

# AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET

## PROTESTANT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF RWANDA

Long-term plan on the environment – summary

### INTRODUCTION

The Protestant Council of Rwanda (CPR) was created in 1963 and is an organisation of 19 member churches and four associated local Christian Organisations. Member churches involved in this project are the Association of Pentecostal Churches in Rwanda, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, the 7th Day Adventist Church, the Free Methodist Church, Baptist Union Church, the Association of Baptist Churches, Nazarene Church, Lutheran Church, Evangelical Church of Friends, the Salvation Army and the nine Dioceses of the Anglican Church in Rwanda. Christians make up 96% of Rwanda's population.

Together CPR members have 1,081 parishes and 2.5 million members in 134 districts. They run 220 secondary schools, 595 primary schools, as well as hospitals and health centres, and 7,050 associations (including women's and youth). CPR is governed by an executive council and the leadership is elected on a four-year mandate.

Twenty CPR member churches are involved in this project and the seven-year plan was developed through a two-day workshop with 56 representatives from all church groups (including women's associations and youth associations). Its major objective is to mobilise pastors and the Christian community to protect the environment for sustainable development in Rwanda, and to establish tree planting in parishes.

This is a response to the aggressive deforestation in the country from 1990 to 2003 following war and genocide. There was further tree clearing for settlement as Rwandan refugees came back home and additional refugees were hosted from warring neighbouring countries of DRC Congo and Burundi. More than 96% of Rwandan households in rural and urban areas use trees as a source of energy and more than 60% of the urban population use charcoal as a source of energy. No wonder little tree cover remains in a nation called 'the country of one thousand hills'.

This plan is designed to complement government efforts to increase tree cover and protect the environment. From 2003, for example, the Parliament banned plastic bags and made cutting a tree without legal authorisation criminal. The Ministry of Education has initiated a Green Schools Programme aimed at planting trees and grass on all school grounds and land. In 2012, the Rwanda Ministry of Environment committed to planting 68 million trees.

### ACTIVITIES IN THIS SEVEN-YEAR PLAN

- To conduct 15 seminars per year in order to train 10,500 pastors, youth and women in the Church on climate change and environmental degradation;
- To establish 15 tree nurseries, including fruit tree nurseries;
- To plant one million trees per year, in open spaces starting with church land. Trees planted will be those recommended by the Rwanda Environment Management Authority. Tree planting is designed to help protect the soil against further erosion as well as create jobs and generate income for Christians and parishes involved.

10,000 trees should be planted per parish in three years;

- To organise permanent special programmes to raise awareness on the environment on the new CPR radio station, Inkoramutima, which is currently being established and for which the CPR was granted a licence in December 2011;
- To provide a National Award for best performing parishes each year;
- To reduce the use of chemicals as pesticides in farming activities and reduce grazing in reserve areas;
- To put in place a joint task force of parishes for action against climate change (parishes to work with local government authorities). The task force will also monitor the effectiveness of the churches in the project.

To facilitate this plan, a Theological Charter of the Environment was adopted. With support from ARC, this was drawn up by heads of churches and members of CPR decentralised committees from all 30 districts of Rwanda and from all 23 church members and church-related organisations, meeting for two days in Kigali in September 2011. It commits Christians from all CPR member churches to:

- value the land and to protect and manage it in a proper manner;
- Protect the environment and take concrete actions such as planting trees of all species;
- Integrate the programme of protecting the environment into all plans of member churches;
- Set up youth clubs to protect the environment;
- Organise competitions around the protection of the environment, drawing on Biblical and Rwandan culture such as poems, songs and dances;
- Remind Christians in Rwanda that it is the environment that makes human beings' existence possible and that anyone who destroys the environment destroys themselves.

*In addition, the CPR is also proposing two complementary projects:*

#### FOOD SECURITY TRAINING PROGRAMME

This aims to promote sustainable food security by training 150 people each year in new farming methods and techniques at the Abaja Ba Krisito (The Servants of Christ) Agro-Pastoral Centre. This is run by a women's ecumenical religious congregation. Farmers come for two weeks of training in new farming techniques and livestock care. It is proposed that these farmers will become models in their communities and train further local farmers.

#### CAMPUS GREEN

Campus Green is a project that aims to set up youth clubs for the environment in schools. The project proposes a training camp for 100 people from schools and youth associations, with young people being trained in environmental care, including tree planting, and then charged with setting up environment clubs in their schools.

*A long-term environment plan was first drawn up after consultation with the heads of churches on the CPR Strategic plan 2011-2013 at Kibuye in September 2010. It was later extended to a seven-year plan which was adopted by the Executive Council of the CPR in July 2011, acting on behalf of the General Assembly.*

*The Theological Charter of the Environment was adopted by a church leaders consultation in*

*September 2011 in Kigali. In December 2011, it was approved by the General Assembly, the decision-making organ of the CPR.*

This plan was launched at ARC's Many Heavens, One Earth, Our Continent celebration held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2012