



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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March 12, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, I write to express my deep concern regarding the level of conflict and instability in West Africa, specifically the increasing violence in Nigeria due to herder-farmer conflict.

Herder groups and farmers on their lands have lived together in peace for decades. However, over the last few years, this social balance has been upset by a mix of complicated factors. Desertification and over-grazing, herders from neighboring countries (sometimes well-armed), and population growth in Nigeria have all contributed to growing violent conflict between herders and farmers. In the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 people were killed in these armed clashes doubling the previous year's death toll to a level that is six times more than the number of people killed by Boko Haram (International Crisis Group Report 262, 2018).

The government has failed to respond to the sharp rise in violence despite the many warning signs. People on both sides of the conflict have lost all confidence in the government, as well as local and traditional leaders' ability and willingness to provide security, bring perpetrators to justice, and conduct reforms that would address the root causes of the conflict.

Starting in 2016 to the present, the Nigerian Catholic bishops have issued nine official statements condemning all herder-farmer violence and calling on the government to address the root causes of the conflict, end impunity, and rebuild the social fabric of the country. On February 26 (Ash Wednesday), the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria asked their faithful throughout the country to wear black and to offer prayers and penance in mourning for all those who have died. The entire body of bishops held a procession in protest of the state of insecurity.

This conflict threatens the national social contract designed by Christian and Muslim political leaders decades ago that had long bound the country together. The United States is a crucial partner with the Government of Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa. I strongly urge you to work with the Government of Nigeria to:

- Partner with the Catholic Church and other religious leaders to develop a new national narrative of unity, Muslim-Christian collaboration and action to persuade the Nigerian Government to stop the violence and rebuild the social fabric of the country;
- Reform agricultural and animal husbandry regulations, guidelines and practices to end the armed competition over land and rebuild the social balance between farmers and herders;

- Work with Christian and Muslim religious leaders on the local level to develop programs of community-based mediation to end violence, promote reconciliation, and rebuild social cohesion;
- Reinstate accountability, transparency and the rule of law by prosecuting both civilian perpetrators of violence and security forces for violations of human rights.

Nigeria is critical to the stability of West Africa and the whole continent. Our committee and the bishops' conference Office for International Justice and Peace are ready and eager to work with you to promote peace and the common good in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ David J. Malloy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops