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PEACE IN NIGERIA: MOVING FROM FRAGILITY TO STABILITY

A Statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)

1. The deplorable security situation in our nation Nigeria and the ongoing discourse heating up the nation's fragile social and religious climate are truly worrisome. More deeply painful is the persistent violence that has claimed countless lives, destroyed homes, and displaced families. As murderous groups continue to unleash terror on defenseless citizens, we strongly condemn these atrocities that have brought untold anguish to many communities. It is a matter of grave concern that several predominantly Christian communities, particularly in the Northern and middle belt regions of the country, have come under repeated and brutal attacks, resulting in heavy casualties and the tragic loss of many Christian lives. In some instances, there have been disturbing reports of delayed or withheld security responses, giving the impression of possible collusion or a lack of will to act. The near-total destruction and occupation of some communities, and the continued attacks on displaced persons even in camps, have deepened the people's sense of abandonment and despair. Such prolonged unbearable conditions have given credence to allegations of 'genocide' in some quarters. Yet, mindful of the sacred dignity and inestimable worth of every human life, we are equally deeply concerned that Muslims and many other innocent citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds have also been victims of this same cruelty that continues to desecrate our common humanity.
2. Recent events further highlight the depth of this national crisis. Cases of abduction of several worshippers in Kwara State (who, thankfully, have been released), twenty-five young girls in Kebbi State, thirteen female farmers in Borno State, two hundred and sixty-five students and their teachers in Papiri, Niger State, brutal killing of more than seventy persons in Southern Taraba and the displacement of thousands there, attest to the troubling scale of the security crisis. These tragedies, together with the killing of Brigadier General Musa Uba and many security personnel, reveal the extent to which criminality has penetrated our national life. When criminals can strike schools, farms, and communities with impunity, it threatens the very foundations of family life, education, and social stability. Such attacks violate our shared humanity and endanger the future of our nation.
3. In the light of this worsening situation, we call on the Government at all levels to urgently and decisively fulfil its foremost duty, as mandated by Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution, to protect the lives and property of all citizens. The Government has both the responsibility and the means to end this violence and must no longer allow impunity to prevail. Those responsible for these heinous crimes must be identified and brought to justice, for without accountability there can be no lasting peace. We urge that reports of delayed or withheld security responses in some affected communities be thoroughly investigated in order to rebuild public trust. The Government must also take all lawful and urgent measures to secure the immediate and safe return of all abducted persons, including the young girls taken in Kebbi, the pupils and teachers seized in Kontagora, and the young females abducted in Borno, and ensure that displaced citizens can return to their ancestral

homes. This moment calls for decisive action to halt the terror engulfing our nation and for meaningful dialogue and peacebuilding aimed at restoring confidence among our people. Lasting peace cannot be achieved through silence or delay. It requires justice, courage, and a firm commitment to the sanctity of human life. Nigerians and the global community can no longer tolerate excuses for continued insecurity.

4. We further draw attention to the persistent violations of the rights and freedoms of Christian minorities in several northern states. The denial of land for the construction of churches, particularly within federal institutions, and the destruction of Christian places of worship, especially at the height of Boko Haram's insurgency, are matters that demand urgent and decisive government action. The overreach of Sharia Courts in some states poses serious constitutional concerns, as it threatens Nigeria's secular character and infringes on the rights of Christian minorities. It is in this context that we recall with deep sorrow the brutal killing of Deborah Samuel Yakubu in Sokoto, an incident fuelled by extremist interpretations of Sharia-related accusations, and we once again demand justice for her, as impunity in such cases undermines the rule of law and endangers the rights of all citizens. While moral formation is essential in every society, the activities of morality enforcement groups such as the Hisbah have frequently resulted in harassment and intimidation of innocent citizens, including Christians and Muslims alike, in the exercise of their fundamental freedoms. Their rigid interpretations of religious norms, often influenced by extremist ideologies, undermine communal harmony and threaten national cohesion. Nigeria's rich religious and cultural pluralism must foster unity, mutual respect, and peace rather than division and suspicion.
5. We salute the courage of the Nigerian people who, despite these trying times, continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and trust in the promise of a better future. We urge all citizens, irrespective of religion, tribe, or political persuasion, to remain united in the quest for peace and the rebuilding of our common life. Every Nigerian is called to be an agent of healing, to reject hatred and retaliation, to speak words that foster understanding, and to uphold justice, dialogue, and mutual respect. Peace is not the responsibility of a select few. It is the duty of all. Rather than engaging in divisive arguments about who has suffered more losses, we should stand together in defending the sacredness of every human life and protecting the vulnerable. Together, we can transform our diversity into strength and build a nation that truly reflects harmony, justice, and hope.

May God, through the intercession of Our Lady, Queen and Patroness of Nigeria, grant our nation and its people peace, healing and restoration. Amen.

Given this twenty-fifth day of November in the year of our Lord two thousand and twenty-five.



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