



## **CBCN URGES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO RESTORE THE DIGNITY OF THE NATION**

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### **NIGERIA -**

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), has called on the Federal Government to restore the dignity of the Nigerian nation and the people, by proactively addressing the socio-economic challenges that resulted in the recent protests by the country's youths in some parts of Nigeria; and the subsequent shooting of peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State; by men in military uniform.

The call of the Bishops' Conference was contained in a statement issued in Abuja recently through the National Directorate of Social Communications of the Catholic secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) after the bloody outcome of the #EndSARS youth protest at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos. The statement titled: *Forging A Path from Chaos to Peace* was jointly signed by the CBCN President, Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze, of Benin Archdiocese and the CBCN Secretary Bishop Camillus Umoh of Ikot-Ekpene.

While regretting that the Federal Government has for long remained complacent to the agitations of the people, over the years on the daily losses of human lives across the entire country, the Bishop noted that it was time to restore the dignity of the country and the people and save her from further embarrassing situations. They called on the government to take full responsibility for stabilizing the country and restoring hope and confidence in its ability to lead the nation away from this disaster. They further called on government to seek the best form of dialogue, to find short, medium and long-term solutions to the present crisis.

The Bishops admonished that “Positive and progressive minds in the country, including members of the political parties not in government, the wider civil society, including the religious and traditional institutions and the youths themselves, should be engaged in a round table discussion, so that a way forward can be effectively charted. This matter concerns every Nigerian. Government should mobilize all of us towards a successful outcome”.

While reiterating their support for the legitimate peaceful protests with which the youths showed their concern against Police brutality and other vices in the country, the bishop expressed displeasure at the infiltration and disruption of the peaceful protests by some allegedly sponsored thugs and hoodlums who introduced violence, arson and looting.

They declared: “Sadly, in the last few days, we have all watched as certain youth groups, some alleged to be sponsored by government or its sympathizers, infiltrated the group of peaceful protesters and openly dared and threatened to visit violence on protesters and disrupt their gathering. It is clearly in the interest of the Federal Government, and of the entire nation, to ensure that our youths are not turned against each other. Instead, we should all promote the unity of Nigerians and do all we can to forestall this issue from further degenerating into ethnic and religious crisis.”

While calling on the youths to embrace peace and meaningful dialogue to get their problems resolved and the hoodlums and looters to put an end to their nefarious activities; the Bishops declared: “We acknowledge and applaud the fact that the government has taken some steps in response to the demands of the youths. A case in point was the swift proscribing of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). That the president finally addressed the nation is at best a small step in the right direction. But it is evident that the fundamental issues are yet to be addressed. More progressive steps need to be taken by the government.”

The statement concluded: “. We renew our hope in the future of our people to live together in a united, just and peaceful country. However, to do this, our leaders must learn that Nigerians deserve and demand respect for their lives, dignity and rights.”

It would be recalled that the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, in a statement issued on October 17, on behalf of the Conference and titled: ENDSARS PROTEST: A CRY FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN NIGERIA, endorsed the peaceful demonstration of the youths in most States of the country, noting that by protesting against the brutality of the police, especially the special SARS unit. He said that the youths were simply calling for justice not just for themselves, but for the entire nation so that Nigeria can have peace.

The Conference, among other things called on the Federal Government to listen to the cry for justice by the youths in order to allow peace to prevail in the country, the CBCN statement noted: “The EndSARS protest is a microcosm of the fundamental problems of Nigeria and reiterated the call for the restructuring of the country.”