



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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July 6, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

As chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write regarding the growing urgency of the situation in Nigeria.

Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria has issued a statement on security in their beloved country. While deploring all acts of violence, especially against innocent civilians, they single out the “recurrent attacks on Christian places of worship.” Their full statement is enclosed with this letter.

The bishops note that it is a “primary duty of government to ensure security of life and property of citizens all over the nation.” Accordingly, I urge the U.S. government to strengthen its work with the government of Nigeria to improve the rule of law and the protection of worship and indeed religious freedom.

The bishops of Nigeria are clear: “Security actions must be intensified and refined. ... Much more needs to be done in the area of intelligence gathering, analyzing, interpreting and security equipment procurement. The terrorists must be identified, engaged, and disarmed.”

It is critical that the U.S. Government urge the Nigerian Government to work with civil society and all Nigerians to collaborate in ways that build, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “a peaceful and reconciled society, in which everyone’s right freely to profess their faith is fully protected.”

Thank you for your consideration of the Nigerian bishops’ concerns for their nation and their people.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Encl.

TUESDAY JUNE 26, 2012

**STATEMENT BY CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA
(CBCN) ON THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY**

1. A nation in Danger!

These are sad days for Nigeria and for all Nigerians. We feel greatly pained by the violent events which have become almost daily occurrences. Time is rolling on and the situation of insecurity in the land has not improved in any significant way. On the contrary, it seems to be going from bad to worse, as terrorists strike almost at will against innocent citizens all across the northern parts of Nigeria. The recurrent attacks on Christian places of worship, and indeed on so many other people and places are cowardly acts against innocent people and are to be vehemently condemned by all people of good will. Equally so are the so-called reprisal attacks. It is a matter of great pain to us, that violent and lethal attacks were committed against innocent people. The attacks and counter attacks are condemned in the loudest possible manner.

2. Primary Duty of Government

It is a primary duty of government to ensure security of life and property of citizens all over the nation. There can be no excuse for failure in this primary duty. There is evidence that the state has been doing a lot to arrest the situation. Significant measure of men, material and equipment has been invested in the effort. Among the security officers many lives have been lost on the various battlefronts. May God give them eternal rest – and

may their supreme sacrifice not be in vain! The people who died in the bomb blasts and in the reprisal attacks were all innocent children of God, men, women and children, Muslims and Christians, of different tribes, all Nigerians, all equally created and loved by God. May they rest in peace and may God grant strength and consolation to the loved ones they have left behind.

3. **More Needs to be Done**

Despite all the current efforts by government, the nation is still under insecurity. We continue to challenge government to do all that is necessary to make our nation safe for us all. Security actions must be intensified and refined. There is need to change gear. We have just heard of changes in the top-most level of our security personnel. We are still to see whether this will bring the marked improvement that is urgently needed. Much more needs to be done in the area of intelligence gathering, analysing, interpreting and security equipment procurement. The terrorists must be identified, engaged, and disarmed.

4. **Christians in Churches as Special Targets**

Of particular concern are the attacks on Christians in their places of worship. Whether by design or not, such actions put grave stress on the already fragile mutual relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria. The sense of anger and hatred is growing by the

day and has reached a dangerous level. We must all act now and decisively to arrest and defuse the tension.

5. **Palpable Danger in the Air**

Following the injunction of Christ, we shall continue to preach peace, love, and forgiveness. But if there is no clear and concrete sign of improvement, the patience of many Christians will wear out, our sermons of restraint will fall on many deaf ears, and those who see violent reprisals as justified deterrence will fall beyond our control. There is palpable danger in the air.

6. **Fervent Prayers**

We call on our Christian brothers and sisters to continue to be fervent in prayer for God's protection on us and for a change of heart for those who sow violence, distress and sorrow on innocent people. May God hear our prayers. We understand that people are tired. But this does not justify our hitting out against one another in violence. Two wrongs do not make a right. Our country is one; hence, we must together find the solution to our woes. To our youth we say: Do not grow impatient. Challenge the government to assume its responsibilities but do not abandon your own in the process: love and respect life; do your best to transform our country through peaceful non-violent means.

7. **But be Vigilant**

But at the same time, we must all be vigilant, making appropriate provisions, within the law, to defend and protect ourselves and our

premises. While we insist on our right to be protected by the state, we know that security is the concern of every citizen. We shall continue to mobilize and deploy our Church security arrangements within the ambit of the law, and in collaboration with the state agencies.

8. **Call to the Muslim Community**

We call on all Nigerians to join hands in combating this common danger. We call especially on the Muslim community in Nigeria to do all in its power to reach out to those who foment, plan, encourage and carry out these acts of violence in the name of Islam. We note with satisfaction that many of the recognised Muslim leaders have clearly condemned these violent and criminal actions. But it is not enough to issue verbal condemnation of terrorist activities. There is need for concrete and pro-active action to call to order those responsible and to make them desist from causing any further havoc on our nation in the name of religion. It is sad that some media and commentators see the crisis in northern Nigeria in terms of Muslims and Christians conflict instead of looking at it as the misdeeds of a few elements among us who claiming to be acting for and in the name of religion wreck havoc on innocent Nigerians. Religion does not encourage such inhumanity we are experiencing but rather should bind us to the Creator and to one another in love and human solidarity. The tendency to blame or exonerate ourselves or religious groups instead of focusing on the solutions has not helped at all. All hands must genuinely be on deck.

9. **“Unless the Lord Watches the City...” Ps. 127:1.**

“Unless the Lord watches the city, the watchmen keep awake in vain”. As Christians, we believe in the power of prayer. But the watchman who abandons his post and relies on prayers alone puts the city at great risk. We must work hard – and then pray that God may “give success to the work of our hands” Ps. 90:17. It is in this light that we remind everyone to sustain our long-standing programme of prayers. In particular, we reiterate the importance of daily family rosary, and “prayer for Nigeria in distress” – as a powerful spiritual response to the grave challenge of insecurity that has engulfed our nation.

10. Pope Benedict XVI’s Appeal for an End to Attacks in Nigeria

We thank the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI for his constant concern for our nation in our present troubles. In an address during the last Wednesday General Audience at the Vatican, he passionately appealed for an end to these attacks when he said: "I appeal to leaders for an immediate end to the killing of so many innocents....It is my hope that the various components of Nigerian society will collaborate so as not to start down the path of revenge, and that all citizens will cooperate in building a peaceful and reconciled society, in which everyone's right freely to profess their faith is fully protected".

May Our Lady Queen of Nigeria intercede for us, as we call on the Lord Jesus to grant us peace and harmony.

Most Rev Ignatius Kaigama
Archbishop of Jos
President, CBCN

Most Rev Alfred Martins
Archbishop-elect of Lagos
Secretary, CBCN