



Frontier Internship in Mission

A WCC Seminar on Human Rights and Human Dignity

By Bernard Tietcheu

The World Council of Churches through its Department for International Affairs, and the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey organized from May 26 to June 01 an International Seminar on the topic: “Human Rights and Human Dignity”. Participants came from four corners of the world representing churches, regional or national councils, NGOs, students of the Institute and other ecumenical organizations. The seminar was attended by people from different faith including, the Christian traditions (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestants), Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Confucian. As a Frontier Intern I was lucky to attend this seminar. In my internship in Ghana I had worked on Human Rights in the context of HIV infection. Being part of this event has definitely helped me to broaden my view on the topic and to assess the complexities of the issues.

The seminar was part of the contribution to the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and the process towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011. During the seminar, we studied the concept of human rights and human dignity from the different cultural, religious and philosophical perspectives. We also studied the in the respective international human rights instruments within the UN system, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all the others treaties and convention on specific human rights. We focused our analysis on particular human rights issues like the right to life, right to freedom of belief and religion, the right to protection from being subjected to torture and other cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, women and child rights in the context of conflict and post-conflict situation using case studies from different countries. The seminar also went through the human rights in the ecumenical agenda. The World Council of Churches has contributed during years in the struggle for human rights across countries in the world.

The UN human rights achievements are very consistent. The international community has elaborated many treaties and conventions in many fields (ILO, UNESCO); likewise, a Commission on Human Rights and a Human Rights Council have been established. Some of these treaties and conventions include the treaties on genocides, on trafficking of human beings, elimination on racial discrimination, covenant on civil and political right, economic and social rights, on discrimination against women, against tortures, and more recently, treaty prohibiting disappearances, convention on mercenary, on

migrant workers, right of disabled. The greatest problem for the respect for human rights is the implementation of these instruments by member states.

Participants in the seminar made some suggestions for the way ahead in finding a common strategy and collective wisdom to advocate human rights. In this regard, they emphasized the importance of education. The educational curricula should be inclusive of human rights awareness. They also stressed the need to have education curriculum that give broad understanding of the human dignity and help students to know more about all cultures, religions and philosophies; to have a holistic approach in addressing human rights issues. The participants agreed that a global cultural revolution is needed at the collective level to champion the cause of human rights. This entails a change within the human rights movement: human rights organizations should acknowledge the achievements of governments in the field of human rights; and governments should consider human rights movements not as a target, but a partner in that field.