



THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY

Feb 22, 2018

A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE FIRST PLENARY MEETING OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NI -

“...THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY” (JOHN 10:10)

A Communiqué issued at the End of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi, Abuja, 17-23 February 2018

1. PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, have held our First Plenary Meeting of the year at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi, Abuja, from 17 to 23 February 2018. Having prayerfully reflected on the ways in which we, as a Church and a Nation, can fully enjoy the fullness of life promised us by our Lord Jesus Christ, we now issue this Communiqué.

2. PROMOTING THE CULTURE OF LIFE

Jesus Christ the eternal Word of the Father, through whom all was made, became flesh and dwelt among us (John

1:14) so that through him we might share in the life of the Blessed Trinity. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). At a high point during his ministry on earth Jesus declared: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). The seed of this abundant life was sown in us at creation and is brought to its fullness in and through Christ. Life is, therefore, sacred, a gift, a mystery and a challenge.

However, recent happenings in Nigeria give cause for grave concern and worry. The wave of political assassinations, killing for ritual purposes, frequent mass murder of harmless, innocent and defenceless citizens are instances. Very often our young people, the very symbols of life and vigour, are the victims and agents of this wastage of human life. In recognition of our divine mandate, may we remind all of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. No person, authority or institution has the right to terminate human life. We say NO to these senseless killings, and urge everybody to respect the sanctity of human life and end the flow of innocent blood in our land. We advocate a stronger collaboration between the government, the security agencies, and the entire population, for a more efficient protection of human life and property. We appeal to the consciences of every member of the Nigerian society to respect the eternal commandment of God: “Thou shall not kill” (Ex 20:13). May God grant eternal rest to all those who have lost their lives in all these unfortunate incidents.

Whereas we acknowledge some legitimate rights due to women and the need to promote them, we, nevertheless, condemn the provisions of the “Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill,” which could provide an avenue for the legalization of many anti-human life and anti-family activities. We therefore demand that such provisions be expunged from the Bill. Similarly, we condemn in unmistakable terms the indiscrete distribution of condoms and contraceptive pills in our schools, youth service orientation camps and private/government health institutions.

We call on the young people to be responsible and remain vigilant. They are to resist any attempt to lure them into idolizing sexual pleasure, using contraceptives, procuring abortion, abusing drugs, and other such vices. Parents have the primary responsibility of educating and supporting their children in this regard. We commend the pro-life

and pro-family movements for their concerted efforts in promoting human life. As the Church prepares to mark the golden jubilee of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical on human life, *Humanae Vitae*, we call on all families to embrace and cultivate the culture of life, a culture marked by faith and solidarity (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 68). As custodians of Catholic faith and morals, we earnestly urge all health practitioners and care givers to be pro-life and pro-family in their conduct, shunning all activities that might lessen the value of human life. In the same vein, we admonish our artistes and media practitioners to promote the culture of life in their professions.

3. THE CHURCH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"By the labour of your hands you shall eat" (Psalm 128: 2). When God created man, he commissioned him to till the earth in order to provide for himself (cf. Genesis 1:28-29). There seem to be too many idle people in our country. Many young people have no job and equally many public servants retire early and thereafter remain unproductive. These idle persons, especially the young ones, are easily available to be recruited for crime and other anti-social activities. There is therefore the need to promote entrepreneurship as a means of engaging our many capable minds and hands in positive skills and so contribute collectively to nation building. In this regard, we continually encourage the faithful and indeed the entire citizenry to discover and exploit opportunities, and assemble resources in order to create value and wealth. This, no doubt, would make it possible for us to build an economy that is truly at the service of humankind. We equally urge the business community to invest not just for profit but also to offer some services to and make positive impact on the society, especially the poor and vulnerable groups. As a Church, we continue to render social services and provide job opportunities for many through the schools, hospitals, and other enterprises. Our Justice, Development and Peace Commission and the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria, to say the least, perform the role of ensuring justice, peace and progress in our society. We also enjoin all Church organs and institutions to enlarge their engagement in entrepreneurial actions such as setting up more resource centres that will bring about skill acquisition and self-reliance. We encourage all to actively engage in ventures that will add value to human life such as agriculture.

4. YOUNG PEOPLE AND PRODUCTIVITY

In a special way, our young people will benefit from entrepreneurship. Young people form a great proportion of our nation's population. The youthful age is a period of creativity, vitality, enthusiasm and bold aspiration. We regret that many of the youths in our country have no genuine means of livelihood. In a prostrate economy where governments cannot provide all the jobs, we ask young people to rise to the occasion and utilize their resourcefulness to create legitimate job opportunities for themselves. We urge them to recognize the dignity of labour, the value of hard work and sacrifice, shun the culture of extravagance, and practise the virtue of thrift.

5. ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

In our recent visit to President Muhammadu Buhari, we expressed our concerns on the state of the nation. While we thank him for giving us a listening ear, we expect him to urgently address the issues raised, as he promised he would. We re-affirm that government has an indispensable role to play in supporting genuine initiatives to improve our people's standard of living. In the words of Pope St John Paul II, the state has the duty to "sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis" (*Centesimus Annus*, 48). We therefore call on government to provide adequate social amenities, infrastructure, functional education, right policies, and good governance, that will bring about the enabling environment required for entrepreneurship to thrive.

6. ONGOING VOTER REGISTRATION: URGENCY AND CONCERNS

Elections are around the corner, a God given opportunity for citizens to democratically choose their leaders in a free and fair contest. Such elections depend not only on what happens on the morning of the elections but the entire process before, during and after the casting of votes. This process begins with the registration of voters, an exercise that has already started nationwide. Reports reaching us from all over the nation indicate that in many places facilities for registration are not available, thus depriving many people of the right to register for voting. It is equally reported that such difficulty in registration often target certain segments of the community. Furthermore, we hear of the registration of under aged persons. It is quite unfortunate that our young people allow themselves to be used as cannon fodder in electoral malpractices. Government and especially Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), should address these serious lapses with utmost urgency and without discrimination and bias.

7. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

Celebrations

Some appointments and celebrations took place recently in our Church. We congratulate the Most Rev Hyacinth EGBEBO MSP, the clergy, religious and lay faithful of Bomadi for the elevation of the Vicariate to the status of a diocese. We also congratulate Most Rev Oliver DOEME, Bishop of Maiduguri Diocese, clergy, religious and lay faithful on the Golden Jubilee of the diocese. We inform you that from 14 April to 5 May 2018, we shall make our *Ad Limina* Visit to Rome, to interact with the Holy Father and his immediate collaborators on the state of the Church in Nigeria. We ask you to please accompany us with your prayers. As you perhaps know already, the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Youth with the theme: "Young People, and Vocational Discernment" will take place in Rome from 3 to 28 October 2018. We equally invite you to pray for its success.

The Diocese of Ahiara

The Holy Father Pope Francis, as Pastor of the universal Church, has accepted the resignation of Most Rev Peter OKPALEKE as Bishop of Ahiara and subsequently appointed Most Rev. Lucius UGORJI, Bishop of UMUAHIA, as Apostolic Administrator of the vacant See of Ahiara. We fully accept the Pope's decision and urge all Catholic faithful to do the same. We commend our brother, Most Rev. Peter OKPALEKE for his outstanding faith and courage in the face of his unfortunate non-acceptance as the Bishop of Ahiara by a large sector of the clergy and laity of the diocese. We pray for repentance and reconciliation among the Christ faithful of Ahiara.

New Officers for CBCN

To the glory of God we announce to you the newly elected principal officers of our Conference. They are: President, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora AKUBEZE, Archbishop of Benin City; Vice President, Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru UGORJI, Bishop of UMUAHIA; Secretary, Most Rev Camillus Raymond UMOH, Bishop of IKOT-EKPENE, Assistant Secretary, Most Rev. Charles Michael Hammawa, Bishop of JALINGO. We pray for God's wisdom and guidance in the discharge of their responsibilities. We are immensely grateful to Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau KAIGAMA and his team for the selfless service they rendered to the Conference. We thank God for guarding and directing them during their successful tenure and ask him to continue to bless them.

8. CONCLUSION: CALL TO RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

In this holy season of Lent, we invite all Nigerians to a radical change of heart and mind, especially in the way they think, in the things that they do and in their entire attitude to life in themselves and in their relations with their neighbours. As we restrain our bodies through prayer, penance and almsgiving, let us continue to work for the

things that make for peace in our hearts, families, and in our political life as a nation. We seek and pray for that peace fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of the ordered universe, willed by God, with a more perfect justice among men and women (*Evangelii Gaudium* 219).

May our Lady Queen of Nigeria, intercede for us, now and forever Amen.

Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau KAIGAMA

Most Rev. Camillus Raymond UMOH

President (CBCN)

Assistant Secretary, (CBCN)

Archbishop of Jos

Bishop of Ikot-Ekpene