

GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA AND THE COMMON GOOD

A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, 10 - 16 March 2019.

PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, held our First Plenary Meeting for the year at the Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, 10 - 16 March 2019. Having prayerfully reflected on issues affecting the Church and our Country, we now issue this Communiqué.

2. LENT, A SEASON OF NEW BEGINNINGS

The Holy Season of Lent affords us an added opportunity to pray, to fast and to enhance Christian charity. As we sincerely seek the face of God, let us be steadfast in cultivating those virtues of decency and moral uprightness that will enhance the peace, the unity and the well-being of the whole nation. With the Holy Father, Pope Francis, we pray that the Holy Season of Lent teach us again how to live as children of God, redeemed, led by the Holy Spirit and capable of acknowledging and obeying God's law written in our hearts.

3. GOVERNANCE AND THE COMMON GOOD

The Church in her Social Teaching describes the Common Good as the “sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily”. The pursuit of this good must be based on the respect for the sanctity and dignity of human life and the equality of all people. The Common Good presupposes respect for the human person and requires the social well-being and development of the group itself. Governance worth its name is only possible where there is true justice, equality and peace. It demands virtues, such as, patience, modesty, moderation, charity and efforts to share. In governing, leaders have to focus on the Common Good and ensure that the people and their aspirations, both individual and collective, assume paramount importance. As a matter of justice not charity, political governance has to pay particular attention to the provision of basic amenities, making sound policies and showing concern for the underprivileged of the society who are often deprived of the opportunity to participate in their own development. We therefore enjoin government at all levels in Nigeria to put necessary structures of governance in place and enact appropriate laws that will produce such an

environment. We equally insist that the democratic culture of the separation of powers and the independence of the Judiciary be respected.

4. THE CHURCH AS VANGUARD OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

For centuries, the Church has been an advocate of good governance for the Common Good. To this end, we call on all dioceses to promote the Social Teaching of the Church, to simplify and to translate it into concrete actions and to use it for an effective socio-political formation of all the people. Special attention must be paid to young people and families so that the values espoused in Catholic Social Teaching would be inculcated early into children and young people.

However, because moral authority is crucial for good governance and transparent accountability, we as a Church commit ourselves to exercise authority based on sound Christian moral principles, truly inspired by the example of Christ and guided by His compassion.

5. STATE OF THE NATION

The 2019 General Elections and Our Democracy

The 2019 General Elections have come and gone except in some areas where the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled supplementary elections for specified reasons. We commend our people for the patriotism and the maturity displayed, and the electorate who in some places came out en masse especially during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections to exercise their rights and perform their civic duties. We equally note the voter apathy that characterized the subsequent Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections. We believe that this apathy may not have been unconnected with among other things, the violence, malpractice and the unnecessary militarization of the process, all of which contributed to eroding the people's confidence in the electoral process. We have taken note of those who have been declared winners, and commend the civility of those who rejected the results but have chosen to express their grievances through legitimate means under the law rather than through violence. Whatever the outcome, justice must be seen to have been done. We admonish whoever holds power at the end of the day to remember that power belongs to God and to Him alone. God demands strict accountability for how anyone takes power and uses it, for God cannot be deceived or challenged (Lk 16:2).

Towards a New Political Culture

We affirm that elections are an opportunity for people through the ballot to freely choose those who will serve them. We denounce the unfortunate incident of loss of lives and destruction of property, which is ongoing even now. We however, admonish that elections should not be turned into a battle between warriors fighting to capture power and conquer territory and people at all cost. We observe that many of the challenges that emerged during the electoral process were as a result of inadequate electoral laws, which made implementation problematic and at times offered lacunae for evil minded people to exploit the situation to their own advantage. Even where the rules were clear, they were not always adhered to. One of the reported phenomena during the elections was the crude and reckless use of money to buy votes; showing how desperate politicians and political parties are determined to get political power at all cost. Bad elections do not lead to good governance. We demand that the government acknowledge the inadequacies that characterized the 2019 elections and embark on a course for redress. We urge her to enact, endorse and implement laws and policies that will ensure free, fair and credible elections in the future.

Promoting Good Governance: a Duty for All

We enjoin all Nigerians, leaders and the led, to abide by democratic principles such as respect for human life, human rights and the rule of law. We also encourage the electorate to ensure that those who hold public offices in our country are held accountable. We equally urge all Nigerians to eschew all forms of indiscipline and corruption and be resolute rather than lose hope in our struggle for a better future and nation.

RECENT KILLINGS IN KADUNA AND OTHER STATES

We have received with deep sorrow, the tragic news of the resurgence of further horrific killings in some parts of Kaduna State, Taraba, Benue, Kogi, Edo, Rivers, Zamfara, Adamawa and other states. Against the backdrop of the violence and bloodshed that characterized the last elections, we are pained that the culture of death is becoming embedded into our daily lives. This persistent devaluation of human life and property poses an existential threat to our personal survival and that of our nation. How can government continue to appear helpless in the face of such shameful tragedy? We strongly appeal to the President, in collaboration with the Governors of Kaduna State and other affected States to seriously take steps to arrest this drift before total anarchy and mayhem consume the entire nation.

EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

Events in the Local Church

We are grateful to God and to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for appointing Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, formerly, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Jos as the Coadjutor Archbishop of Abuja. Archbishop Kaigama remains the Apostolic Administrator of Jos. We congratulate His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan for this new development. We felicitate with Most Rev. Albert Ayinde Fasina on his happy retirement as Bishop of Ijebu-Ode Diocese. We wish Bishop Fasina a rewarding retirement. We thank God and the Holy Father for the appointment of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Francis Adesina to the Episcopal See of Ijebu-Ode. His Episcopal Ordination comes up on the 25 April 2019. The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria continue to thank God and the Holy Father for the appointment of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Patrick Eluke as the Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese. We rejoice with His Lordship, Most. Rev. Camillus Etokudoh and the entire Christ's faithful of Port Harcourt Diocese. The Episcopal ordination of Msgr. Eluke comes up on the 9 May 2019. We recall the happy occasion of the Centenary Celebration of the arrival of the Catholic faith in Kano. We equally thank God for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Canonical Erection of the Dioceses of Ilorin and Ijebu-Ode. We pray for the continued growth of the faith in these dioceses.

Events in the Universal Church

We note that the World Youth Day was celebrated in Panama in January 2019 with many Nigerian youths, bishops and priests participating. We pray that the entire Church in Nigeria continue to lead and encourage the youths to imitate our Mother, Mary, in seeking, discerning and doing the will of God. On another note, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, organized a summit of all the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops on the theme: "Protection of Minors against Sexual Abuse". As part of our duty of governance as Shepherds of the flock of Christ, we commit ourselves anew to ensuring that minors and vulnerable adults are safe from sexual abuse and offenders are duly prosecuted and given appropriate sanction.

We are happy to announce the 3rd Plenary Assembly of the Regional Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA-CERAO), with the theme: "The New Evangelization and the Promotion of Integral Human Development in the Church, Family of God in West Africa". The Assembly takes place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 13 – 20 May 2019. We equally rejoice with The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), which concludes the yearlong celebration of its Golden Jubilee between 21 and 29 July 2019 in Kampala, Uganda. The theme of the celebration is "Church-Family of God in Africa, Celebrate your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ your Saviour". May the Jubilee enhance the

proclamation of the good news all over the African continent and bring the joy of salvation to the entire people of God.

8. CONCLUSION: BE PRAYERFUL, BE HOPEFUL, REMAIN FOCUSED

We thank God for keeping us together as a nation. As a people we must be prayerful, hopeful and focused as we journey through another four years in our political history. St. Paul admonishes us: “the night is far gone and the day is close at hand, let us cast the works of darkness and put on the armour of light” (Rom 13:12-13). Strengthened by this biblical injunction, let us rededicate ourselves to the power of God’s word in prayer. Our intensive prayer inflames our hearts in faith and keeps our hope alive. We must continue to pray to God to help us rediscover our common humanity, cultivate respect for one another, enthrone transparency and accountability in the use of our common patrimony and imbibe apostolic charity towards the poor and the vulnerable in the Church and society. May the Almighty and Merciful God through the intercession of our Mother, Mary, Queen and Patroness of Nigeria lead us along the way of truth, love and peace, Amen.

*Most Rev. Augustine Obiora AKUBEZE, Archbishop of Benin City, CBCN President,
Most Rev. Camillus Raymond UMOH, Bishop of Ikot-Ekpene, CBCN Secretary.*