

Religious Freedom Week 2023

Pray—Reflect—Act

June 26

Pray that herders and farmers in Nigeria, whose conflict over access to land and resources has fueled religious tensions, may find the means to compromise and work out their differences in a non-violent manner.

Reflect

In February 2021 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria published a message to the people of Nigeria, perhaps their strongest statement ever, condemning the long running crisis of violence in the country saying, "The very survival of the nation is at stake. The nation is falling apart. Serious insecurity, clearly evident in widespread loss of lives and property, for long unaddressed, 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." The police forces and the courts have failed horribly to establish the rule of law in the country. This has led to a total lack of general security while shrinking grazing land has contributed to rising conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria. Because herders are generally Muslims from the Fulani tribe and farmers are generally Christians of various ethnicities, this has exacerbated ethnic and religious differences in conflicts that originated over access to agricultural resources. Amid continuing violence and polarization, the CBCN continues to call and work for peace. This work is crucial because the population of Nigeria is almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims and this state of conflict could drive a wedge between them and threaten the long-term stability of Nigeria. The lack of effective rule of law has allowed terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State - West Africa Province to maintain operations in Nigeria. Additionally, other groups, often referred to as armed bandits, kidnap innocent people, attack travelers on the roads and rails, and steal cattle often for money. As a result, a repeating cycle of retaliation has become pervasive throughout Nigeria. For example, in January 2022, Islamic terrorists attacked and burned a rectory, killing one priest and seriously injuring another. Subsequently, a mob of Christians burnt the local police office in response to the perception that the police do not respond as promptly to attacks against Christians as they do against Muslims. Religious polarization has increased in Nigeria, inhibiting the chance for dialogue among opposing groups.

Act

Support Aid to the Church in Need, Catholic Relief Services, USCCB's Solidarity Fund for Aid to the Church in Africa, and other organizations that are helping the internally displaced, providing livelihood training and healthcare, and offering peacebuilding between those of different faiths.

www.usccb.org/ReligiousFreedomWeek!

