



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 19, 2022

Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I write to you in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. When considering Africa, the growing violence and demise of governance in Nigeria continues to be of highest concern to our Committee. In continuity with my letters to you last year on [March 19](#) and [June 21](#), I wish to vigilantly convey the steady and growing concerns and aspirations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). Neither Africa, nor the world, can afford Nigeria to become a failed state. It is our shared hope that the United States will partner with Christian and Muslim leaders and their institutions along with likeminded members of civil society working to end the senseless violence in Nigeria and pave the way for free, fair, and credible elections in February 2023.

The President of the CBCN, the Most Reverend Lucious Iwejuru Ugorji, recently opened the CBCN General Assembly (the governing body of the bishops) saying, "We are passing through what might be deemed as the darkest chapter of our history as a nation..." The final statement from the general assembly (attached) decries the wanton violence committed by terrorists, insurgents, kidnappers, and bandits, and attacks on places of worship like the parish in Owo, Ondo State in June which I released the following [statement](#) to bring attention to this disturbing development. These attacks threaten religious freedom and the longer they continue, the more divided Muslims and Christians will become. Economic turmoil compels the country's youth to leave in search of opportunities despite the perilous journey to Europe, or the United States.

Still, the Nigerian Bishops look to the future of Nigeria with hope. This hope is contingent on credible elections next year. I appreciate you hearing this renewed plea to work for credible elections in February. Specifically, I urge you to consider the invaluable insights of the CBCN which extend well beyond their public statements and with whom we work closely in support of Nigeria prevailing through their current crisis to a better future.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Attachment: CBCN Statement, *The Threshold of a New Dawn in Nigeria*



THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW DAWN IN NIGERIA

A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Sacred Heart Pastoral/Retreat Centre, Orlu, Imo State, 8 - 16 September 2022

1. PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, held our Second Plenary Meeting for the year at the Sacred Heart Pastoral/Retreat Centre, Orlu, Imo State, from 8 to 16 September 2022. Having prayerfully reflected on issues affecting the Church and the Nigerian State, we now issue this Communiqué:

2. THE CHURCH, POLITICS AND THE COMMON GOOD

The Church teaches that politics is for the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance and the source of its inherent legitimacy (cf. Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, 74). As such, political authority has to be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed towards the common good. Out of respect for all God's children, the Church does not identify with nor is she to be bound to any political party. Nevertheless, the Church is not indifferent or neutral to the formation and activities of the political community (cf. John XXIII, *Mother and Teacher*, 180).

We urge our Catholic Lay Faithful, especially those with talents for the difficult yet noble art of politics or whose talents in this matter can be developed, to prepare themselves for it and, forgetting their convenience and material interests, to engage in political activity in pursuance of the common good and the establishment of the moral order (cf. Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, 73). In other words, they are to accept as their divine vocation the task of sanctifying the world like leaven from within (cf.

Vatican II, Apostolate of the Laity, 2 and 7; John Paul II, Lay Members of Christ's Faithful, 16).

While working to promote political activities and good governance that guarantee the dignity of the human person, justice and equity in society, priests have the duty to guide the Lay Faithful. In doing this, without prejudice to their rights to exercise their franchise, priests are not to use the pulpit to promote any particular political party or its candidates.

3. A CALL FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

As we thank God for considerable growth in political consciousness in Nigeria, we recognise that such consciousness needs guidance through political education so that all citizens, in general and young people, in particular, will be able to effectively play their part in political affairs (cf. Vatican II, The Church in the Modern World, 74).

We call on all our citizens and institutions to work towards responsible political behaviour and informed choices. In consonance with the principles of the Social Teaching of the Church, our people should be made aware of the duty to be both good leaders and followers. All citizens need to know, right from childhood, that they are stakeholders in the political affairs of their country; that they are actors and not mere spectators. Only when the people are enlightened to take cognisance of their duties to the nation and their rights in it can they escape the servitude of political manipulation and ignorance in their electoral habits.

4. POLITICS AND THE GENERAL ELECTIONS 2023

The 2023 General Elections are fast approaching. We commend the National Assembly and the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for enacting and signing into law the Electoral Bill 2022. We acknowledge the President's commitment to ensuring a level playing ground for all candidates in the elections. Furthermore, we commend the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for its innovations, especially in the area of technology, to ensure free, fair and credible elections. We, however, enjoin the Commission to ensure that this technology is transparently deployed, in order to increase the confidence of the people in the electoral process.

Politics is a noble vocation. We, therefore, encourage all politicians to uphold the values of integrity and decency. We strongly condemn as unlawful and sinful all forms of vote selling and buying and advise all politicians and voters to refrain from doing so. While it is not our responsibility as religious leaders to dictate to political parties the choices of their presidential, vice presidential and other candidates, we have the duty to advise

the citizenry to bear in mind the implications of these choices while electing the next set of leaders. We, therefore, renew our call on all our faithful, laity and clergy alike, to come out *en masse* to vote for people of unassailable integrity, who have the good character, capacity and track record to lead our nation out of the present socio-political and economic doldrums, irrespective of party, religious and ethnic affiliations. It is through the right political choices that our current situation can be ameliorated.

5. **SOME CHALLENGES FACING THE NATION**

6. **i) *Continued and Heightened Insecurity in our Country***

We continue to decry the worsening state of insecurity in our nation as well as activities of terrorists and insurgents, kidnappers and bandits. Armed robbery and cybercrimes have continued unabated. Attacks on travellers and worshippers in Churches and other places of worship have become too frequent. An instance is the recent mass shooting and bombing attacks on St Francis Catholic Church, Owo, Ondo State, on Pentecost Sunday, 5 June 2022, in which 41 worshippers were killed and 70 grievously injured. All these have led to an incessant loss of lives and destruction of property of innocent people. We express our heartfelt condolences to all the bereaved and pray for the eternal repose of the deceased.

Regrettably, the government has not lived up to its duties with regard to security. We observe that even when suspects have been arrested, there is not even diligent prosecution of the culprits of these nefarious acts, thereby leaving the citizenry helpless and despairing. While we continue to call on civil authorities to stand up to their constitutional responsibility of safeguarding the lives and property of Nigerians, we enjoin all to strengthen security measures in their homes and institutions. We call on all citizens to be law-abiding, vigilant, and to shun all forms of violence and criminality.

1. **ii) *Nigeria's Poor Economy***

Owing to mismanagement and a failing economy with an ever increasing debt burden, there is poverty and hunger in our land, in spite of our huge human and natural resources. Spiralling inflation, high costs of goods and services, soaring unemployment, crude oil theft and non-functioning refineries have inflicted untold hardship on the citizens. Furthermore, governments have resorted to unnecessary borrowing, jeopardising the well-being of the present and future generations. Furthermore, this poor state of our economy has led to the mass migration of our human capital, especially professional and skilled labourers, fleeing the nation in search of greener pastures. In light of the above, we urge governments to make adequate policies and provide the enabling environment for the creation of more jobs by both the

government and the private sector. This would surely reduce the level of poverty, insecurity and unrest in our land.

iii) ASUU Strike and Education in our Nation

The protracted strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) since 14 February 2022 is unacceptable. ASUU has cited the non-implementation of agreements by the Federal Government as the cause. We know that efforts have been made to resolve the matter. However, we believe that a resort to courts may not be the best and fastest way to solve the problem. Therefore, we renew our call on the Federal Government and ASUU to find a quicker and better way of resolving the matters under contention so that public universities will re-open.

7. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

We thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for calling the Synod on Synodality, which began in October 2021 at the diocesan level and is scheduled to end in October 2023 in Rome. The Synod is meant to be a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening to one another at all levels in the Church: parish, diocesan, provincial, national, continental, and universal. We expect that the fruits of the Synod will most certainly contribute also to building a better political community, where consensus building, listening to the needs of one another and sharing resources equitably among the different strata of the society find a place.

We are grateful to God for the successful hosting of the Reunion of the Episcopal Conferences of West Africa (RECOWA) Assembly in Nigeria (3 – 8 May 2022) and felicitate with its new president His Excellency Alexis Touably Youlo of Ivory Coast. Also, we congratulate the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) for successfully holding its Assembly in Accra, Ghana (25 July – 1 August 2022), and we thank God for its new president, His Eminence Richard Cardinal Baawobr, Bishop of Wa Diocese in Ghana. We prayerfully wish him a full and speedy recovery.

For and on behalf of the Christian faithful in Nigeria, we are grateful to Pope Francis for creating another Cardinal from among us, His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, Bishop of Ekwulobia Diocese. While we pray for our new Cardinal, we continue to pledge our loyalty to the Holy Father and seek better ways to deepen our commitment to the task of evangelisation of the peoples.

We thank Most Rev. Augustine Tochukwu Ukwuoma and the entire Christ's Faithful of Orlu Diocese for their hospitality and kind hosting of the Second Plenary Assembly this year, 2022. Since our last Plenary Meeting in Abuja in March 2022, we have had the

retirement of Bishop John Afareha of Warri Diocese (18 April 2022) and the appointment of Archbishop Augustine Obiora Akubeze as the Apostolic Administrator of Warri Diocese; the installation of Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Owerri (23 June 2022) and the retirement of Most Rev. Anthony J.V. Obinna as Archbishop of Owerri after 29 years of dynamic leadership to the Archdiocese. We also had the erection of Kontagora Diocese and the installation of Most Rev. Bulus Dauwa Yohanna as its first Bishop (16 June 2022); the episcopal ordination and installation of Most Rev. Isaac Dugu as the Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese and Most Rev. John Bakeni as the Auxiliary Bishop of Maiduguri Diocese on 1 July 2022 and 7 July 2022 respectively. We congratulate Most Rev. Michael Kalu Ukpong on his assumption of office as the Diocesan Administrator of Umuahia on 24 June 2022. We continue to pray for the eternal repose of our venerable brother, Most Rev. George Dodo, Bishop of Zaria Diocese, whose death occurred on 8 July 2022. He was buried on 4 August 2022. We are grateful to God for the election of Rev. Fr. Michael Pius Kagarko, who assumed office as the Diocesan Administrator of Zaria on 9 July 2022.

7. CONCLUSION: A CALL TO SOBER REFLECTION, SELF RESTRAINT AND PRAYER

No doubt, we stand at a crossroads. How we conduct ourselves during this period is crucial to the survival of our nation. Let us turn our attention to God in prayer and fasting for our nation to get it right. We call on our citizens to continue fasting and prayer to prepare for smooth and peaceful elections. In campaigning and canvassing for votes, we urge politicians to eschew the politics of bitterness, divisiveness and religious bigotry. If we succeed in doing these things, we shall indeed cross the threshold into a new dawn in our country.

We commend our nation into the hands of God as we move ahead in faith, hope and trust. Indeed, the Lord of hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our stronghold (Ps. 46:7). May our Mother Mary, Queen and Patroness of Nigeria, continue to intercede for us. AMEN.

Most Rev. Lucius Iwejuru UGORJI, Most Rev. Donatus Aihmiosion OGUN, OSA

Archbishop of Owerri Bishop of Uromi

President, CBCN Secretary, CBCN