



GOOD GOVERNANCE PANACEA TO COUNTER HATE SPEECH

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LAGOS, NIGERIA -

Good governance and transparency in administration have been described as panacea for countering hate speech and falsehood, the Catholic Archbishop of Lagos, Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins has declared. Promulgating a draconian law of capital punishment as presently being proposed by the country's Federal lawmakers will amount to entrenching tyranny and anarchy the Archbishop added.

Archbishop Martins' position was contained in a recent press statement released in Lagos and signed on behalf of the Archbishop by Rev. Fr. Anthony Godonu, the Acting Director of Social Communications, Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos. In the statement titled: *Hate Speech Bill: Beware of Entrenching Tyranny and Anarchy*; cautioned the Federal Lawmakers to tread softly on the plan to pass the bill recommending capital punishment for hate speech noting that the action might result in criminalizing freedom of expression, "which is an inherent fundamental right of every human being in a democracy and would be tantamount to entrenching tyranny and anarchy in the land."

According to the Metropolitan of Lagos Ecclesiastical Province, a bill advocating capital punishment for those found guilty of hate speech offences could be counterproductive and further threaten the fragile peace in the country. The Archbishop stressed that: "mass advocacy, coupled with running a truthful, transparent and credible government would help to curb hate speech and peddling of falsehood." He added that: "A government that is transparent,

truthful and credible which gives ample evidence of its performance would itself put detractors to shame and them voiceless.”

The Archbishop noted that the proposed bill by the Federal lawmakers contradicts the Nigerian Constitution; adding that: “There are enough provisions in our law books to address such issues that border on character assassination, sedition, etc. “He continued: “Apart from that, such a law could become a tool for persecuting anyone whose way of expressing dissenting opinions offends powerful people in the society. Who determines when an expression of thought becomes hate speech could become tricky.”

While agreeing that there is need to curtail the spread of hate speech and fake news in the media, the present approach of the National Assembly is tantamount to killing a fly with a sledge hammer, the Archbishop noted.

Calling for continuous dialogue between relevant stakeholders on the matter, especially those in the communications industry; Archbishop Martins noted that: “Hate speech thrives in the atmosphere of distrust, anger and fear;” concluding: “I believe that, if government is able to win the confidence of the masses by entrenching truth, transparency and respect for the rule of law in all of its activities, then it would have removed the fertile soil for deceit upon which falsehood thrives.

The Archbishop admonished the Federal Lawmakers to collaborate with the executive and the judiciary to provide good governance for the Nigerian nation instead of dissipating energy on passing a bill that would further create a gulf between the people and the leaders of the country.