



## Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 2, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street., NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, I write to support the concerns of my brother bishops in Nigeria as stated in their recent Plenary Communiqué entitled, **“Journeying Together for the Common Good in the Church and Our Nation,”** which I have attached for your reference.

The bishops of Nigeria have decried the unabated violence perpetrated by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State-West Africa Province in the northeastern states. Local vigilante groups have risen up to defend farmers in the middle belt of the country from armed herdsmen while bandits and gunmen attack villages and motorists, and kidnap innocent people for ransom across the northwest and middle of the country. As a result, Nigeria is now home to around [3 million internally displaced people](#) most of whom have escaped this relentless swell of violence. Our brother bishops in Nigeria conclude, “Insecurity has attained yet a higher scale than we had ever seen before in the land.”

Adding to this crisis, the Nigerian bishops argue that the termination of fuel subsidies and a drastic devaluation of the Nigerian currency are only benefiting the elite while increasing poverty amongst the most vulnerable people in society.

The Catholic Church, along with many academics and observers, argue that the root causes of the nationwide violence is pervasive corruption and endemic poverty and a massive failure of governance at the federal level. This analysis echoes what the bishops said in 2021, that this longstanding crisis, “has left the sad and dangerous impression that those who have assumed the duty and authority to secure the nation are either unable – or worse still, unwilling – to take up the responsibilities of their office.”

Now in 2024 the bishops declare that it is time to run government for the common good and allow all capable Nigerians to participate in the task of national rebirth. To that end, they urge the government to:

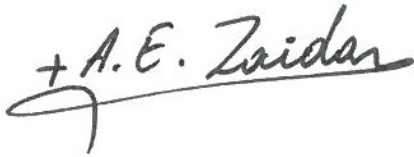
- urgently address the increasing disaffection and restiveness spreading across the population to avoid a descent into chaos and anarchy,
- carefully study the idea of decentralizing security responsibilities to a state police force or to other security outfits,
- Invest in the creation of small businesses, especially agricultural enterprises,
- Address the corrosive impact of corruption on people and society.

The Catholic Church points out that Nigeria has all it needs to rise to these challenges. If government is the problem, civil society must be empowered to become the solution. The Church has numerous assets including Veritas University, the national and diocesan Development, Justice, and Peace commissions and a network of clergy and lay leaders from all walks of life. The Catholic Church is also a trusted interfaith partner among Muslim communities, and with its vast grassroots networks, the Church is willing to channel its efforts and credibility to exert influence at the highest levels of government to affect change.

I urge you and your colleagues in the United States Embassy to engage with the local Catholic Church leadership to put these ideas into action. The deterioration of stability in the Sahel region and West Africa generally is in many ways worse than Nigeria. Yet, I believe that we need to be very proactive in Nigeria to address the growing and alarming level of fragility that exists in Africa's most populous nation before the forces in the Sahel intensify the crisis. This region of Africa needs a partnership and the leadership of the United States if it is to withstand the forces of violence and extremism.

We and our partners in Nigeria are ready to work with you to reach this goal.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ A. E. Zaidan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan  
Bishop of Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace