



SECAM Plenary Assembly enters day 5

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KAMPALA, UGANDA -

The 18th Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) has entered its fifth day as the open workshop ended on 24th July 2019 making way for Bishop delegates to reflect more on the discussions and the way forward for the church in Africa.

For 3 days since Monday, July 22, the Assembly's activities have been marked by three distinct exercises, namely study sessions, group discussions and plenary discussions. On Tuesday and Wednesday, the delegates have shared pastoral experiences from all regions, ending with two reflections: the possibilities and occasions for a missionary activity in today's Africa as ignited by the presentation made by Rt. Rev. John MacWilliam M. Afr. Bishop of Laghouat in Algeria; and another on the new frontiers, spiritualities and pastoral strategies presented by Rt. Rev. Fulgence Muteba Mugalu, Bishop of Kilwa-Kasenga in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Fr Nathanael Soede, moderating the Tuesday proceedings, reminded the delegates that this exercise must be guided by the spirit of synodality as Pope Francis always emphasizes.

"In the spirit of journeying together, let us look at the pastoral challenges ahead of us and for the future of the Church in Africa," he said.

ABOUT SECAM:

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) is an Assembly of all African Bishops, who during the Vatican Council II (1962-1965) resolved to build a continental structure in order to unite the Church in Africa and promote collaboration in pastoral ministry.

The Association was officially launched on July 29, 1969 at Lubaga Cathedral during the visit of Saint Pope Paul VI. For this reason, the Uganda Episcopal Conference has been tasked to host and lead the Golden Jubilee Celebrations, and it's a great honour to the country.

About 400 delegates including Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and others from the African continent and other parts of the world are expected to attend the celebrations.

Pope Francis will be represented by a delegation from the Vatican.

The delegates from all over Africa have discussed the pastoral challenges in the various regional groups of SECAM: the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa (ACEAC; Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa region (ACERAC); Regional Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA/ CERAO); Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt (AHCE); Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa (CERNA); Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), Episcopal Conferences of the Indian Ocean (CEDOI) and the Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA).

His Eminence Robert Cardinal Sarah Prefect of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has urged the delegates to be more focused on the pertinent pastoral issues that are coming up, while Archbishop Protas

Rugambwa, Chairman of the Pontifical Mission Societies and Secretary of the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples emphasized the importance of identifying the linkages between the past and what is coming up as the way forward for the Church in Africa.

“We are not absolutely re-inventing the wheel. Therefore, it is important that we see what was already decided for the past 50 years, where we are today, what ought to be done from now onwards. This is what will give our Assembly a sense of continuity. Let us focus so that the product of this conference will be concrete, refined and substantial,” said Most Rev. Rugambwa.

These remarks are coming up following the group presentations and as delegates deliberate on the key questions and how to address them, guided by the theme of the 18th SECAM Plenary Assembly, Church Family of God in Africa: celebrate your Jubilee; Proclaim Jesus Christ your Saviour.

The 300 SECAM delegates have continued to express appreciation of what the Church in Africa has achieved since the establishment of SECAM in 1969. These include the Church’s commitment to evangelization, integral human development and keeping the sense of universality of the Catholic Church.

Given the present realities of the Church, delegates emphasized that apart from being academically profound, the documentation of the forthcoming recommendations and resolutions ought to have a pastoral flavour centred on the people of God. Also, they must reflect and emphasise that the Church belongs to all the people of God - the Clergy, Religious men and women and the Laity.

The regional grouping thus, called for the “centrality of the Eucharist as it links with the other Sacraments and the sharing of the Word of God in Small Christian Communities”.

The importance of the family as central to modern evangelization was said to be very crucial; Catechesis and

ongoing formation of the faithful; marriage and family apostolate; using the digital technologies and social media as tools for evangelization; strengthening the Bible apostolate; pastoral ministry to the youth, single mothers and Catholic politicians; child safeguarding; and the centrality of the woman in evangelization, Christians formation of children and stability of marriage.

The delegates also indicated the need for more efforts towards ongoing conversion of Africa, citing in particular renunciation of corruption and bad governance; violence, terrorism and religious radicalism; environmental degradation and ecological issues; illiteracy and belief in witchcraft; and giving more space to the laity in the Church.

Other issues that came up for future strategies looked at poverty, instability of family, moral issues such as abortion, same sex marriage, globalization, refugees and migration.

The Plenary from today 25th July 2019 to 27th July 2019 begins a session exclusive to Bishop Delegates and Secretaries Generals and will eventually end with elections in a closed session of Bishops. It is anticipated that the Bishops of Africa will come up with concrete pastoral pathways to guide the Church on the continent for many years to come.