

“Our closest neighbor and first visitor”

*The Ghanaian Cardinal Turkson at the EU-Africa Summit
by Christoph Strack*

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson is the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. This 62-year-old Ghanaian is also one of the most prominent representatives of the Church in Africa. In an interview with the Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur (KNA; Catholic news agency), this last weekend in Berlin, he talked about his expectations for the EU-Africa Summit to be held Monday and Tuesday in the Libyan capital, Tripoli.

KNA: Eminence, what do you expect from this Summit?

Turkson: Almost ten years ago, many African States established the NEPAD, the “New Partnership for Africa's Development.” This initiative gave many good impulses: for the development of values, the fight against poverty, the creation transparent forms of government, the empowerment of women, and for helping children. However, NEPAD has basically fallen asleep. We don't know if and when it shall wake up. Fortunately, the African Union has adopted certain goals and, with the EU, has begun working to reach them. The EU-Africa Summit – at its first meeting in 2007 – inherited aspects of these important goals and should address them.

KNA: But do the leaders of the European States have an adequate vision of these goals?

Turkson: I hope that the EU —despite the location of this meeting in Tripoli— will seriously consider the projects that will help Africa out of poverty, by promoting transparency, fair forms of government, local trade and women's rights. Many other things are also entailed. Take, for example, agricultural trade: a major step forward will be made, if Europe opens its market to African products. In that case, Africa would not need as much financial support. Presently, agriculture in Germany receives state subsidies; there no such thing in our countries. At the same time, there are barriers to European markets. This is unfair. The assembly in Tripoli must take these issues seriously. Africa's promotion is at stake.

KNA: Given that Europe is Africa's closest neighbor, does it have a special responsibility?

Turkson: Europe is not just Africa's closest neighbor; it was also her first visitor. The Europeans came long before the Chinese and the Indians. But Europe abandoned Africa, leaving behind a void in which China has imposed and continues to impose itself. Europe must do everything it can to reduce the gap again. Whoever, in Europe, complains that China is taking over Africa and gaining too much influence must understand that Europe has given it every opportunity. Secondly, Africa must see to it that the Africans are met as equals. Sometimes, when the European Heads of State come to Africa...

KNA: Do you think the UN's Millennium Development Goals will be achieved by 2015?

Turkson: (after long pause) Yes. We still have another five years. And I hope they will have an impact. Moreover, not only States are involved, but also many large organizations are working towards the achievement of these goals. However, I warn that the aid is too dependent on certain conditions, such as requirements of family planning. In addition, aid from donor countries must be coherent. For example, in some countries, aid workers and UN-organizations are trying to assure that there is clean drinking water — this is good and vital. But in the same regions, there are foreign companies that massively pollute the water, while gold mining or extracting mineral resources. That's an absurdity.

KNA: What can Europe learn from Africa?

Turkson: Respect for life. Despite all the problems, despite the conflicts, the African people have a love and respect for human life, from which Europe can still learn.