led the church through reformation. Therefore, reformation is a continuous process within the society and its institutions. The founder of the reformation Dr. Martin Luther still inspires the role of the church to continue with its mission to bring new hope to the society every day. All baptised people are missionaries who are sent by our Lord Jesus Christ (John20:21) .We are supposed to be the light and salt within the society and agents of freedom, unity and peace.

Tanzania acheived independence in 1961 without bloodshed. The same spirit of our forefathers in dialoguing and finding peaceful consensus should continue all the time. Independence that was achieved without bloodsheds should be protected without shedding the blood of citizens. **Freedom and unity** have been the pillars of this nation for the past 50 years.

We, the Bishops by the grace of God, request people of faith, of different religion to pray for the nation. And pray for people with different mandates and positions to

have wisdom and love for this nation and its people. Our small prayer groups (Jumuiya) and all parishes must pray for our leaders so that God gives them the wisdom to do justice, to listen rather than speak, to lead rather than to order, to unite people rather than to divide, to love people rather than to be loved by people, to serve the people rather than to be served (Mark10.45), and to respect people rather than to demand to be respected.

This Easter Message insists that we respect the right to Life. Our Lord Jesus Christ died so as to protect life. For His death and resurrection has put to an end death and its agents. We are called to protect life and not to allow torture and killings. With all wisdom and humbleness, we tell the government leaders that the Tanzanians now need a NEW CONSTITUTION. The new constitution will ensure the system of leadership that will protect the right to life, natural resources, and national values and ethics, independency of state organs and accountability of public leaders to the citizens.