



CHURCH URGED TO BE MORE PROACTIVE IN PROTECTING MINORS FROM SEX ABUSE

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and the Archbishop of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze has stressed the need for the Church to be more proactive in the protection of minors and vulnerable persons from sex abuse and other related challenges.

Archbishop Akubeze made the call in his homily at the celebration of the opening Mass, for the third National Catholic Education Summit, held recently at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja. The four-day summit which had *Catholic Education in Nigeria: Challenges of Child Protection and Human Sexuality* as its theme, was attended by over 600 participants from all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country as well as other stakeholders in the country's education sector.

Also present were Archbishops Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri and Matthew Ndagoso of Kaduna Archdiocese and Chairman, Church and Society Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. Also present were Bishops: Hilary Okeke of Nnewi, Gabriel Dunia of Auchi, Martin Olorunmolu of Lokoja, Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo of Abeokuta and CBCN Education Committee Chairman; and the Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Anselm Umoren.

Describing the theme of the summit as very apt, considering the present global crisis the Church is facing because of sexual abuses by a few priests, the CBCN President noted that these clerics have wounded the Church. He reiterated the support of the CBCN for the Holy Father, Pope Francis in calling for protection of minors and vulnerable adults against sexual abuse.

Expressing grave concern on the issue, the CBCN President declared: “When you listen to some of the testimonies of the victims or survivors of sexual abuse, one is greatly moved to tears. The trusts of the people were betrayed.” He added: “There is no doubt that this crisis is creating credibility problem for the Church.”

While noting that the actions of the few clerics involved in the sexual abuse scandal have done grave harm to the body of Christ; Archbishop Akubeze urged the faithful not to fail to acknowledge the many priests who are truly struggling daily to live out their chaste

celibacy. He added: “We cannot forget the many positive influences impacted by priests on children especially those who have worked in Catholic Schools.

Archbishop Akubeze stated that the Church has adequate statute on the protection of minors and vulnerable adults against sexual abuse, stressing that what is most paramount now is for the Church to be more proactive in ensuring the effective application of this statute. His words: “It is also pertinent to note that the present Church law on protection of Minors and vulnerable Adults is one of the most comprehensive by any modern-day-Institution.”. Outlining some of the Universal Church provisions in this respect, Archbishop Akubeze called for the strict application of this law by the Church in Nigeria.

Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso, the Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese and Chairman of CSN Church and Society Department delivered the keynote address on the theme of the summit. Papers delivered at the four-day programme included: *Sex and Media Education in Catholic Schools: Imperative for Child Protection against Sexual Abuse* delivered by Professor Walter Ihejirika of the University of Port Harcourt; *Single or Co-Educational Schools: Implications for the Future of Family* by Professor Patricia Ojiah of the University of Abuja and *Catholic Ethos as the Foundation for Ideal School Leadership: A Contemporary Challenge* by Rev. Fr. Anthony Amadi, CSSp of Veritas University, Bwari,

Abuja.

Other speakers were: Msgr. Professor Cletus Tanimu Gotan of Federal College of Education, Gindiri, Plateau State, whose paper centred on *Impact of New Media on Adolescent Sexual Activities and Behaviours of Students in Nigeria: Moral Implications*; Professor Maxwell Gidado of Nassarawa State University, who spoke on *Legal Implications of Child Abuse and Catholic Institutions*; while Dr. Emmanuel Okechukwu , Secretary, CBCN Health Committee, spoke on *School Health Programme for Catholic Schools: Strategy for Safeguarding Educability and National Productivity*.