

# ANGLICAN CHURCH OF BURUNDI

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## **Church Leaders Conference on Sexual Violence organised by the Provinces of the Anglican Church of Burundi and Rwanda and Tearfund UK in conjunction with UNAIDS.**

The Archbishop of the Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi, the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi, and the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Rwanda, the Most Rev. Onesphore Rwaje, co-hosted an interdenominational conference for Church leaders in collaboration with UNAIDS and Tearfund in Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, to consider the role of the Church in the fight against sexual violence in Burundi and Rwanda.

In March 2011 the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi, along with the Archbishop of the Democratic Republic of Congo, was present at the launch at Lambeth Palace of the coalition of The Anglican Communion, Tearfund, Christian Aid, and Restored established to urge the Church to speak out against sexual violence. The coalition came about as a response to the findings in Tearfund's research report, 'Silent No More' which documented the role of the church in response to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Liberia, with some later study in Burundi. It concluded that the Church had largely failed to respond adequately to sexual violence and had sometimes been unintentionally instrumental in marginalising those who have experienced its devastating consequences.

In his forward to the report on sexual violence in Burundi commissioned by Tearfund the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi wrote, "The Church should lead the way in breaking the silence. What we must ask ourselves as people of faith is how we can create greater awareness in our own communities about the consequences of all forms of violence and work actively to change attitudes and practices that perpetuate violence in homes, families and institutions".

The conference brought together representatives from the two Anglican Provinces, other denominations, UN agencies, NGOs and associations, and representation from the Archbishop of Canterbury's office and the World Council of Churches. Nearly ninety delegates gathered together from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2011 to decide on the goals that should be worked towards in responding to sexual violence and the practical steps needed to achieve those goals.

The conference was officially opened by the President of the Republic of Burundi, His Excellency Peter Nkurunziza, who referred in his opening speech to sexual violence as a "scourge found all over the world" and praised the church for having the courage to rise up to examine and confront it. He referred to the special responsibility, message, and mission of the Church. He also expressed his gratitude for the Church's support of the Burundian government that has put measures in place to care for and protect the population, especially women and children, from violence and abuse.



Participants with the President of Burundi

Participants were welcomed by the Archbishop of Burundi who stressed the importance and impact of the Church working together with a common purpose. In his opening remarks the Archbishop of Rwanda called on the Church to rise up to challenges presented by gender based violence and to speak out at all levels of society so that broken lives are healed and peace and hope are restored.

Rev. Emmanuel Murangira, Country Representative for Tearfund Burundi and Rwanda, commented that it was an inspiration to see the Church playing its role because it is no longer possible to turn our eyes from the distress of victims. The Church must be a place of safety and protection. “The Church must not give silent consent to such violence”, he said.

A representative from the World Health Organisation called for a coalition of all concerned in the Great Lakes Region.

In order to establish the context for the conference, reports were presented on the situation regarding sexual violence in Burundi and Rwanda and about the work of a local association working in Burundi.

The Programme Development Advisor for Gender with Tearfund UK and Co-Director of Restored, Mandy Marshall, looked at the nature of power and the importance of empowerment of women. She presented a theological perspective on issues of gender focusing on Christ as a model.

Under the themes of leadership, equipping the Church, partnerships, overcoming stigma, creating a safe environment and behaviour change participants had the opportunity to discuss the vision and challenges and solutions in order to decide on some strategies for the future.

A holistic approach with a common vision and proper understanding of its potential is needed if the Church is to make an impact as it seeks to confront sexual violence, advocate for and support survivors, respond to the perpetrators of violence, and protect future generations. Adequate training in the Church and community is necessary to empower and build capacity. Collaboration and networking at local, national, and regional levels would pave the way for future consultations around the issues.

It was acknowledged that partnerships between the Church and donors, governments, aid agencies and other bodies was essential in order to make progress and mobilize resources. Commitments to support the Church in the future were made by Tearfund and UNAIDS. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, Monseigneur Evariste Ngoyagoye, pledged his support in fighting gender based violence and the need to protect the children and youth from pornography.

The conference concluded with a march through the streets of Bujumbura that culminated at the Anglican cathedral where a service was held to bring the conference to a close.

In his sermon the Archbishop of Rwanda challenged the delegates to stand together in the task of leading and guiding the flock that God has entrusted to them as good shepherds, ensuring each person’s honour, protection, and care.



March through the streets of the capital

A declaration was read out reflecting the participants’ common vision of a society transformed by the Gospel and without sexual violence. The Archbishop of Burundi officially closed the conference with a blessing.

**“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care... as God wants you to be” 1 Peter 5 verse 2**