



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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His Eminence John Cardinal Olorunfemi Onaiyekan
Archbishop of Abuja
Archbishop's House
P.O. Box 286
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Your Eminence:

I write to express solidarity and condolences in the wake of the recent bombing at the Nyanya Bus Station outside of Abuja and the abduction of 100 girls from a hostel in Borno State. Our Committee is painfully aware that these heinous attacks are only the latest to strike Nigeria. Media report that since January over 1,500 innocent people have died in assaults linked to Boko Haram. Tragically this total includes scores of young students in Yobe and Borno states who perished when their school dormitories were torched while they slept. Still hundreds of others have died in police custody under less than transparent conditions.

We are concerned for the over 500,000 Nigerians who have been displaced by the violence that has even spilled over into Cameroon and Niger. Mindful of the religious overtones of the situation, we are guided by your assertion:

What it means is that we need to insist on our rights and the rights of others in this regard. In Nigeria, a majority religion in one place is a minority in another. It is therefore in the ultimate best interests of everyone if we all defend and uphold the rights of each to religious freedom, the second most important right after the right to life itself. This is the way of the future. Our nation cannot afford to lag behind.

We share your belief that continuous dialogue between political, military and religious leaders is needed to end the violence, complemented by police and military action that brings perpetrators of violence to justice while respecting human and civil rights. Nigeria is a country rich in its human and natural resources. Building unity among all Nigerians will help build peace and prosperity for all.

I cherish the memory of my visit to Abuja and the dinner we shared. I also have fond memories of my visit to Jos and my telephone conversation and visits in Kinshasa with Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama. Our Committee will continue to seek ways to support the Church in Nigeria at this trying time. As we celebrate Holy Week, I pray in Easter hope that the Church and people of Nigeria may one day soon enjoy peace and prosperity.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates

Bishop of Des Moines

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Cc: His Grace Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, Archbishop of Jos, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
Reverend Father Michael Ekpenyong, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria