



Pacific Conference of Churches

The Call from Malasi Tabu

Acknowledgement

We express profound acknowledgement to the Minister and congregation of Malasi Tabu, the Moderator, Assembly Clerk and Secretary for Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu for the hospitality and the organisation for the participants of the Consultation. We acknowledge the contributions of the Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Directorate of Trade of the Government of Vanuatu and the Pacific Conference of Churches. We acknowledge the participation of the members of the Vanuatu Christian Council, last but not least, the enthusiastic and enlightening contributions of the participants as well as the youth of the various churches.

Introduction

The member churches of the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Vanuatu Christian Council, comprising the Church of Christ in Vanuatu, Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, Catholic Church in Vanuatu, Anglican Church of Melanesia in Vanuatu, Assemblies of God of Vanuatu, Seventh Day Adventist Church of Vanuatu and Apostolic Church of Vanuatu, met at Malasi Tabu from 20th to 22nd of July, 2011 in a consultation focussing on the Rethinking Oceania process through the Exodus story in the Bible.

The consultation was an invitation to us, the Churches, Government and Civil Society to embark on a journey of rethinking our governance, our social relationships and social justice, our economic life and our relationship to the land. It is also a call for us to state where we stand today and where we are heading into the future on these issues that are so central to our life as people of Vanuatu.

The results of our deliberations during these three days are presented herein.

Statement of Concern

1. We recognise that we live in an age of globalisation, represented by systems of global economics and finance, global governance, a global view of resources – land and environment and social capital – and through the mantra of “no alternatives” and that through these, wants us to be governed, to organise our economic lives and to see our stewardship of our land and environment, the way it wants us to.
2. We recognise that the ethos of globalisation and such universalist cultures is to impose a single truth, a single culture and a single way of life on the diversity created by God and therefore, reduce the gift of diversity into sameness and human life to a single organised way of thinking and living.
3. We recognise that the clamour, the temptation and the seduction of globalisation’s way of life is exceedingly attractive and powerful and in that regard we confess our own

complicity to the ways of globalisation in how we exercise governance, administer our economic life and, in our stewardship responsibility of our lands and environment.

4. We recognise that since our birth as an Independent nation on 30th July, 1980 and adoption of a universalist way of governance, the consultation, participation and consent of our people have not often sought on issues that matter most to us, in particular, the representation of our people's concerns in parliament, the way our economic life should be organised and managed, and how we should be good stewards of our lands and environment.

Statement of Affirmation

5. Affirm that God created diversity and it is through this divine gift of diversity that we are to seek Him, learn to appreciate and discover, through the particularities of our contexts, His greatness and will for us.
6. Affirm that the rights of citizenship includes consultation, participation and consent and that the principles of social justice, which are ensuring that no one is denied the graciousness of the community and the honouring of the dignity of the human person, ought to be the core values of our governance, our economic life and our stewardship responsibility.
7. Affirm that we must enter into a formation process, much like the exodus formation of the Israelites in the Bible, of rethinking who we are in this age of globalisation, the way we are governed, how we organised our economic life and community life, and how we conduct our stewardship task over the land and the environment.
8. Affirm that the process of Rethinking our Oceania is a process in Formation in the spirit of the Exodus Experience where God called a people and formed them into a new way of life in how they are to be governed, to organise their social and economic life and to be stewards of the land and their environment through the formative principles on:
 - a. Moral life
 - b. Governance
 - c. Social Justice including economic justice
9. Affirm that the Rethinking Oceania concept note is the beginning of our Formation and a call for us to look at our form of Governance in Vanuatu, the organisation of our social and economic life with reference to the Preamble and Chapter 12 Sections 73 and 74 of our Constitution and our stewardship of our resources, most importantly land.

Statement of Commitment to Action

We commit ourselves to taking the following steps in our own formation as a people and as a nation:

10 *Governance*

The right of citizenship and the principles of consent, consultation and participation in decision making are key values in the Exodus Formation Framework on Governance. In this regard we

- a. support the call of the Prime Minister for a Referendum on a new system of governance;
- b. call for a national summit between the Churches, Government and Civil Society on this new system, and in particular regard to how these key principles can inform the new governance system;
- c. organise seminars and awareness in our theological schools, communities and Churches on the Exodus Framework and Rethinking Oceania formation process;
- d. develop a framework of hermeneutics to accompany the formation process of our people on the Exodus Framework and Rethinking Oceania; and
- e. call on government and the churches to conduct short leadership and governance courses for students in tertiary education as well as in schools.

11. *Vanuatu World Trade Organisation accession process*

Recognising the inherent failings of the open economy to guarantee just outcomes and further recognising the demands of the Exodus experience that a society must ensure human honour and equal dignity to all of its members and that no one should be without the basic requirements of existence, we call

- a. for a more inclusive and comprehensive consultation process between Government, the Churches, Civil Society and the Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat before a decision on Vanuatu's membership of the World Trade Organisation is made by Government. This consultation is to address, amongst other concerns, the following:
 - i. the accession package that we are negotiating with the WTO;
 - ii. the perceived benefits and risks of becoming a WTO member;
 - iii. the form and extent of 'development' that may or should arise from our membership;
 - iv. the immediate and future costs to our economy, our environment and our social capital;
 - v. the additional requirements and sacrifices on Vanuatu that will accompany WTO membership obligations; and
 - vi. alternatives to the current accession process.
- b. on the Churches to contribute, wherever possible, to discussions with Government, civil society and all other sectors of Vanuatu society the Biblical guidelines for economy and the basic principles of the Exodus framework; and
- c. on Government to reinforce its economic governance and business policies to better empower the economically disempowered and disadvantaged, the custom land owners in particular.

12. *Land*

Recognising that land, as created by God in the Biblical creation story and having been given to us as a perfect gift to steward over, it is to be respected, cared for and its perfection maintained now and into the future in honour of this divine assignment.

Recognising that land belongs to God and that we hold the land in trust in respect of our ancestors, those who are still living and those who will follow us, we hold that the land, in the fullness of its material and non-material richness, is to be used for God's glory and to be shared for the betterment of the community and the nation in accordance with the minimum requirements of the Exodus formation for ensuring social justice.

We therefore call:

- a. on all Ni-Vanuatu for the continued respect for and protection of land, in the entirety of its constitution, from degradation and wrongful use;
- b. on Government for the continued respect for and protection of custom land in law, policy and practice;
- c. for an immediate redress of shortcomings in, or abuse of, existing protections for land that allow circumventions of these protections for reasons including unrestrained development or so-called economic growth;
- d. in accordance with Leviticus 25:23, for an immediate and complete stop to the sale and speculation of land in Vanuatu, which apparently continues to occur; and
- e. to seek other options, one of which is a return to the Melanesian land tenure system.

Conclusion

We call on the Vanuatu Christian Council and other Christian Ministries in Vanuatu to coordinate the implementation of this Call. We commit ourselves to implement the Malasi Tabu Call within five years beginning in 2011. We commit ourselves to coming together after two and a half years to see how far we have journeyed.

We commit ourselves to a new paradigm of rethinking our participation in this time of globalisation, acknowledging our complicity in many of its temptations and commit ourselves to formation in the ways of the Lord.

Malasi Tabu
Freshwater, Port Villa
Vanuatu

22nd July 2011
