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ON THE RECURRENT WAVE OF VIOLENCE AND THE CHEAPENING OF HUMAN LIVES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY. A STATEMENT BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA (CBCN)

Preamble

1. Our beloved country appears to be under siege from many forces. Repeatedly, innocent citizens in different communities across the nation are brutally attacked and their sources of livelihood mindlessly destroyed. Property, worth millions of Naira, including places of worship, schools, hospitals and business enterprises are torched and turned to ashes. In the words of Thomas Hobbes, these criminals have made life in our nation “nasty, brutish and short”, causing people to live in perpetual fear, anxiety and desperation. While thanking God and the federal government for the successes so far recorded in the fight against Boko Haram terrorists in the north east, we are appalled by the repeated occurrence of other ugly incidents that are tearing communities apart and generating tensions.

Recurrent Bloody Clashes Between Herdsmen and Farmers

2. Due to unfavourable climatic factors, herders are constrained to move in search of greener pastures to save the lives of their cattle and to protect their economy and so, some unscrupulous ones mindlessly drive their cattle into farmlands to graze on people’s crops. When local farmers resist such wanton destruction of their means of livelihood, they are visited with deadly attacks.
3. The recent mass slaughter of unarmed citizens by these armed herdsmen in some communities in Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna and Taraba States has caused national shock, grief and outcry. We commiserate with the families of the deceased, whilst we pray for the blissful repose of the dead and the quick recovery of the wounded. At the same time, we totally condemn such brutal massacres of innocent people. Herdsmen may be under pressure to save their livestock and economy but this is never to be done at the expense of other peoples’ lives or livelihoods.
4. It is, therefore, madness to slaughter fellow human beings and shameful that we had to show the world this ugly picture of our country. If government is incapable or unwilling to protect the lives of her citizens before marauding herdsmen, people might be tempted to resort to self-help in defence of their lives and property when threatened or attacked. This will, no doubt, lead to the complete breakdown of law and order in the country. To forestall this, government should urgently and seriously rise up to her primary responsibility of protecting the lives and property of her citizens and ensure that such mindless killings should not reoccur.



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5. With the array of intelligence officers at her disposal, government should also expeditiously take measures to unmask the perpetrators of these dastardly acts and their sponsors, disarm them and bring them to book. Our perilous situation calls for more security consciousness. Accordingly, we exhort one and all to be more vigilant and report strange faces and movements timely to security agents.
6. It would be stressing the obvious to state that a better alternative to open grazing should be sought rather than introducing “grazing colonies” in the country. Government should rather encourage cattle owners to establish ranches in line with international best practice. Farmers and herdsmen have a lot to contribute to the socio economic prosperity of our nation. A more enduring strategy must be worked out for their peaceful co-existence and mutual respect.

Incessant Kidnapping

7. It is very sad to note that the spate of kidnapping in our country has risen to unimaginable proportion. Day after day, citizens are taken captive, humiliated and traumatised by heavily armed gangsters. No institution or individual is spared by kidnappers, no matter how old, sacred or highly placed. As a result, people live now in constant fear and anxiety, whether at home or on the highway. Kidnappers are ruthless, deadly and operate without any qualms of conscience. In their efforts to extort huge sums of money as ransom, they subject their victims to untold ordeals lasting weeks and even months. In the name of God, we urge kidnappers to embrace a change of heart and seek more decent means of livelihood.
8. The victims of kidnapping and their families should no longer be left at the mercy of heartless and greedy kidnappers. There is an urgent need to deal decisively with kidnappers and drastically curb their excesses. Given the effective security equipment available in the modern world of high technology and considering the huge security votes set aside every month at the state and federal levels, our communities should be better policed by security agents, who are better equipped and well trained to handle the security challenge of kidnapping that is bringing our nation to its knees.

The Ugly Phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees.

9. One of the bitter fruits of bloody conflicts is the ugly phenomenon of internally displaced people and refugees. Thousands of people in our country have been displaced and have fled their homes to seek a more peaceful environment for themselves and their families. Similarly, due to the protracted political unrest in the Cameroons, many Cameroonians have also fled their country and have taken refuge in some communities in Taraba, Benue and Cross River



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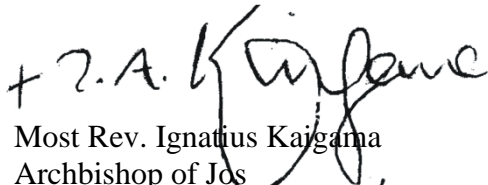
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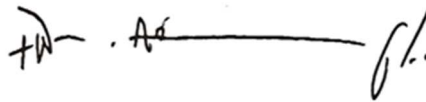
States. To overcome their traumatic experiences, they need tolerance and a welcoming atmosphere in their camps as well as beddings, food, water, good sanitation and medical supplies. Children of the displaced and refugees also need access to good education.

10. We, therefore, appeal to all men and women of goodwill to provide material help for the IDPs and refugees through the JDPC/Caritas in these States who will cater for their needs or through Caritas Nigeria. Government should also strengthen the National Commission for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons to cater for their needs.
11. Reports have it that there are some abuses going on in some IDP and refugee camps. Some officials in those camps diverted materials meant for the IDPs and refugees. There are also reports of sexual harassments in some camps. Government should as a matter of urgency conduct investigation into those allegations with a view to checking these abuses.

Conclusion

12. Since the repeated outbreaks of bloody conflicts in different communities across the nation, we observe with great sadness that thousands of innocent people have been hacked down in cold blood. Others have been exposed to situations of unspeakable suffering. Many others have been crushed and silenced, while their rights and dignity are trampled with impunity. We believe that, if there is some degree of political will, our public authorities can take adequate steps to put an end to these human tragedies and save the country from the calamities of a civil war. It is wiser and easier to prevent a war than to stop it after it has broken out. We, therefore, urge all aggrieved parties to seek reconciliation through dialogue and mutual forgiveness. Above all, we passionately appeal to them to beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (cf. Is 2:4).


Most Rev. Ignatius Kajgama
Archbishop of Jos
President, CBCN


Most Rev. William Avenya
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Secretary, CBCN

January 16, 2018