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In Arusha, near Kilimanjaro, in the same building where the 7th ICA Regional Assembly was held, there are two important head offices: the International Tribunal for the crimes perpetrated Rwanda and the Parliament of the East Africa Community formed by Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda: two different sides of Africa today.

The first one recalls the tragic reality of ethnic conflicts, the latter the willingness of nearby countries to integrate in order to be able to compete in the globalised economy.

In Sub-Saharan Africa there are two parallel realities.

On one side, we witness the spreading of modern organizational and institutional models, inspired to European and American ones; on the other, the persisting of cultural and social factors centred on ethnical or territorial belonging.

The modernization of Sub-Saharan Africa requires, above all, to ensure drinking water, electricity, schools, health system, trades based on international standards, motorization, technologies, Internet, and a democracy ruled by a modern constitution, with consistent laws and procedures.

Some early signals are showing that something is changing.

Twenty years ago, the majority of African Countries had dictatorial Governments, while today, they represent a minority.

In the last five years, the 2/3 of Sub-Saharan countries held political elections, some more correct than others, in which several political parties stood as candidates. A new generation of political leaders is emerging, more eager to commit themselves for the general well being of people.

Something is changing also at institutional level.

The old “Organisation for the Unity of Africa”, applying a “no interference” policy regarding internal affairs of state members has turned into the stronger “African Union”, implementing a “no

indifference” policy towards the countries in the region who fail to respect democracy, human rights and the need for peace.

The “New Partnership for African Development”, promoted by the African Union believes that a fairer government is an essential pre-requisite for the realization of economic growth and social justice.

In 2003, the Summit of Africa Union Heads of States and Government approved the “Strategies for the promotion/creation of employment and better life conditions”.

In spite of this commendable pledge, Sub-Saharan Africa still shows severe situations of social discomfort, poverty and endemic diseases.

The standards of life are still far from being considered acceptable by the majority of people.

To make this picture worse, there is the demographical tendency, due to the high fertility rate, especially in rural areas. For lack of education and poverty, the average number of children per woman ranges between 5 and 7.

40-50% of population is under 15 years old. 35 out of the 40 countries with the highest mortality rate are Africans, as well as the first 10 countries with the lowest life expectancy, which ranges between 36,1 years in Botswana and 42,9 years in Zimbabwe.

In spite of this appalling statistical data, in the last 30 years the population has almost doubled, going from 352 million in 1970 to 627 million in 1998 up to 688 million in 2002.

By the year 2030 there could be a second doubling-up, reaching the number of 1,3 billion people.

As a consequence of this demographical growth, and the lack of an adequate development rate, Africa is the only continent where, the number of poor increased in the last 25 years.

Average per capita income has gone from US \$ 546 in 1970 to US \$ 525 in 1998 with a dramatic drop down to US \$450 in 2002. This part of the world has the highest percentage of population with a daily income lower than US \$ 1.

However, in 2003, after three decades of economic stagnation all over the continent, 23 Sub-Saharan countries registered an average income growth higher than 5%. The emerging of a new entrepreneurial group, and the establishment of a middle class, can boost economic development. However the rate of inequality is unchanged, placing Sub-Saharan Africa second at global level, between Latin America and the Asian continent.

Among the factors of exclusion we should mention the belonging to an ethnic group, age, education disabilities, and the condition of single women in charge of their families (widows, divorced or married to migrants).

In general, the fact of being a woman prevents an individual from accessing health care, taking economic initiatives or relying on a decent job.

There are several remarkable differences between city and rural life conditions. More than 70% of the population live in rural areas, where agriculture is the main mean of survival. Most farmers, who produce nearly all the food they consume, are women.

Cultivable land is extremely limited: in Lesotho, for instance, it covers no more than 9% of the territory.

The inability of increasing productivity of agriculture is due to a combination of factors, such as the system of ownership of cultivable fields, lack of technologies and policies reducing the role of government institutions concerning investments and innovation.

This dramatically limits the possibility to increase the added value of agriculture production through the transformation of products, with serious consequences on poverty levels.

More than half of rural population (56%) has an average yearly income of US \$ 163. In rural areas, the most serious problem is underemployment, rather than unemployment: according to the few available statistics, data ranges between 30% and 45%.

To this situation we must add the question of allocating the cultivable land. In many countries, according to the tradition, land belongs to the community while, according to the Constitution or agriculture legislation, the land is owned by the State or the King (Lesotho). This double

interpretation contributes to create conflicts within the same community or between different communities.

In the villages, the head of the community, or the landowner, hold the *traditional* power, not recognized by the law, to allocate land to farmers.

Today, the slow, but progressive concentration of land in the hands of a rich minority, thanks to certificates of ownership provided by the law, is preventing farmers to access the land, thus causing a further exacerbation of social conflicts.

Another consequence is the mass migration from rural areas to African cities first and, later, to Europe. The phenomenon of migration has very deep roots. Without an effective improvement of life conditions in rural areas, it is bound to spin out of control.

The world should become more aware of this situation and press for the adoption of permanent, effective policies and directed to the development of rural areas.

For this reason, the cut in aid to Africa during the last two decades, shows, besides a lack of sensitivity towards the African continent, a blindness towards European's own interests.

In rural areas, where all too often organizational forms safeguarding peasants' interests are lacking, co-operatives are playing an increasingly important role.

In urban areas the situation remains difficult for the majority of people, with large poverty zones and growing social distances. 40% of the population lives out of less than 1 US \$ per day (US \$ 352 per year). The estimated unemployment rate affects up to 20% of the work force of "formal economy".

Unemployment and underemployment affect up to 40% of active population. About 72% of city persons survive operating in the sphere of the so-called "informal economy".

Trade unions are increasingly weaker because of extreme poverty, unemployment and the creation of "parallel" unions by national governments, who forbid the formation of opposition powers.

Cultural and social differences are very wide and deep.

The ethnic group is the basis of society and the place where solidarity is expressed. The group takes charge of the problems left unsolved by the State.

In several countries, political power is based on ethnic groups or regions: they chose the candidates and, at the end, they are the ones who determine the election results.

Rather than contributing to the construction of a national unity, the search for inter-ethnic balances and alliances is a tactical choice finalised to win the elections

The variety of languages still spoken today in all the States created by colonisations prevents an effective inter-group communication.

The only common languages are inherited from “colonizers” (English, French and Portuguese), and are spoken only by a small part of the population.

Although colonization goes back a long-time, it has left deep marks in the institutional and social structure, and contributed to the outbreak of ethnic clashes.

In the case of Rwanda, for example, the indication of the ethnic community of belonging in people ID's, rather than the country of origin, a law introduced by English and Belgian colons still in force today, greatly contributed to exacerbate ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic groups existed before colonization, but afterwards, they have been exploited and, in some cases, (Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo) legalized, aggravating the separation between communities, with the consequences we all know.

This is the evidence that ethnic clashes are the product of a sociological reality rather than primordial impulses. Exogenous phenomena are, in most part, responsible for conflicts.

Corruption is a widespread phenomenon, provoked by thirst for money and power, by poverty and the weakness of democracy and civil society, by illiteracy, by the connivance of the Western world and the lack of a true willingness to fight it.

In spite of the cultural training received, most political leaders are not willing to change a system from which they are benefiting.

The change of this situation is, in most part, entrusted to education and the establishment of a modern way of thinking, based on self help and able to provide an effective training to managing successful enterprises and fighting the most serious causes of social exclusion and poverty.

Africa is the continent most hit by HIV/AIDS.

More than 13 million people died of the disease and the virus currently affects about 28 million individuals.

AIDS has caused 11 million orphans. It is estimated that by the year 2010 their number will increase to 20 million. The number of infected women is 20% higher than the number of men; with young people, the difference goes up to 50%.

Only one person out of five, at risk of infection, can access information or services. The costs for an adequate social protection are high and most people cannot afford them.

It is in this context that co-operation has been rediscovered by many African countries.

“The Action and Strategic Plan” approved by the Extraordinary Summit of African Union in 2003, recognized co-operatives as an important resource to promote decent work and to reduce poverty in Africa.

In general, co-operatives are supported by the state, because they have shown their effectiveness in building the basis for a pacific co-existence between different ethnic groups.

Although difficult to create, inter-ethnic co-operatives have shown to be very useful for the creation of a single group that stimulate individuals to get to know each other and co-operate for the building of peace and democracy, with great benefits for economic development.

Some countries, particularly Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, South Africa and Sierra Leone represent an example of national institutions actively committed in enhancing the role of co-operatives, through appropriate laws and policies.

In a context of extreme situations, where very low standards of life add up with the uncertainty towards the future, the challenge for Africans and for their partners from developed countries is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the democratic processes underway in several African countries.

It is time for African to make courageous decisions and for the rest of the world, particularly Europe, to promote new, more effective actions in support of this continent.