



STATE, CHURCH COLLABORATION PARAMOUNT TO EFFECTIVE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY - Cardinal Onaiyekan

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan has stressed the need for collaboration between the State and the Church in the provision of adequate health facilities for the people, especially in cases of infectious and deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS.

Cardinal Onaiyekan made the admonition in his reflection at a recent international Faith Based Organizations Consultation Conference organized in Abuja by the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN) in collaboration with United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and US President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief(PEPFAR).The three-day programme took place at Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja.

The theme of the Regional Consultation which focused on Early Diagnosis and Treatment for HIV- positive Children, was: ***Strengthening Engagement of Faith-based Organizations***. It was attended by about 150 delegates from Nigeria, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DCR); the primary countries of focus; and other parts of

the world.

According to the Cardinal, faith based organizations involved in provision of health care services should have access to public funds to enable them discharge their services effectively for the common good of the people. He, however, added that for this to be possible and result oriented, faith based organizations must have access to public funds.

The local ordinary of Abuja Archdiocese noted that public funds which are not the personal funds of any individual or public office holder are to be made available for the common good and “whoever is ready to make good use of it should have access to it.” He continued: “in the absence of that, we are left with a situation that those who really have the heart to do the work do not have the resources and those whom the resources are given are not interested in the work”

Cardinal Onaiyekan recalled how the collaboration between the State and religious bodies in the past yielded success in the health sector for the benefit of the government and the people. His words: “for a long time, there was a very good cooperation between the religious bodies in particular Christian missionary bodies” at the time the colonial administration were in control of the country.

Expressing concern that the collaboration has gone into comatose, the Cardinal remarked that in recent times, faith

based organizations are restricted to doing whatever they can do within the context of private practice, thus reducing the scope of their services to the detriment of the poor.

Speaking on the theme of the conference, Cardinal Onaiyekan went down memory lane on the havoc the dreaded HIV disease caused at the early stage of its emergence, especially the aftermath effect of its stigmatization which led to the death of many victims. He also spoke on how children contracted the disease pointing out that this situation gave a new dimension to the fact that it was no longer tenable to tie HIV/AIDS to moral behaviour.

Cardinal Onaiyekan also addressed the spiritual ignorance associated with the disease saying: “Worst of all from my own point of view is the spiritual ignorance that pervaded the atmosphere. We hear HIV/AIDS was God’s punishment for reckless sexual behaviour with the result that the rejection, the stigmatization and the social exclusion was extended even to places of worship”.