



## **OWERRI ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE BISHOPS URGE AHIARA FAITHFUL TO BE SUBMISSIVE TO THE HOLY FATHER**

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### **ABA. NIGERIA -**

The Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Owerri have called on the priests, religious and lay faithful of Ahiara Diocese to comply with the directives of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, accept Bishop Peter Okpaleke as their local ordinary and prepare for his installation.

The bishops made the call in a Pastoral Statement issued at the end of their second Plenary meeting held at the Bishops House, Christ the King Cathedral, aba, Abia State, recently. The Pastoral Statement titled: *A Moment of Grace and Reparation; Praying For Church And Nation*: was signed by Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri and Most Rev. Augustine Ukwuoma of Orlu, President and Secretary of the CBCN Provincial Conference.

Pointing out that the Ahiara crisis has been a very painful experience for the Church of the Ecclesiastical Province, the Bishops declared: “We in the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province and even far beyond have known and felt the scandal and pain of disunity which has attended the crisis in Ahiara Diocese. Many have been deeply wounded, and many others have felt bitter. We the Bishops and Pastors of our Province passionately plead for conversion, forgiveness and reconciliation.”

Expressing satisfaction with the personal intervention of the Holy Father in the crisis, the Bishops articulated their gratitude to the Pope and called on all the priests and faithful of the diocese to comply with the directives of the Holy Father. They said: “The June 2017 visit of members of our Owerri Ecclesiastical Province to the Vatican and to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, along with some prominent members of Nigeria’s Episcopal Hierarchy, brought to a certain climax the pain of our Local Church especially in Ahiara Diocese.”

They added: “This pain has lasted for almost five years. We are deeply grateful to the Holy Father for his personal intervention which has given the definitive way forward. We therefore earnestly call on all the priests, religious and laity of Ahiara Diocese to unconditionally obey the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, and to comply with all his directives, wholeheartedly accept Bishop Peter E. Okpaleke and prepare for his installation.”

Speaking on the political situation of the country the bishops expressed grave concern and called for concerted soul-searching as to “whether we really want to build and be an equitable, united and peaceful nation”.

Their words: "The last two years of Nigeria's national life, 2015-2017, have seen an increased upsurge of ethnic and regional agitations which have added further political tension to the already violent state of the Nigerian nation. Unable yet to contain the murderous menace of various marauding groups across Nigeria, the agitations and denunciations by rival Nigerian blocs, some in favour of, some against restructuring Nigeria, have made Nigeria a continually troubled and worrisome nation."

They continued: "The rigging of elections by the political elite, the stealing of public funds, the owing of legitimate entitlements to workers and pensioners, the mass unemployment of our youth and the politics of exclusion have all added to the sorry state of Nigeria. We pray for Mr President, Muhammadu Buhari, appealing to him as well as to the other members of the executive and the legislature at the national and state levels, to seriously look into the problems of our people and proffer the best of solutions for their welfare."

The Bishops stated: "It will require self-sacrificing and truly patriotic leaders to move Nigerians and Nigeria towards this path of equity, friendship and peace. Where there is a corporate will to do so, it can still be done. Other nations that once had internal bloody wars have eventually overcome their hatred and hostility and become truly united – in Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America. Others that felt it was better to live well apart have amicably and peacefully separated, sometimes with the help of the United Nations."

They concluded: "We are once again at a critical cross-road. Having seen a tragic civil war in Nigeria from which we are still to recover and with small-scale wars still raging, here and there in Nigeria, our government and political leaders should embrace the path of compassion, dialogue and repentance so that Nigerians and Nigeria may be repaired, renewed and truly united. We therefore urge all Nigerians to eschew all forms of hate-speech capable of inflaming passions."