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## Outlook on the Month

### NAIROBI ASSEMBLY

The Assembly of the All African Conference of Churches met in Nairobi, Kenya from August 1-10/81. In many respects, this was the most important meeting of the AACC since its inception. The AACC met for the first time since 1974 and this in itself is strange. It should have met in 1979. But the AACC has had its share of problems. It has been without a general secretary since Canon Burgess Carr had resigned a few years ago. An ambitious building programme has as yet not been completed and has caused the organisation major financial problems. In the absence of a general secretary communication with the churches has been even less satisfactory than it usually is between local churches and the headquarters of any ecumenical body. Under normal circumstances this is bad enough. In the situation of which the AACC finds itself this added strain to an already difficult situation. People were openly talking about the 'crisis' in the AACC and some even prophesied that the churches would prove themselves less loyal to the AACC as an organisation. Indeed, the relationship between the AACC and its member churches had suffered. As did the relationships with partner churches and donor agencies overseas. It was clear that the assembly would meet under considerable tensions. But not only that. The political situation in Africa seems to be getting worse. Amidst tensions, war and rumours of wars, coups and counter-coups, Zimbabwe seems to be the only sign of hope on our battered and wounded continent. The economic structures of the world remain basically unjust and exploitative and it is the poor and defenceless who are suffering most. Growing militarism causes insecurity, hunger, op-sided economies and a tragic inversion of priorities. Africa has almost 5 million refugees and this is not even counting the unstated resettled millions of South Africa. All of these realities were brought to the Assembly - and rightly so. For the church, although not of the world, is nevertheless in the world. And the church in Africa is the church in the midst of these painful problems.

And this is one reason why I am grateful for this Assembly. It had reason to be subdued, less prophetic and therefore less 'political' in order to accommodate 'healing' amongst churches and nations. It could have gone for a cheap kind of reconciliation to reassure its member churches and its partners overseas. It could have ignored Africa's problems in order not to alienate the member churches after a particularly difficult period in the life of the AACC. Especially with a new general secretary taking office it could have argued that it would be better not to tread on political toes.

The Assembly did none of that. It tried, as bravely and honestly as it could to speak to Africa as the churches of Africa.

There was an amazing openness to discuss the overwhelming problems of our continent. People were not merely content to 'make a scapegoat' out of South Africa. They were as honest about their own situations as they were indignant about South Africa's racism. There was a willingness to be self-critical, an awareness of the responsibility of the church in Africa.

All this was by no means easy. And no one is fooled into believing that all the problems of the AACC have disappeared overnight simply because the Assembly itself was a successful, joyful, spiritually enriching experience for those of us who were privileged to be there. And questions remain of course. Will the AACC be able to move beyond pious statements and realise the healing that the theme of the Assembly emphasized so much? Will it be able to persist on its chosen path also when the churches come home and have to match their Assembly pledges with faithful deeds? Will the churches of Africa be able to be as prophetic to the new regimes ('our own people') as in the days when they were involved in struggles for liberation? We do not know. All I know is that the All Africa Conference of Churches deserves our fervent prayers, our faithful support, our clear commitment. So much depends on what we, the churches are prepared to give. So much depends also on the grace of God. Let us hope that we can be as sure of the first as we are of the last.

ALLAN BOESAK

South African Outlook