



DISCIPLINED COUNSELORS NEEDED IN SCHOOLS TO CONTROL SEXUAL ABUSE

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The presence of morally upright and disciplined counsellors in schools has been described as one of the effective means of reducing the vice of sexual abuse of minors in schools and vulnerable persons in the society. This admonition was part of the resolutions adopted by participants and the recently concluded Third Education Summit of the Catholic Church, held at CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja.

The four-day summit was attended by about 700 delegates from different parts of the country, including the CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, who declared the summit opened. Also present at the ceremony were: Archbishops Anthony J.V Obinna of Owerri and Matthew Ndagoso of Kaduna who is the CBCN Chairman for CSN Church and Society Department. He also delivered the key note address.

Also present were Bishops: Hilary Okeke of Nnewi; Gabriel Dunia of Auchi; Peter Kayode

Odetoyinbo of Abeokuta and CBCN Education Committee Chairman; and Most Rev. Anselm Umoren, the Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja; Catholic educators from all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country as well as other stakeholders of the sector including officials of the Federal Ministry of Education.

The participants who expressed deep concern over the increase of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons in the country sought for stringent measures against the perpetrators of the crime and adequate protection for all vulnerable persons irrespective of their ethnic and religious differences as well as their status in the society.

Other resolutions contained in the document endorsed by the CBCN Education Committee Chairman, Most Rev. Peter Odetoyinbo and Secretary, Rev. Fr. Bernard Asogo; also included that the social and cultural content of Schools need to be taken into consideration, especially in the development of family life of students; and need for parents and guardians to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the two school types (co-educational or single); and decide accordingly within the context of their cultural background, social status and religious faith, which is best for their wards.

The participants also urged that all cases of child abuse must be reported and disciplinary and legal actions taken against those found guilty; while therapy, counselling and spiritual assistance should be given to victims of the act. Other recommendations

include striking a balance between over protection and harmful process in terms of sexual abuse; need for proper sex education for students and encouragement of students to speak up when they are being intimidated.

Far reaching decision were also taking on the various topics discussed premised on the presentations of the speakers. These include: how to ensure that the inculcation of core Catholic values/ethos in schools; protection of school children against abuse from adults concerning human sexuality; sustaining high quality education in Catholic schools in order to retain the trust the people have in the institutions.

Other areas include: minimizing the impact of negative politics in Catholic education, upholding the basic right of a child to education by government irrespective of the school the child attends; need for better collaboration between the state and the Church in enhancing standard in the sector and how the Church can handle the burning demands of both single and co-educational schools in the country.

Stressing that all hands must be on deck to make education a priority of both the government and other stakeholders of the sector in the country, the participants concluded: "Education is the greatest school of liberation and protection of the dignity of the human person."

