



KILLING OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS, 17 OTHERS BY HERDSMEN, AN INDICATION OF FAILURE OF THE NATION SECURITY SYSTEM

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MAKURDI, NIGERIA -

The inability of government to provide adequate security for the life and property of innocent and law-abiding Nigerians is an indication of indirect culpability in the rampaging activities of the Fulani herdsmen in the country.

This inference was contained in the Pastoral Message of Consolation of Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe CMF, to the Christian Faithful of Makurdi Diocese, Benue State; on the murder of two Catholic Priests and 17 other members of St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Ukpor-Mbalom, Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. The statement was titled: Agonized but Organized: Death, they die no more.

According to Bishop Anagbe: "Unjust killing of innocent citizens also cast a shade on the sensibilities of those who have vowed to protect the sovereignty of this country, this dignity of every human life irrespective of any political affiliation and the safety of lives and property. He continued: "And as all of you know, the hallmark of politics is justice, development and peace. A person who continues to look as an evil persists or remains silent in the face of barbarism has lost a piece of his soul, hopefully not forever. Let the evil man turn from his evil ways and live."

The bishop assured that the death of the two priests and their parishioners will not be in vain as they have been united with Christ in death by paying the ultimate price in martyrdom. His words: "Every unjust killing is a verse to

the dirge which is the pitiable state of the human soul that has lost a sense of the sacred. Every endorsement of the banal is an attack to the heart that causes spiritual cardiac arrest”.

He added: “But the mystery of divine providence is that the darkest evil often reveals the profound power of light, a light that shines in the darkness and which cannot be confounded by it (Jn 1:5). If we mourn the shedding of blood, it is not because we are sad over the dead. Those who die with and in Christ as Frs. Joseph Gor, Felix Tyolaha and companions died in Mbalom are at peace, far away from every pain. For them, the worst is over and all that is left is joy of eternal happiness.”

In a statement issued in Rome on Thursday, April 27, the Bishops of the Catholic Church described the killing at Mbalom by Fulani herdsmen as “a barbaric, gruesome, grisly and dastardly act”. The statement was signed by Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze of Benin City and Most Rev. Camillus Umoh of Ikot Ekpene, President and Secretary of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), respectively.

In the statement:

the Bishops stated: “That our two priests, Fr Joseph Gor and Fr Felix Tyolaha, along with their parishioners were waylaid in the course of the celebration of the Holy Mass early in the morning, suggests very clearly that their murder was carefully planned. This wicked act cannot be said to be a revenge attack (as is often claimed), for whom have these priests attacked?”

Expressing sadness and anger, the Bishops wondered why the Federal Government whose primary responsibility is to protect lives, stand back while its security agencies deliberately turn a blind eye to the cries and wails of the helpless and armless citizens who remain sitting ducks in their homes, farms, highways and now, even in their sacred places of worship”.

The Bishops further noted that “Since the President who appointed the Heads of the nation's Security Agencies has refused to call them to order, even in the face of the chaos and barbarity into which our country has been plunged, we are left with no choice but to conclude that they are acting a script that he approves of. The Bishops advised President Buhari to stop presiding over “the killing fields and mass graveyard the country has become”; adding that the inability to keep the country safe can result in the loss of trust of the citizens. They advised him to save the country from total collapse by choosing the part of honour and step aside.

Aligning with the position of the CBCN, the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) and the Catholic Women Organization of Nigeria (CWO), have also condemned the brutal killing of innocent Nigerian citizens by Fulani herdsmen and called on the Federal Government to put an end to the carnage, which borders on ethnic and religion cleansing.

In a statement signed by Sir Thomas Folu Adekoya and Hon Sir Henry H. Yunkwap, KSJI; National President and National Secretary of Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria; the council declared: “ The killing of any Nigerian in circumstances such as this is bad enough but the killing of two Reverend Fathers, in one fell swoop, inside a church during Mass, is most sacrilegious, provocative, deliberate assault on the Christian Faith and an open invitation to religious war from which we pray our merciful God to deliver Nigeria.”