

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
POLICY STATEMENT ON AFRICA**

A. Theological Foundation

The American Baptist Churches, as part of the visible body of Jesus Christ in the world, base their concern for all peoples on the fundamental belief that our world has been created by God who is compassionate, loving, just and gracious and who is exemplified in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that He is the perfect revelation of the Creator God. Because Jesus came announcing the good news of the Kingdom to all people and because the heart of the Gospel is in the words, "For God so loved the world...that whosoever..." (John 3:16) we are convinced that no person, no nation, is excluded from His love and concern. Also, from the New Testament response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) we recognize the responsibility we have for the welfare of others.

These beliefs provide the mandate for the church to work for the rights of all people and to relieve human suffering wherever found. These beliefs also require the church to be concerned about the legitimate aspirations of all peoples for the fulfillment of life. Thus questions of equality, economic improvement, adequate nutrition and child mortality are concerns that are linked directly to our understanding of God and His will for the world, and for our behavior towards others.

Further, our biblical view of God portrays One who continues to create, renew and redeem the earth and its people (Isaiah 43:18-21). Recognizing the continuing struggle against human sinfulness, we work for change through the spirit of Jesus, who said, "My father is working still and I am working" (John 5:17). In spite of frustrations, we see this effort as a witness to the hidden presence of the Kingdom which will ultimately be revealed and victorious (Luke 17:21).

B. The Context of Africa Today

The continent of Africa is one of the great land areas of our world. Not yet overpopulated, with an estimated population of 800 million million, Africa is situated at the crossroads of east and west, north and south, and is home to highly diverse cultures and people. Its vast resources of land, labor and natural resources are sought by other nations. With the Red Sea and the Suez Canal at its northeastern border, this continent borders on one of the great shipping corridors of the world. Such factors make Africa a major force to consider in world trade politics.

Africa's nations record a long and varied history whose roots are deep in the past that preceded the comparatively recent colonial penetration by Western nations, in the late nineteenth century. While the start of the colonial period followed almost four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, African lands and people had experienced previous centuries of

cultural development that had made both Christianity and Islam historic religious faiths in Africa before the coming of the first European in the fifteenth century.

It is important to recognize the variety of cultures, customs, and religious beliefs found in Africa. The extreme west of the Muslim world, the Maghrib, occupies the North African nations of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. To the east are the currently rival states of Libya and Egypt where Islamic fundamentalism threatens both internal and international stability. To the south of Mediterranean Africa lies the vast panorama of sub-Saharan Africa where historic black cultures are the vast majority from Senegal in the West to Tanzania in the East and the Republic of South Africa in the South.

The nations of Africa face a variety of internal and external problems. For the most part the contemporary nations of Africa have become politically independent during the period since World War II, and are at various stages of development. Some suffer under repressive political systems. Many lack access to their own natural resources and the economic stability they would provide. Therefore, most face severe problems of illiteracy, lack of adequate health and nutritional care, and adequate food production and distribution. The suffering of Africa's millions is exacerbated by the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, globalization, wide spread military conflict, genocide, war-induced famine and hunger, and the resurfacing of the centuries old problem of slavery. Power politics, strategic considerations and economic profit and advantage serve, for the most part, as the determining factors in relations between the essentially industrialized nations of the East and the West and the mainly non-industrialized states of Africa.

There has been rapid growth of the Christian Church in Africa in recent decades. Today, nearly one-half of the population of Africa claims to be followers of Jesus Christ. Outstanding public leadership in several African nations is being given today by those who received Christian education and nurture. Several large denominations emerging out of completely indigenous origins claim large followings. A tremendous challenge faces Christian leadership to move their peoples beyond tribal loyalties and change-resistant cultural patterns and toward a way of life that will be productive of a cohesive and resilient society.

C. Policy

Political Concerns – All the nations of Africa have achieved self-rule. The struggles of power with former colonizers may stifle progress in these nations and absorb the energies needed to meet social and economic problems. In such situations, external influences or military dictatorships may easily seize control. Massive sales of military weapons to African nations have emphasized violence and have contributed to the climate of fear.

1. American Baptists will encourage our government to oppose domination or subversion of African nations by any foreign power that seeks to interfere with the free exercise of majority rule and self-government.

2. We will urge opposition to massive arms sales, which serve to emphasize a military approach to problem solving, and which create heavy foreign indebtedness, as well as an aggressive mentality that discourages efforts at comprehensive solutions to national problems.
3. We deplore those situations in which dictatorship, with denial of human rights, has produced a climate of fear. We commend those African nations and national church bodies that take a stand against oppression and the violation of human rights on any part of the continent, and urge that such organizations as the United Nations and Amnesty International provide a means of recourse in those situations where human rights violations may occur.
4. We will urge that in disputes among nations, in Africa, as in other parts of the world, discussion, mediation, and arbitration be used to diffuse tensions and avoiding recourse to violent confrontation.
5. We will urge our government to give strong support through its foreign policy for human rights and majority rule in Africa.

Economic Concerns – There is need to support the efforts to bring about a greater equality in the world economic order. The developing nations of Africa should receive a more adequate share of the income provided by their rich mineral resources, which are so much needed by the industrialized nations. Agricultural output in Africa should be geared to a larger extent toward overcoming hunger and providing for local consumption, rather than excessive emphasis on large scale production for foreign markets. Experimentation with high nutrition foods, forage crops, feed grains, and training in appropriate small scale animal husbandry is greatly needed. Improved road systems that would link farmers to local markets would provide the incentive to increased production for local sale. There is the need to increase appropriate agricultural technology that will enhance agriculture without destroying the soil or water supply.

6. We will urge that international trade policies and other economic structures be adjusted to assist the developing nations of Africa to participate more equitably in the world market.
7. We will urge more realistic and meaningful foreign aid programs to accompany reform of the world economic system so as to have a significant positive impact on African countries, particularly in so far as expanding access to their own resources.

8. We will support the development of agricultural programs aimed at nutrition at the village level, through such means as increasing roads to local markets, appropriate agricultural technology for increased production, and emphasis on high nutrition foods, including fish and animal husbandry.

Natural Resources – Overgrazing to provide more meat for foreign export in the Sahel area is but one example of serious destruction in the ecology of Africa. The annual advance of the Sahara Desert, at the rate of 30 miles per year, affects the life patterns of the nomadic herders. There is urgent need for responsible government management of the soil and of water supplies in view of the fragile ecological conditions in the tropics. Land use and mineral extraction should not result in large income for the few on a short-term basis at the expense of the long-term welfare of the indigenous populations.

9. We urge careful studies and monitoring to protect the long-term usefulness of resources and land productivity for the support of the total population in Africa.

Emergency Needs – Periodic disasters result in the flow of refugees out of areas of famine, warfare, or terrorism. Presently one-half of the world's ten million refugees are African. Of this number one-half are children.

10. American Baptists will continue to provide assistance for Africa's refugees in cooperation with other responsible church-related agencies. We urge our government and other public relief agencies to monitor relief programs to assure that emergency aid reaches those for whom it is intended. We also urge actions to correct those situations which cause the uprooting of people and bring about increasing refugee populations.

Christian Faith and Human Aspirations – Developing nations aspire to the welfare and security of their peoples and a place in the family of nations. Their objective is the achieving of victory over fear, whether it be due to physical or spiritual repression. Associated with this is the need to grow to one's fullest potential. From the Church's perspective it is recognized that all persons need to come to understand, acknowledge, and accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ as One who frees and empowers people.

We rejoice in the reports of the growth of Christianity in Africa and in the role of the Christian church in bringing about spiritual release and fulfillment, fostering education and vocational advances.

11. Recognizing that education is the base of self-determination and the achievement of aspirations, American Baptists will support literacy work and continue to foster basic educational programs for Africa, under the auspices of Christian leadership.

12. Recognizing the contribution of Christian higher education in preparing many who are giving responsible leadership in public life, American Baptists will support programs for post-secondary education under Christian auspices with indigenous leadership.
13. American Baptists will continue to support programs of village health and nutrition, medical hospitals, and the training of doctors and nurses, seeking through the ministry to human need to live out the Christian witness.
14. American Baptists will commit themselves to continue to cooperate with African Church leaders and national churches in their evangelistic outreach and training of leaders for growth of the Christian Church in Africa.
15. Recognizing our primary historic relationship to the Baptist Community of Congo, we indicate our openness to new initiatives on behalf of the task of Christ's Kingdom in all of Africa.

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