

October 27, 1983 Lambeth Conference Set, Islamic Relations Eyed

Episcopal News Service

NAIRDBI, (DPS, OCT. 27) -- In a series of three international meetings here this month, Anglican units took a number of steps that will shape the work of the Communion for the next few years.

The Anglican Consultative Council, the recently-created Mission Issues and Strategy Group and the Primates met consecutively at the Limuru Conference Center from Oct. 3 to 12. Emerging from those meetings was a decision to continue the tradition of "Lambeth Conferences" of bishops of the Communion, a re-assertion of the Communion's concern for peace issues and a plea for new dialog and understanding between Christians and Muslims.

The next Lambeth Conference will be held in 1988 at the University of Kent in Canterbury where the last such meeting was held in 1978. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, called the meeting after consultation with the primates and with the Council; whose secretariat will provide support service for the gathering.

In announcing the meeting, Council spokesman John Martin said the purpose would be to seek and promote new initiatives in four areas of Church life: mission and ministry; dogmatic and pastoral constitution; ecumenical relations; and the transformation of the social order. A series of regional conferences will be held -- similar to the Pacific Basin Conference -- to help bishops prepare for this ambitious agenda.

"I hope that the Lambeth conference will not be seen as just another meeting which produces a report," Runcie commented. "This is why we have to start now with our preparations. My hope is that the bishops will be in close communication with their dioceses so that they come reflecting the concerns of their clergy and people. I hope that each bishop will bring his diocese with him."

Much of the agenda for the Limuru meeting had been designed by the African primates and, among their concerns for refugees and liturgical cultural differences, there was a strong concern about the relationship of Christians to the Muslim-ruled states in Africa.

Pointing to a recently-introduced Islamic code in the Sudan, the primates expressed the fear that such laws would violate the human rights of non-Muslims in those countries. The codes could be used to restrict baptism of young people, regulate the pastorates and require Muslim education for Christian children.

Although noting the "increasingly difficult situation" and occasional persecution in which Christians find themselves, the primates added that they "are also aware that among the followers of Islam itself there are many who regret the emergence of fundamentalist extremism."

Their comments were rebutted by a Sudanese envoy who said the laws were meant not to persecute, "but to create good citizens."

The centrality of that issue was echoed by Runcie at a sermon at the start of the Primates meeting in which he noted that "Christian Churches everywhere have their eyes on Africa." Reflecting on the missionary past, Runcie continued "Thank God that it's no longer so that to be a Christian you have

to be a European. The African experience is precious and the world wide Church is hungry for a share of the African vision."

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