



CURRENT WAVE OF VIOLENCE PORTEND DANGER, CATHOLIC BISHOPS WARN

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The current wave of violence and incessant killing of innocent Nigerians in different parts of the country portends danger for the country if the Federal Government does not seriously rise up to her primary responsibility of protecting the lives and property of her citizens and ensure that recent mindless killings that took place in some communities in some states of the country do not reoccur.

This assertion was made by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in a statement issued in Abuja recently. Titled: On the Recurrent wave of Violence and Killing of innocent Nigerians in different parts of Our Country and signed by Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos and Bishop William Avenya of Gboko; President and Secretary of the Conference respectively.

The Bishops condemned in its entirety, the recent manslaughter of unarmed citizens by armed herdsmen in Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna and taraba States. The bishops also expressed grave concern on the increase in the spate of kidnapping, humiliation and traumatization of victims of this evil act as well as the ugly phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) and refugees.

According to the Bishops, the decision of the Federal Government to establish grazing colonies in different parts of

the country is not in the interest of the socio-economic growth of the country' and cannot provide a lasting solution to Cattle herdsman and farmers incessant clashes.

Pointing out that both the farmers and herdsman have a lot to contribute to the socio-economic growth of the country, the bishops noted that: "It would be stressing the obvious to state that a better alternative to open grazing should be sought rather than introducing "grazing colonies" in the country. Government should rather encourage cattle owners to establish ranches in line with international best practice." They therefore advocated a more enduring strategy that will ensure a peaceful co-existence and mutual respect among the two groups.

Reacting to the recurrent bloody clashes between herdsman and farmers in different parts of the country the Bishops noted: "The recent mass slaughter of unarmed citizens by these armed herdsman in some communities in Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna and Taraba States has caused national shock, grief and outcry." They added: "We totally condemn such brutal massacres of innocent people. Herdsman may be under pressure to save their livestock and economy but this is never to be done at the expense of other peoples' lives or livelihoods." The Bishops commiserated with the families of the deceased and prayed for the blissful repose of the dead and the quick recovery of the wounded.

While stressing that "it is madness to slaughter fellow human beings and shameful that we had to show the world this ugly picture of our country;" they called on the government to be more proactive protecting the lives of her citizens by marauding herdsman, to prevent them from resorting to self-help in defence of their lives and property when threatened or attacked. They added: This will, no doubt, lead to the complete breakdown of law and order in the country. To forestall this, government should urgently and seriously rise up to her primary responsibility of protecting the lives and property of her citizens and ensure that such mindless killings should not reoccur."

Pointing out that the spate of kidnapping in the country has risen to unimaginable proportion; the bishops remarked that "Day after day, citizens are taken captive, humiliated and traumatized by heavily armed gangsters. No

institution or individual is spared by kidnappers, no matter how old, sacred or highly placed. As a result, people live now in constant fear and anxiety, whether at home or on the highway.”

They added: “Kidnappers are ruthless, deadly and operate without any qualms of conscience. In their efforts to extort huge sums of money as ransom, they subject their victims to untold ordeals lasting weeks and even months.”

They urged those engaged in the criminal act to embrace a change of heart and seek more decent means of livelihood.”

Speaking on the ordeals of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP’s), the bishops called for an end to reported abuses going in their camps which include diversion of materials meant for the IDPs and refugees and sexual harassments. They appealed to government to as a matter of urgency conduct investigation into those allegations with a view to checking the abuses.

On how to save the country from uncontrollable crisis that could lead to disintegration the Bishops advised: “With the array of intelligence officers at her disposal, government should also expeditiously take measures to unmask the perpetrators of these dastardly acts and their sponsors, disarm them and bring them to book. Our perilous situation calls for more security consciousness. Accordingly, we exhort one and all to be more vigilant and report strange faces and movements timely to security agents.”