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Africa Initiative's Position Statement on the Holding of 2022 General Conference

To:

Ms. Kim Simpson
Chairperson
Commission on General Conference
USA

Bishop Cynthis Harvey
President
Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Introduction

As the Commission on General Conference prepares for its upcoming meetings as part of its preparation for hosting of the 2022 General Conference, it is our pleasing duty to inform the Commission and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church that the three Central Conferences of Africa are ready to participate in the 2022 General Conference through its elected delegates.

We are deeply saddened by the fact that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on General Conference was constrained to postpone the General Conference initially scheduled for 2020 and 2021 respectively. We are however delighted to acknowledge that significant efforts have been made by the international community and many national governments to make COVID vaccines available to many of its citizens, including African delegates to the 2022 General Conference.

Over the past six months, leaders of the Africa Initiative within the three Central Conferences of Africa have worked assiduously to carry out research surveys among members of the about two hundred and eighty-six (286) delegates expected from the three Central Conferences of Africa to attend the 2022 General Conference. The purpose of the survey was to determine their readiness to participate in the scheduled 2022 General Conference.

The survey was centered around two major issues: the accessibility of COVID vaccines in their areas, and the possibility of applying for a US Visa. Of the thirteen episcopal areas within our three central conferences, about ninety percent of delegates have taken their COVID vaccines, and the remaining ten percent (10%) comprising of few delegates in Burundi, parts of the D. R. Congo, and Nigeria are expected to take their vaccine shots before May, 2022. We therefore want to make it unequivocally clear that majority delegates from Africa are ready to participate in the events of 2022 General Conference, and the remaining delegates should be ready shortly.

We will be greatly disappointed, and many within our UMC connection will be equally disappointed if the Commission on General Conference or any group uses vaccine or visa challenges to African delegates as reasons to further postpone 2022 General Conference. Absolutely no one should use Africa's perceived challenges as reasons to further delay the holding of this much anticipated 2022 General Conference. We are ready to participate!

Due to the severity of the COVID pandemic about two years ago, booking appointments for visa interviews at most US consular sections was a huge challenge, and travels into the US was highly restricted. But of recent, that challenge has been significantly resolved. Evidence of this is the fact that several major international events are now being planned to take place in the United States, including the United Methodist Women Assembly. Some delegates from Africa have secured their visas and will be in attendance.

Coordinators of Africa Initiative within annual and provisional annual conferences have confirmed that visa application links are now opened at most American embassies across Africa. In fact, some delegates have begun booking their appointments for interviews.

Given that we have a little more than five months to the holding of the 2022 General Conference, we humbly urge the Secretary of the General Conference to make invitation letters available to all delegates and alternate delegates in Africa in the soonest possible time, as well as to delegates in other parts of the globe. We should all be able to secure our visas far in advance of the scheduled 2022 General Conference. We therefore reiterate, on behalf of the majority of African delegates to the General Conference that we are ready for 2022 General Conference and foresee no reasons for further delay of General Conference.

Given the experiences we have all had with the COVID pandemic over the past two years, and the challenges it still poses in some parts of the world, we can only learn to live with this reality until the pandemic is totally eradicated someday. But life must go on. We must all take the necessary health measures to ensure that we keep safe and ensure the safety of our neighbors. Thus, the continued presence of the COVID pandemic in some parts of the world should not be a reason for another postponement of General Conference.

If, however, conditions in the United States render it difficult or impossible for the hosting of the General Conference, Africa will be more than happy to play host to the 2022 General Conference. We have done some venue research, and we can confirm that if the need for an alternative venue becomes necessary, Africa will be glad to host the General Conference. In Africa, the 2022 General Conference could be hosted in Harare, Zimbabwe; Abidjan, la Cote D'Ivoire; Nairobi, Kenya; or Johannesburg, South Africa.

Conclusion

The Africa Initiative remains grateful to members of the Commission on General Conference for the great task of planning for the hosting of the 2022 General Conference. The Commission is in our thoughts and prayers as she prepares to meet this Thursday, 24th February, 2022 for its global meeting. It is our hope that all African delegates to this Commission will be invited and provided the Zoom link to the meeting, as well as the needed resources to enable them to purchase internet data to effectively participate in the meeting.

As we conclude this position statement on behalf of the UMC Africa Initiative, that comprises clergy and lay of the three Central Conferences of Africa, we once again urge the Commission on General Conference to do all within its power to facilitate the hosting of 2022 General Conference. Further delay of this global gathering would do much harm to progressives and conservatives alike who are deeply convinced about moving forward to do ministry as they know and understand it based on their convictions. By hosting the 2022 General Conference, we will abort further decline of the church's membership, the pain and anguish many currently bear as a result of the two postponements we have already suffered. Furthermore, various

wings of the church will be at peace with each other and will endeavor to do ministry together in ways that will be mutually benefitting following the much-anticipated gracious separation.

It is our prayer and hope that this position statement will be given your timely and favorable consideration for the common good of our beloved United Methodist Church. Thank you.

Kind regards.

Signed by Members of the Executive Committee, UMC Africa Initiative

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Rev. Dr. Kimba K. Evariste,	Coordinator, Congo Central Conference
Rev. Dr. John Pena Auta	Coordinator, West Africa Central Conference
Mr. Simon Mafunda	Coordinator, Africa Central Conference
Rev. Philip Adjobe	Member, Cote D'Ivoire Episcopal Area
Rev. Wilton Odongo	Member, Kenya-Ethiopia Annual Conference
Dr. Julius Sarwolo Nelson	Member, Liberia Episcopal Area
Rev. Frobes Matonga	Member, Zimbabwe West Annual Conference
Prof. Aboua Louis Roi Nondenot	Member, Cote D'Ivoire Episcopal Area
Rev. Dr. Edwin Momoh	Member, Sierra Leone Episcopal Area
Chief Prosperous Tunda	Member, East Congo Episcopal Area
Mr. Nicolas Sukisa Munongo	Member, Central Congo Episcopal Area
Rev. Louis Loma Otshudi	member, Central Congo Episcopal Area
Rev. Chipeng Kayemb Francois	Member, South Congo Episcopal Area
Rev. Kenneth Kalichi	Member, Zambia Annual Conference
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