



## **STATEMENT OF MOST REV . IGNATIUS KAIGAMA ARCHBISHOP OF JOS AFTER THE RECENT JOS KILLINGS**

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### **JOS, NIGERIA -**

I am very far from Nigeria but the sad and bad news from Plateau State are not far from me. I hear that herdsmen are on the prowl again and there is bloodshed, murder of infants, youths, men and women in huge numbers in our beloved land of “peace and tourism”. The flagrant and despicable taking of human lives and the continued destruction to homes and means of livelihood is a disgrace to humanity and a shameful projection of a negative image of Nigerians.

The gruesome murders have robbed me of the enthusiasm, energy and pride with which I came to Canada and America. I came boasting to the various audiences I had - whether in Church prayer gatherings or discussion groups, at media interviews or during interactions with officials of Foreign Affairs Ministry, about the huge potentials in Nigeria and how even in the midst of violence caused either by Boko Haram, militant herdsmen or the yet to be identified “foreign invaders”, peace is very possible as we are determined to sustain the culture of civilized conduct and peace. I declared emphatically that I am proud of being a Nigerian and cannot apologize for that conviction. I have talked to hundreds of people in Canada and the United States of America, assuring them that Nigerians are a hard working, religious, resilient and peaceful people. I told my friends who have been postponing their visit to

Nigeria for ten years now due to security issues not to be afraid. I told them to “come and see”. Last year I hosted visitors from 12 countries from South America, Asia and Europe and they all returned home safely after visiting Jos and even Maiduguri. I therefore renewed my invitation to my friends to come to Jos and they will experience that the people are a kind-hearted, loving and peaceful people and not what they read in exaggerated media reports.

While I am still here making frantic positive propaganda for my country Nigeria, inhuman and diabolical killings have taken place in parts of Plateau State. What do I tell the friends I have convinced to come, the youths I interacted with telling them how beautiful Nigeria is? What of the messages of hope about Nigeria that I gave in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, New York, Portsmouth, Milwaukee, etc, telling everyone about the goodness of my beloved country? Was I lying? Why should I be confronted with such embarrassing news while I am still on “active duty” here as an unrecognized and unappreciated ambassador for Nigeria - a duty I have performed selflessly in many parts of the world for over two decades now. Wherever I find myself I try to promote the positive image of our dear country, of course, not neglecting it’s dark sides.

While I am out here, people are still asking me questions about the Chibok girls, the Dapchi girls, especially of Leah. They ask me what they hear about the murderous terrorists called herdsmen who kill priests and lay faithful at worship or defenseless people on the farms. They join me in worrying that these murderous agents don’t seem to have in sight the end of their massive destruction to lives and property.

In the course of my journey I have also met with government officials and tried to put up strong arguments about why there is violence and destruction in our land, blaming corruption, poverty and bad governance and begging them (officials abroad) to genuinely intervene to speed our socio-economic progress. Now, with this indescribable wickedness of killers in Plateau State and other parts of the Middle Belt where the poison of extreme violence is emitted intermittently from the wells of their evil hearts, meant to cause monumental loss to lives and property, is there still justification in telling the “good news” about Nigeria?

I have shared the story of multidimensional peace efforts in Nigeria, using our Dialogue Reconciliation and Peace (DREP) Centre in Jos as an example. DREP is an initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos meant to offer a neutral place where reconciliation of aggrieved parties takes place and also the Interfaith Vocational Training Centre in Bokkos near Barkin Ladi, where Muslim youths and Christian youths are trained for two years in vocational skills and helped to appreciate the civilized culture of dialogue instead of hostile confrontation at the slightest feeling of provocation. I explained how shortly before I left Nigeria we were at meetings in DREP Centre in Jos with the Fulani and Irigwe ethnic groups to strategize on how to avert further killings. We even agreed to hold an interfaith prayer session in August.

Today, when I heard that the killings have resumed, I called His Excellency, Governor Simon Lalong and my Vicar General Msgr. Cletus Gotan, who both kindly explained the pathetic situation to me, and all of them felt so flabbergasted at the turn of events by the gruesome murders.

Could our President come out clearly, categorically and courageously to explain to his kinsmen why dialogue is the best solution. Cattle, as important as they are, cannot be valued over human beings. That does not mean that cows should be wounded, stolen or killed. I believe not enough has been done to challenge the herdsmen killings. Is it because of the so-called "hidden agenda" or simply the absence of courage, determination, patriotism and political will? The Igbos who merely attempted secession were brutalized and suppressed. Who will suppress these raging evil killers? Quod erat demonstrandum.