

## PRESS RELEASE

*For Immediate Release*

### **Catholic Professionals gather in Addis Ababa to reimagine lay leadership in Africa**

**ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia** — From 30 April to 2 May 2026, close to 30 Catholic academics and professionals from across the continent convened in Addis Ababa, under auspices of the International Catholic Movement for Intellectuals and Cultural Affairs (Pax Romana-ICMICA) to reflect on the theme *Reimagining the Role of Catholic Lay in Africa*.

In his message to the participants, His Eminence Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, Archbishop of Addis Ababa, while celebrating the opening mass, called on professionals to be salt of Africa. Speaking at the event and in his own capacity as a practicing Catholic, Parfait Anyanga-Omanga, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General to the Africa Union, emphasised the importance of faith and hope amid ongoing challenges within the context of multilateralism.

In their concluding statement, the Catholic academics and professionals reflected on Africa's challenges. They noted that while nearly 11 million young people enter the labour market annually, only about 3 million formal jobs are created annually. They committed to working with other stakeholders to address youth joblessness.

They promised to deploy their skills to work for those at the margins and peripheries of society. 'We are a unique category of people, with special gifts of professional formation and responsibility to work towards the *African society We Want*', leveraging our numerical strength and presence in all spheres of life', noted Dr. Jean-Claude Kulondwa, a Congolese medical doctor, who traveled for nearly four days from Bukavu, a conflict-affected region, to attend the meeting in Addis. 'We are committed to accompanying the church and other stakeholders to the margins and peripheries by deploying our skills', said Dr. Jules Zanou, an academic at the University of Benin and the President of the Catholic Movement in Africa, a sentiment shared by Ms. Kaputo Chenga-Bwalya, a Zambian public policy specialist.

They condemned the current international financial architecture that denies African countries from accessing the necessary financing for socioeconomic development, calling for urgent reforms. 'We need an international financial system that doesn't push Africa on the periphery, rather, one that enables the continent to access resources to support the poor and those at the margins of society', noted Dr. Fredrick Wamalwa, a Kenyan Catholic Economist based at the African Development Bank.

The Catholic academics and professionals acknowledged, further in their statement, the declining traditional donor financing into Africa, including financing to the church. They committed to leveraging their skills to help the church to invest in innovative financing mechanisms such as investments in financial markets that are aligned to the values and principles of the Church. 'We want a self-sustaining African church, and we are ready to deploy our skills towards that,' read part of the concluding statement, which was presented at closing session, in the presence of His Excellence Archbishop Brian Ngozi

Udaigwe, the Apostolic Nuncio to Ethiopia, who had earlier invited the participants not to shy away from engagement in public and political life

The Catholic academics and professionals underscored the need for continuous formation of lay Catholics in Africa, promising to work with relevant church structures to scale up formation programs for lay people, as a way of translating the Gospel in tangible spiritual and social transformation tool. Along this line, Fr Johane Maseko, the Coordinator for the Zimbabwe Catholic Commission for the Laity, called for their self-conversation, imploring members to always invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their work.

The event was also attended by Mr. Fasika Lachore, the International Secretary General of Catholic Student, based in Parish, France, as well as Catholic Professionals and students from Benin, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, accompanied by their Chaplains. Also present was Fr. Emerick Louison, Chaplain of the African Union (AU) and representative of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) to AU.

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