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Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network
AEFJN HISTORY

Together for Justice since 1988

AEFJN HISTORY
AEFJN has had a website since 1997 ([www.aefjn.org](http://www.aefjn.org)) and regularly updates its contents and presentation to make it user-friendly. We want you to read it!

In the website there is information not only about AEFJN’s issues but also about Africa in general.

More recently, AEFJN has produced a series of fact-sheets on various issues affecting social justice in Africa.


Every month AEFJN publishes news regarding the development of the different issues of the Plan of Action.
AEFJN’s values

What are our values?
Our Christian faith
Our preferential option for the poor
Our desire for global justice and a fair share of the gifts or creation for all, with the people of Africa especially in mind
A profound respect for the dignity of each human being
A concern for fair and just relationships between Africa and Europe and for the global common good.

AEFJN’s uniqueness

It has a stability of presence, through its member congregations, with the poor in Africa which gives access to knowledge about the reality of their life.
Has members in Africa and in Europe, in touch with all layers of society and very familiar with the African context.
**Focuses on the economic issues** affecting relations between Africa and the European Union and its member states.
**Aims to influence economic policies** related to Africa. Disseminates information on issues of structural injustice to its members and the general public.
Christian network that can take decisions independently of the institutional Church.

WHY AEFJN?

“With one hand we give Africans a few crumbs and with the other hand we take away their loaf of bread”. This is the way Fr. Angel Olaran sees things on the continent where he has served as a missionary for four decades. A member of Lavigerie’s Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), he used to work in a bank in his native Spain before deciding to become a priest. His first experience in Africa was among farming communities in rural Tanzania. For the last 20 years he has been working in Wukro, a township located in the semi-arid Tigray region in Northern Ethiopia. Maybe it is his skills in economy and accounting that have helped him effectively head a host of development projects: he has helped build a secondary school; he has supported Wukro’s local hospital and he has set up irrigation canals and a farmers’ training scheme that has improved the livelihoods of peasant families who used to eat one meagre meal a day.

Many men and women missionaries have had similar experiences: they have enthusiastically dedicated themselves to helping their African brothers and sisters have a more dignified life, but seen that “life has become more difficult for the people with whom we work”, as Sr. Margaret Clark, Sister of Notre Dame of Namur, notes. “Our analysis indicated that many of the reasons why conditions in Africa were deteriorating lay in the North and that it there that action was needed to challenge the political and economic powers”. This is why many missionaries who have tried so hard to help Africans have better education, food and health, feel duty-bound to make people back home aware of the causes of poverty and injustice in Africa and to work for fairer international policies.
In 1983 three missionary institutes (the Society for African Missions, the White Fathers and the Spiritans) formed the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in Washington. Conceived as an advocacy group, it aimed to give missionary religious institutes an opportunity to have a positive influence on US government policies affecting Africa. Its members gathered information on African social justice issues and staunchly lobbied members of the Congress. Inspired by their confreres in the US, General Superiors of missionary institutes in Rome began dreaming of doing something similar in Europe. They considered Brussels as the centre of such an initiative since it was there that the Commissions of the European Economic Community prepared legislation for approval by the European Parliament and the Council. In January 1987, the project was presented to 38 religious missionary congregations that had an active presence in Africa. A year later, on 18th June 1988 the network was formally established, with 16 founding members. The plan was that there should be a central governing body in Rome and a secretariat in Brussels. John-Paul II Encyclical “On Social Concerns” calling missionaries to be present wherever decisions were made, was the confirmation that the initiative went in the right direction.

AEFJN Secretariat staff 1999: From left to right: Sr. Margaret Clark; Sr. Begoña Iñarra and F. André Claessens (Executive Secretary).

AEFJN's identity

AEFJN focuses on the economic issues affecting relations between Africa and the European Union and its member states. It aims to influence economic policies related to Africa.

Vision

A world where all can enjoy their fair share of the gifts of creation and have the opportunity to fulfil their God-given potential;
A culture where people, especially the poor, are at the heart of economic and social policy.
An African continent that can stand on its own feet in its relations with other world powers.

Mission

Motivated by our Christian faith and enriched by the Social Teaching of the Church, we aim to be alert wherever political decisions concerning economic relations between Africa and Europe are being made.

As citizens of our own countries in Africa or in Europe we lobby decision-makers at a national level through our 'Antenna' groups. The International Secretariat lobbies at European level: the European commission, the Members of the European Parliament and the European External Action Service, so that the EU policies impacting Africa are just and fair.

Networking through our communities and churches we join with other Church and civil society groups at national and international level to advance the common cause for a respectful, compassionate and just world.
They also participated in drafting the « Dakar Appeal against land grabbing » that is a common declaration issued from the World Social Forum in Dakar.

Europe-Africa Post-Synod Meeting

To follow-up the Recommendations of the Second African Synod that took place in Rome in October 2009, Justice and Peace Europe and AEFJN organized a meeting in The Hague.

Synod Delegates from Africa from Justice and Peace Commissions, together with European Justice and Peace Commissions and Christian organizations working in Africa gathered in in March 2010 to formulate a plan of action to follow some of the recommendations of the Synod regarding Justice and Peace issues.

The aim of the meeting was to deepen the partnership between Justice and Peace Commissions from Africa and Europe and AEFJN to implement in the implementation of the recommendations of the II African Synod.

The Brussels secretariat started 2nd January 1989 as “African Desk” of EECOD (European Ecumenical Organization for Development) and its first secretary was Fr. Frans Thoolen SMA. He began by writing a position paper “Western Development Models and Small Farmers in Africa” and an action programme which were greatly coloured by the experiences of missionaries working in Africa. Given the great inconsistency between the help given by the European Union (EU) to agricultural projects in Africa and its policy of dumping agricultural products on African markets, AEFJN asked for greater coherence in EU policies. It was also evident that much lobbying would be needed to boost official development aid that prioritised small scale farmers over agro-business. For many years the network focussed on the external debt. Many antennae participated at the G8 Summit in Cologne dedicated to the debt problem. Ever since, as the situation changed other issues have been addressed by the secretariat and the antennae, such as the arms trade and the dumping in Africa of substandard medical supplies ... but more of this later.

From its earliest years, the AEFJN secretariat in Brussels was successful at gathering information about forgotten crises, like the war in Sudan, the famine in Malawi, the conflict in the East of the RD Congo and at communicating this to the media and the relevant authorities. In this way, AEFJN had a great impact and established a name for itself in Brussels.

Women farmers in Burkina Faso.

Women farmers in Burkina Faso.
STARTING THE ANTENNAE

The staff at the International Secretariat in Brussels soon realised the need to lobby not only the European Union (EU) Institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council) but also the national governments since they play the main role in EU decision-making. And so the first national ‘antennae’ in EU member states came into being. These offshoots were called ‘antennae’ to reflect their important role in receiving and transmitting information. With the European Parliament meeting in Strasbourg once a month and being the venue for some of the EU/ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Joint Parliamentary Assemblies, it was there that the first antenna was formed in 1991.

As the work of AEFJN became more widely known, the interest of member congregations grew and other antennae were formed: the Netherlands, France (Paris), Ireland and the UK in 1993 and Switzerland in 1994. Others followed suit: Austria, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Malta.

Another important step was the setting up of antennae in African countries: Uganda, Cameroon (1997), D.R. Congo, Ivory Coast and Kenya.

The first meeting of the antennae took place in Brussels in 1995 when representatives of Austria, Netherlands, Kenya, Uganda and Italy met with the secretariat. Since then the antennae met once a year and from 1999 meetings became twice-yearly. These gatherings have allowed AEFJN to organize numerous campaigns and be present at important events such as the Africa-Europe Summit in Lisbon in 2007.

World Social Forum 2007 Nairobi

In January 2007, the Secretariat participated in the World Forum on Theology and Liberation that preceded the World Social Forum. It also took part in some of the events related to EPAs: conferences, a seminar on the consequences of EPAs in West Africa, the adoption of joint strategies and a peaceful march to see the EU delegation in Nairobi. Also, during the event we took the opportunity of meeting 70 brothers and sisters from missionary congregations to talk to them about AEFJN’s goals.

World Social Forum Dakar 2011

Four years later, the Secretariat was involved again in the World Social Forum, this time in Dakar, taking an active role in 3-day workshop "Land grabbing in Africa - Dangers and Challenges".

More than 100 members of missionary congregations and some lay people attended the international session AEFJN organized, an opportunity for them to get to know the network and its work – and a chance for the Secretariat to learn from their experiences. The participants of the workshop drafted the « M’bour declaration on land grabbing in Africa ».
PRESENCE AT INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Ecumenical Meeting at Graz (Austria)

In 1997 the secretariat was present at the second ecumenical gathering in Graz. The stand of AEFJN presented the work of religious in Europe for greater justice in the relations North-South.

2000 Jubilee Campaign

Around the year 2000, a worldwide mobilisation requested the cancellation of the external debts of the poorest countries for the year 2000 (Jubilee year). AEFJN like many Christian groups and NGOs joined the 2000 Jubilee Campaign. All the Antennae participated in the Campaign and AEFJN was one of the Christian groups participating at the 2000 Jubilee.

In June 1999 in Cologne, AEFJN representatives from different countries joined the Jubilee 2000 coalition to hand the G7 leaders gathered in Cologne a petition with 17 million signatures calling for them to cancel the debt of 50 Third World countries. The G7 responded positively and committed to rapid cancellation of up to 90% of the debt of 41 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), among them 34 African countries. $100 billion were to be devoted to this initiative.

THE WORK OF THE ANTENNAE

These few lines cannot adequately reflect the effort and endless hours of voluntary work carried out generously and regularly by the members of the different antennae. As any living organism the Antennae are born, reach their summit and some of them with time dwindle, while others continue very active. Nevertheless, it is worth giving a flavour of some of their activities and achievements:

Strasbourg (France). Founded in 1989 by 12 missionaries, to follow the proceedings of the European Parliament, it was the very first AEFJN antenna. Members update each other on socio-political and economic issues affecting African countries and on European international cooperation policies and research issues carefully before deciding on the lobbying action to take. Once a year they organise an open day to raise awareness among politicians and the public about the situation in a particular country in Africa and to ask European politicians to take any necessary action.

Uganda was the first African Antenna. Given the conflict in the North of the country, one of their main concerns was the just conditions for peace and reconciliation. Formation to advocacy, Trade, Water and eradication of poverty were among their issues. They lobbied the Ugandan Parliament on different issues.
France. This antenna was formed in 1989 as a response to the superiors of missionary congregations who lamented the deterioration in the economic situation in African countries, despite the Church’s many efforts for development. The aim of the group has always been to transform the relationships between the European Union and the African countries. Their annual meetings are an opportunity to invite Africans to speak on an issue connected with AEFJN’s mission.

Netherlands. It was one of the first antennae to be active. They keep a close contact with their missionaries in Africa. Their newsletter is well appreciated and they are well known at the Ministry of Development for their knowledge on the different African contexts.

Ireland. Ever since it started in 1993, the antenna has networked with NGOs and FBOs like Pax Christi and Amnesty, taken part in numerous activities such as Campaign Aid (lobbying the Irish government to increase its overseas development aid budget) the Anti-Racism Coalition, Debt Cancellation, Jubilee 2000, the Arms Trade Treaty, Medicines of Quality... The antenna has petitioned government on many issues, including Energy, the Environment, Cli-

France Antenna coordinators at a Justice & Peace exhibition.

27 January 1998, Antenna Netherlands, event « Africa-Europe 500 years later ».

Ireland Antenna meeting Oct. 2007.

of Sudanese officials who bear responsibility for Sudan’s non-cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC). In July 2008, al-Bashir was accused of crimes against humanity by the ICC.

The country holding the Presidency of the EU at that time, Javier SOLANA as EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and EU Commissioner for Development Louis Michel made declarations on the conflict in Abyei calling upon the partners to immediately cease all hostilities and respect the ceasefire. Nevertheless, no action from the EU followed.

Prosecution of Rwandan leaders

In 2006, the “International Forum for Truth and Justice in the Great Lakes of Africa” and the “Federation of Committees of Solidarity with Africa”, member of Spain’s AEFJN antenna asked the Brussels Secretariat to organise meetings with European Parliamentarians, the EU Council and the Belgium government.

The aim of the meeting was to inform them on the Spanish Court arrest warrants against 40 high-ranked members of the Rwandan Patriotic Army that participated in the assassination of nine Spanish missionaries and aid workers in the Great Lakes during the period 1990 to 1996. Among those indicted for alleged war crimes were some of the Rwandan high-ranking officers in positions of command in UNAMID - the peacekeeping force in Darfur. The Forum and AEFJN lobbied a number of MEPS, and other EU Institutions towards asking the UN Security Council not to renew their mandates and to ask INTERPOL to accelerate the procedures for the detention of those for whom there were arrest warrants.

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AEFJN met different parliamentarians to get the resolution introduced. Despite the fact that Jacques Delors let us down, our request was finally agreed.

**Insecurity in the Kivu region (DR Congo)**

At the request of the Archbishop of Bukavu, François Xavier Rusengo Maroy, who told us about the worsening insecurity in the Kivu region, the AEFJN Secretariat undertook an emergency action. More than 50 letters were sent to European Parliamentarians, followed by personal contact in order to obtain a resolution at the 2007 EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Although the short timescale prevented the issue from being on the agenda, insecurity in the East region of DR Congo did feature in the final resolution.

A number of parliamentary groups followed up the issue and in November 2007 a delegation of European MPs visited the DR Congo. The Secretariat contacted the media, the Churches, AEFJN members and Church organizations and asked them to lobby their Minister of External Affairs to ensure the “international community”, especially the EU, took action to prevent new conflicts in the region.

**Action concerning the violence in Abyei, Sudan**

The violence that spread across the Abyei area in Sudan, the bombing of the civilian areas in May 2008 and the looting and burning of markets and homes by the government’s armed forces precipitated the flight of thousands of civilians to the South for safety.

At the request of religious in Sudan, AEFJN contacted the EU Council and certain MEPs to ask them to take appropriate action. The EU made various declarations, but only the European Parliament (EP) tried to push the EU Council to take action... without success. The EP voted a Resolution on Sudan calling on the European Council to take steps to adopt punitive measures against a group

**United Kingdom.** Fr. Adrian Smith, M Afr., Sr. Margaret Clark, SND were among the founders of the antenna in the early 1990s. From this small seed it has grown into a large “mustard tree” with 50 active members, including lay people. Recently, a number of African priests, sisters and lay people have swelled the membership. Two-monthly meetings are held in London, with members coming from all over the country. The varied agendas include speakers from the Brussels staff, national NGOs and specialists from members’ own congregations. Each member belongs to a working group specialising in Trade and Corporate Social Responsibility, the Control of Small Arms, Food Sovereignty or Climate Change. Their aim is to influence political decisions affecting Africa by lobbying their local MPs and MEPs.

Their activities also include open days, the widely distributed quarterly “Africa Action Sheet” and even a meeting at 10 Downing Street with Prime Minister, Tony Blair. They have also been involved in campaigns such as Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History and the Campaign against the Arms Fair.
Switzerland. Eleven missionaries started this antenna in 1994. Since its beginning it has engaged in lobbying national MPs on political issues that affect Africa; they have published numerous articles in the press (that were later compiled in a book “L’Afrique pour Passion”) and have developed their own website. In 1999 they wrote to the Swiss Bankers’ Association asking them to cancel the debts of the Swiss aid and development organization on the occasion of the Jubilee 2000 campaign. They have also run a campaign in schools against the toy guns.

Ivory Coast. They have been very faithful meeting regularly in the Northern and Southern regions till the war prevented them from doing so.

Belgium. Started in 1997 by 14 male and female religious from 12 different congregations with communities in Africa, this antenna has adopted a truly “African way”; from the beginning they agreed that all decisions be taken by consensus. They have actively lobbied in favour of family farmers in Africa whose interests are threatened by the European Common Agriculture Policy. They have also campaigned for debt cancellation, access to water and for textbooks in D R Congo. The antenna has given particular attention to this country and the Great Lakes region at large, because of Belgium’s historical links and because many of its members have worked there. The working group on Medicines has also been very active.

During the last three decades, over 400,000 tons of crude oil have been poured in the soil of Southern Nigeria, seriously affecting the health and access to land and fishing of millions of people.

European legislation, when it comes to protection of the environment and the resources of its own citizens by industrial activity, is well detailed and it demands that safety standards be strictly followed. When it comes to European companies doing business in Africa, it is a different story.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Faced with a very serious situation of injustice, AEFJN members, may suggest AEFJN Secretariat to initiate an action concerning a particular issue or country. Occasionally these require a political declaration or campaign, for which we use the media for maximum impact on politicians. The first of these emergency actions were on Malawi and Sudan (the unheard of civil war), in the late 1980s. There have been many more since then. Next page we mention some of them.

Oil exploitation in Congo-Brazzaville

At the request of Jean-Pierre Godding, a Holy Ghost father from Justice and Peace Congo-Brazza, the AEFJN Secretariat demanded to the EU-ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) 1999 Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg to introduce a resolution denouncing the support of European oil companies’ to the warlord, Denis Sassou Nguesso.
UNFAIR EXPLOITATION OF AFRICA’S NATURAL RESOURCES

Africa is rich in resources needed for energy, such as minerals and oil. Well managed, its exploitation could greatly raise the standard of living of its populations. However, it has often become a curse because the struggle for their control is at the origin of many wars (as in the East of D R Congo) and dictatorships. On top of that, in many cases trans-national foreign companies exploit these resources with an absolute disregard for the impact their actions have on the environment and on the living conditions of the people who live nearby.

A prime example is that of AREVA, a French company that for the last 40 years has been extracting uranium in Niger. Millions of bulbs in France shine because of the electricity produced thanks to Niger’s uranium, but for the local population of Niger electricity is a luxury beyond their reach. AREVA has radioactively contaminated the environment in areas close to their mines and made water sources unsafe.

Another well-known case is that of Shell in the South of Nigeria. According to their own reports, between 1997 and 2006 this company had an average of 250 oil leaks every year. Shell does not invest enough money to ensure that internationally accepted safety standards are followed and that its decrepit infrastructure is renovated, despite the fact that it makes huge profits (in 2010 alone it reaped net profits of 18.6million dollars).

Cameroon. The first Cameroon antenna started in 1997 with a group in Yaoundé and another in Maroua. The first commitment was towards the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. While many thought the Chad oil will bring prosperity to the region, the antenna saw already the adverse consequences of the oil exploitation. After a decline, the Antenna has revived since 2010 as “Faith and Justice Cameroon” thanks to Sr. Annie Girard who was mandated by her congregation to do this work. Much of its current activity has been centred on formation – in both the French and the English sector – of religious and lay people in understanding and combating social injustice, especially in the areas of health and land-grabbing. The antenna has a socio-political observatory “Africa Munus” to analyse the situation and discover the causes of injustice. Working with the Secretariat in Brussels, it has also lobbied the EU to prevent a large amount of EU Aid from going to PHP, a major, French-owned, banana company that has taken land from small producers and maintains its workers in appalling working conditions.

Italy. The Italian antenna started in 1997. It has translated important documents into Italian, like the Justice and Peace Handbook edited by the General Superiors and AEFJN documents on issues such as land grabbing, the arms trade, access to quality medicines and access to water. It has lobbied Italian
and EU authorities on various issues affecting Africa. Notably, in 2010, it wrote an open letter to the Minister for Development alerting him to the effect that the policies that favouring bio-fuels had on pushing thousands of Africans into risking migration to Europe. It also challenged the activities of ENI, an Italian multinational oil and gas company, in Congo-Brazza.

**D.R. Congo.** Started at the end of the 90’s, the main issue was the debt cancellation. They made a very strong advocacy campaign in Kinshasa with publications in local languages.

**Austria.** The Antenna was active for some years, and collaborated in the presentation of AEFJN at Graz Ecumenical Meeting. But when the Comboni Sisters left Austria no animator was found.

**Germany.** The missionary institutes were concerned that the German public was not sufficiently aware of the issues concerning African countries. Sixteen congregations working in Africa began the AEFJN antenna in Bonn in 1998. Today they are more than forty congregations. The first campaign was on the problem of child soldiers. The Antenna set up a reference library and launched a website with information on African countries, the history and the development of the Church. They joined the Jubilee Campaign. Together with Misereor, they organised a seminar on Land Grabbing at the 2011 World Social Forum in Dakar.

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**ARMS TRADE**

The illegal trade in small arms is swamping African countries, feeding civil wars and undermining peace, security and sustainable development. It also encourages the deployment of child soldiers.

When AEFJN was born, there was little or no international legislation on arms trade. A strong civil society lobby forced the EU to deal with this issue and in December 1998 member states signed a voluntary “Code of Conduct for Arms” agreeing to report annually on licenses granted for arm exports. This small step was just the beginning of an on-going process. The lobby by civil society organizations continued and in 2008 the “EU Common Position on military material” imposed compulsory limitations on the granting of arms export licenses. Despite these efforts, loopholes remain and countries still manage to export arms in dubious circumstances.

At UN level, AEFJN has worked towards two major initiatives: the Program of Action on Small Arms, begun in 2001, and the proposal, put forward by 107 Countries in 2006, for a strong Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). To be successful, the control of arms needs to be implemented by all countries, so civil society and some European governments started campaigning for an ATT at the UN. After many years of lobbying, the US, Russia and other countries agreed to the 2012 UN Arms Trade Treaty Conference. Three years of preparations and meetings resulted in a draft document, but no agreement was reached at the conference. Fortunately, more than 90 countries are prepared to continue working towards this vital treaty – and AEFJN’s drive and involvement will continue.
AEFJN has always been concerned about the access of people in Africa to affordable quality medicines. We particularly concentrate our efforts on the EU’s stand within bilateral and multilateral negotiations with other countries. Since the imposition of patents by the WTO, access to the cheaper but good quality generic medicines in Africa has become increasingly difficult. Pharmaceutical companies say patents help cover their research costs – but the reality is that much of the research is covered by public funds and the companies spend more on marketing than research.

The case of South Africa highlights this point. In 1998 its government passed legislation to make essential medicines more accessible to its people. Faced with the priority given to generics, 39 pharmaceutical companies sued the South African government in order to block the implementation of this legislation. AEFJN joined the campaign of thousands of patients and civil society organizations to demand that the pharmaceutical companies withdraw their case. This public pressure was successful and South African patients were able to have the cheaper, good quality generic medicines.

Another concern is the quality of generic drugs produced in Europe where there is a double-standard policy: drugs intended for the European markets have to pass strict quality controls, whereas there is little control of drugs destined for export to developing countries.

**Portugal.** Since the beginning the antenna has had the support of the different congregations present in Africa as well as the lay missionaries. It has a lot of contacts with the Catholic university, parishes and youth groups. This dynamic antenna played an important role at the 2007 Lisbonne Africa – EU Summit. They organized a yearly Public event regarding the issues of AEFJN.

**Spain (Madrid).** Since its inception in 1999, this antenna has grown to 40 members who belong to working groups active on three main issues: food sovereignty, access to quality medicines and the control of small arms. Working for the antenna has meant learning how to lobby and over the years, members have produced a series of reports and publications on arms in Africa. They have gathered much valuable information from Africa and organized awareness-raising seminars for various groups; they have networked with national and international NGOs and engaged with MPs who are willing listeners; they also communicate directly with government ministers.

**Kenya.** From 2002 till 2007 the Antenna called Catholic Economic Justice (CEJ) worked on economic justice issues. The campaign ‘Debt is Slavery! Debt is Poverty! Refusing to pay is Justice!’ extended to all the country with great
participation in the Nairobi slums. Together with other religions they collected 85,000 postcards signatures. They met with the Minister of Finance, the Debt Management Department and the EU embassies to bring forward the concerns of the people of Kenya and to explain the objectives of the campaign. The network asked the screening of the public debt register for illegitimately used loans and to lobby for the cancellation of the illegitimate debts.

Poland. Missionaries in Poland started an Antenna with the participation of young lay missionaries. As Africa is not known and awakes not much interest in Poland, the antenna started by a campaign of awareness on the situation of Africa.

Malta was the last-born antenna. As Malta is a small country it had difficulties to find a coordinator and their way through in the different issues, as the main concern of the Maltese people were the immigrants from Africa.

During the last few years, large surfaces of arable land have been acquired by foreign companies, mostly from Arab and Asian countries but also from Europe, as it is the case with the Neumann Kaffee Group, a German company that in 2001 acquired 2,500 hectares of land to grow coffee in the Mubende district of Uganda, evicting 400 families. More than 12,000 people lost their ancestral land overnight. In this way, many African countries have lost significant areas of fertile land to foreign groups that grow food or biofuels to be sent to rich countries. The trouble is that this is happening in countries where citizens are already undernourished. Liberia has lost 67% of its land to foreign companies, Sierra Leone 15%, Ethiopia 10%, Gabon 8%, Tanzania 7% and Mozambique 6%.

Land grabbing in Africa feeds also the growing demand for bio-fuels in other continents. Crops like sugarcane, oil palm, jatropha and maize are grown to produce ethanol or diesel. Apart from depriving millions of Africans of their land, these practices — aimed at maximum profits in the shortest time possible — endanger the ecological balance, affect biodiversity, make water sources run dry and often cause irreparable damage to the topsoil.
Agreements (EPAs). The negotiations of these EPAs were meant to be concluded by 2007.

EPAs provide for duty-free access of European goods and services to African markets which would put local agricultural and industrial sectors in jeopardy. African farmers and owners of small and medium-scale enterprises cannot hold out against competition with European products, particularly food which is heavily subsidised in the EU. You only have to enter in a supermarket in any African city these days and compare prices. Generally, items like tomatoes, chicken, beef, onions, sugar, milk, imported from the EU are cheaper than those produced locally.

In spite of the 2007 deadline, the EPA negotiations are still on-going and civil society has played an important role in encouraging African governments to stand firm in the negotiations and not to sign up.

**LAND GRABBING**

Now that food is a major focus of financial speculators on the stock market, fertile land has become a scarce resource that attracts the greed of powerful entrepreneurs. As a consequence, land grabbing is rampant in African countries. According to the World Bank, during 2011 alone some 42 million of farmland worldwide were purchased by investors of which 75% (32 million hectares) were in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In African societies, land tenure is usually based on community tradition and

**THE POLITICAL SCENE**

Sister Begoña Iñarra, currently the Executive Secretary, recalls receiving a letter from a Spiritan who was secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of Congo Brazzaville, in April 1999. “He wanted us to press the EU to make a statement condemning the situation in Congo-Brazza and take measures against ELF and some French Banks that favoured one of the warlords, Denis Sassou Nguesso”, she remembers. “I tried to get the support of some French MPs, members of the Joint EU-ACP Parliamentary Assembly that was about to meet in Strasbourg. All of them refused, except Jacques Delors. However, each time we went to meet him, Delors would find a different excuse not to receive us... , till we understood that, just like the other French MPs, he did not want to commit himself on anything to do with ELF - confirmation that all the French governments had been very much involved in the ELF-Congo business”.

Working for social justice in Africa means talking directly to the decision makers and trying to make alliances. In doing this, one finds politicians of all political shades who are eager to learn and act in good faith, but one has also to be ready for disappointments. AEFJN members often remark that the civil society coalition that has worked against the Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pa-
cific) countries has been well received by the Greens, the Socialist and United Left parties of the European Parliament. The greatest opposition to the amendments to EPAs that we wanted came from the European Peoples Party (EPP) which includes most Christian Democrats. “I cannot understand how those who support us (the protestant development agencies) financially vote against what we propose, thus destroying the work we are doing on other continents...”, ponders a Christian lobbyist in Brussels.

Others experiences are more encouraging. “During my participation at one of the Committees of the European Parliament”, says Sister Begoña, “I discovered that Robles Piquer, from the People’s Party (PP), whom I had seen on TV in Spain as a minister of Franco, was defending Ethiopia. I was touched by the way he spoke. He really wanted the best for a country that had suffered so much in the past and that was then facing a war. I went to thank him for what he said and that was the beginning of a friendship. He would often come by unannounced to chat about his new love, Africa. Those moments spent with somebody that I’d thought held opposing views helped me to see that the heart goes beyond the political affiliation and ideas. I think I helped him to change his image of Africans, too, to see them not only as people in need but as resilient people full of initiative in overcoming difficulties... I enjoyed those moments as much as he did”.

Mr. Robles Piquer, ex-member of the European Parliament.

To be net exporters of foodstuffs now have to import most of their food. Most families in Africa have to spend between 60 and 80% of their income on food. Compare this with European countries, where – even in an economic crisis - family expenditure on food does not usually exceed 20%.

Having to buy the food they consume has become a mortal trap for most of the African poor. In 2006 basic products like rice, wheat and maize became the object of stock market speculation and two years later prices increased by 50 or even 60%. Since then, prices of essential commodities have not come down. The problem is that there are no international legal mechanisms to regulate speculation on basic food products, only optional codes of good practice that cannot be enforced.

Other factors have contributed to this situation, notably the great demand of bio-fuels. For instance, in the USA almost half of the 416 million tons of corn harvested in 2009 was destined to the production of ethanol. This would be enough to feed 350 million people for a year. About 15% of the world’s production of maize is for bio-fuel.

TRADE

Until 2000, commercial relations between the European Union and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries were regulated by the Lomé agreement which allowed free access to the European market for African goods - and no need to reciprocate. However, the international rules of the World Trade Organisation changed and Lomé’s successor, the Cotonou Agreement of 2000, brought in free trade agreements known as Economic Partnership
THESE ARE THE ISSUES

AEFJN has dealt with numerous social justice issues, mostly regarding relations between the European Union and Africa. The wide range of campaigns include the child soldier issue, debt cancellation for African countries, access to water and the trafficking of human beings... However, there are six main topics the Secretariat and its antennae deal with:

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

From the beginning, AEFJN has paid particular attention to issues affecting family farmers in Africa. Up to a few years ago, most of them produced the food they ate and sold the surplus in local markets to meet family needs like clothing, transport, household items and education. Some areas, like the Sahel and parts of Eastern and Southern Africa, could experience cyclical droughts that resulted in years of scarcity, but despite this, most Africans had enough land and, provided there were no armed conflicts, they could feed themselves reasonably well.

Things have changed a great deal in recent decades. Most African countries have been forced by international trade and financial policies to reduce their public investment in agriculture. Other economic measures have propelled migration from rural to urban areas; factors such as climate change, land grabbing and war have forced many Africans to leave their land. On top of that, international institutions and donor countries, including the EU and the US, have kept demanding that African countries liberalise their agriculture while the world’s richest countries continue to increase subsidies to their farmers. Under these circumstances, fair competition in international markets is non-existent. All this has resulted in a dramatic change: African countries that used

Sr. Margaret Clark recalls a similar experience: “When I started, we were facing a European election. It seemed an ideal time to get voices from Africa heard in Europe and to mobilise our network to take political action. So I wrote to some of our contacts in Africa asking what they wanted to say to those being elected to the European Parliament. I sent the responses to some of my “contacts” across the EU asking them to make sure those elected heard and responded positively. Memories of that include a Dutch MEP whom I met, much later, in Holland. “I know who you are.” she told me. “You are the people who disseminated the ideas from Africa during the elections. I agree with them and shall try to see them implemented. I am most grateful for them.”

The value of talking to politicians should not be underestimated. For instance, at a meeting on Energy and the EU, Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs said that no EU business was acquiring land in Africa for bio-fuels. AEFJN members from the secretariat collected data and asked for a meeting with him. He invited them to meet a member of his cabinet, a lady who seemed genuinely surprised. “I believe you, but we had never heard about this negative impact of our policies for family farmers and the rural population of Africa. Please keep us informed.” That was confirmation for us of the importance of our lobbying. We present the interests of the people of Africa and have the added advantage of having faced challenging situations with Africans at grassroots level ... and the politicians often sense this.
VISITS TO AFRICA

Eager to get in touch with the current concerns of Africa, the members of the Secretariat have visited different African countries to strengthen the relations with AEFJN members in those countries, and to deepen the collaboration with African organisations working on similar issues and having a similar vision.

Margaret Clark from AEFJN Secretariat during her visit to Zambia in 1996 with a group of catechists interested in economic justice at Kitwu Pastoral Centre.

André Claessens, AEFJN Executive Secretary visiting the Xaverians in Bongor (Chad) in December 1997.

AEFJN participation at the Forum on poverty organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of Tanzania, Dar-es-Salaam, November 2002. From left to right Bishop Kilaini, a lady representative of Caritas, Maria Eugenia Basterreche from AEFJN Secretariat and Wolfgang Shonecke from AEFJN Germany.

Visite d’André Claessens, Executive Secretary to the Cameroon Antenna in 1977. Meeting with the members of Maroua, North Cameroon.

Meeting Justice and Peace Commissions from Africa (Octobre 2010). Begoña Iñarra, AEFJN Executive Secretary with Sr. Marie-Bernard Alima, Executive Secretary of Justice and Peace Commission, D.R. Congo.

Coordinating team of AEFJN Antenna Cameroon (Foi et Justice Cameroon) with Thomas Lazzeri from the Brussels Secretariat.

Meeting Justice and Peace Commissions from Africa (Octobre 2010). Begoña Iñarra, AEFJN Executive Secretary with Sr. Marie-Bernard Alima, Executive Secretary of Justice and Peace Commission, D.R. Congo.


Begoña Iñarra, AEFJN Executive Secretary, invited by Mgr. Kouraleyo, bishop of Moundou (Chad) co-animated a seminar on the oil exploitation for Justice & Peace coordinators from the dioceses of Chad (November 2011).

AEFJN meeting with religious at Addis Abega (Ethiopia) in March 2012.