



REFUSAL OF LAND FOR BUILDING CHURCHES IN SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTRY IS A BREACH OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF CHRISTIANS

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OTUKPO, NIGERIA -

The refusal of government authorities to give land for the building of churches by Christian denominations in some parts of the country has been described as a violation of the country's Constitution which stipulates freedom of worship and choice of religion as a fundamental right of every Nigerian.

This assertion was made by the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan in his homily at the Thanksgiving Mass to mark the blessing and dedication of the new Church building of St Augustine's Catholic Church, Otukpo, built and donated to the Catholic Diocese of Otukpo by Senator David Mark, the immediate past President of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Cardinal Onaiyekan declared: "...we should not have any situation, where a place of worship is denied to Christians who want to build places of worship. We have had a lot of cases not only in the past, but it is happening today; where some believe that it is part of their religion to obstruct and to do everything to frustrate the efforts of Christians to have a place of worship in their areas"

Using instances to buttress his position; Cardinal Onaiyekan further remarked: "This country, Nigeria is now a Christian/Muslim country," He added: ... not only do we have the right to build churches but also we have a right that

our churches are not destroyed. The cardinal also used the occasion to appeal to government on the reconstruction of the Northeastern part of the country, ravaged by the Boko Haram terrorist group; stressing that the exercise should include the rebuilding of Christian churches destroyed by the fanatics.

While thanking those who have donated money for the reconstruction of the northeast and the commitment of government to rebuild the ravaged area, the cardinal stated: "I take this opportunity to tell them that among the things to be rebuilt are all churches that have been destroyed. This is because you cannot say you are rebuilding and you rebuild only your schools, hospitals, some peoples' houses and mosques and then you do nothing about the churches."

Stating that the Catholic Bishops of Yola and Maiduguri have compiled and sent records in this respect to the appropriate quarters, Cardinal Onaiyekan noted that one of the good things of the Boko Haram insurgency is that it exposed the greatness and presence of the Catholic Church in those areas.

Cardinal Onaiyekan while commending Senator David Mark for building and presenting such a beautiful edifice to St Augustine's parish, Gboko; called on all rich people, especially Catholics to use their wealth in building for the Lord and taking care of the poor and the needy in the society. He described the church as: " the house of God, a place where we can all feel at home, we all can be at home and everybody takes his rank before God. He added: "Here, we are all equal before God".

The ceremony was attended by some Bishops of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), dignitaries from all walks of life, politicians, captains of industries and Catholic faithful from all parts of the country.