



DEPLOYMENT OF SOLDIERS TO SOUTH EAST, INIMICAL TO EXISTING FRAGILE PEACE

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UMUAHIA. NIGERIA -

The Catholic Bishop of Umuahia Diocese, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji has described the *Operation Python Dance II* of the military in Abia State as a dangerous display of military power in a charged atmosphere as inimical to the sustenance of the present fragile peace and harmony in the entire country. The Bishop's position was contained in a recent press statement released by the Chancery in Umuahia and signed by the Bishop.

In the same vein, the bishop called on aggrieved and agitated Nigerians to have respect for the rule of law and “always keep in mind that their rights are limited by the rights of others” He continued: “We have to stress categorically that hate speeches capable of inflaming passion or incendiary statements that pitch one part of the country against the other, far from solving our national problems rather compound them. Consequently, they should be avoided.”

Bishop Ugorji, who is also the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Chairman for Justice Development and Peace and Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN) noted that the country is passing through turbulent times as a result of “the growing culture of impunity, greed and graft among the political elite as well as the injustice and inequity in political appointments and the distribution of social amenities”.

Noting that the above anomalies and others like illegal amassment of wealth by public officers at the

expense of majority of Nigerians and the growing army of unemployed youths roaming the streets of the country has resulted in a charged atmosphere and frustration, there is need for caution by all segments of the society; especially by government agencies.

He stressed: “Consequently, agitations of disillusionment and dissatisfaction are growing louder across the nation, especially in the last two years. While some groups in the nation are calling for restructuring of the country, others such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are pressing for secession.”

The Local Ordinary of Umuahia diocese pointed out that; the activities of the military in the South East, through operation Python Dance has turned out to be an overkill resulting in the deaths of many innocent people and the embarrassment of the country on the international scene. His words: “We must express our disappointment that government decided to deploy heavily armed soldiers for a show of force in the South East in a very volatile and provocative atmosphere. Rather than engage soldiers to eliminate non-violent agitators, government should urgently address the anomalies that are the root causes of agitations in the nation or at least pursue the path of dialogue to a logical conclusion.”

The bishop added: “By trying to use excessive force to suppress agitators, who were peacefully voicing out their grievances, government showed contempt to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizenry in a democratic society. Above all, deploying armed soldiers to unleash brutality on unarmed and defenceless agitators is totally against the tenets of a true democracy. The lessons of history teach that such draconic measures far from crushing agitators rather energise and embolden them.”