

STATEMENT ON THE STATE OF THE NATION RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC LAWYERS, NACL, THIS 16TH DAY OF MAY, 2021

COMMENCEMENT:

We, members of the National Association of Catholic Lawyers (NACL) during our Executive Meeting on the 14th of May, 2021 deliberated, among other issues, on the State of the Nation, and view with great concern and apprehension, the rapidly deteriorating security situation and level of poor governance in our country Nigeria. This is characterised by insurgency in the North-East region of the country, relentless acts of brigandage and banditry in other parts of the country, attacks on farming communities by persons suspected to be herdsmen, rustling of cattle and other livestock, kidnap for ransom and killing of innocent persons including students, clerics and law enforcement officers, bombing of police stations and other law enforcement offices, including the Correctional Centre in Owerri, Imo State, and sundry security breaches of diverse and increasingly destructive kind across the country.

Cost of governance is on the increase with low level of productivity. Public servants have resorted to heavy extortion before doing their jobs adding to dwindling income in the polity. In addition, the poor health care has led to the death of many Nigerians, young and old.

The frustrations within the system and an apparent laissez faire and seeming unconcerned posture of the country's leadership has led to calls from some quarters for the President to resign or be impeached. These calls arise from genuine concerns of Nigerians.

Having prayerfully reflected on this deplorable state of the Nigerian nation, and the extent to which it could conceivably degenerate if the situation remains unchecked, we hereby issue this statement:

Our hearts are with all Nigerians, especially families and victims of various acts of criminality and deaths resulting from poor healthcare, and we pray fervently to God the father of all mankind, to console them, to look with favour on them and grant them the fortitude to bear their irreparable losses.

We condemn in the strongest terms ever the unbridled acts of criminal elements operating almost without hindrance, and we call on the Nigeria Police Force, the Armed Forces and other law enforcement agencies, to redouble their efforts towards the fulfillment of their constitutional responsibility for the security of lives and property of the average Nigerian.

We restate, for the avoidance of any doubt whatsoever, the provisions of S. 14 (2) (b) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended, which states as follows: "the security and welfare of the people SHALL BE the primary purpose of government"

Specifically with regards to intermittent attacks on farming communities by persons suspected to be herdsmen, we fully associate ourselves with the recent call by the Southern States' Governors to the effect that "development and population growth has put pressure on available land and increased the prospects of conflict between migrating herdsmen and local populations in the South. Given this scenario, it becomes imperative to enforce the ban on Open Grazing in the South (including "(cattle

movement to the South by foot)” We further call on the Northern Governors to heed the advice of the Kano and Benue States” Governors to ban open grazing, save the farmers from agony and the Nation from the consequent high prices of food.

We call on the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation, His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari to, as a matter of urgency, **convene an International Security Summit that will exhaustively deliberate on the current security situation**, enable us learn lessons from countries that experienced similar situations in the past and have overcome same and, most importantly, avail us the opportunity as a country and as a people, to take advantage of State of the Art technological equipment for security surveillance and action.

Our country Nigeria remains a Federation founded on democratic principles as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended. Consequently, we remain committed to the ideals of “an indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God”.

Nevertheless, we are not completely unmindful of the unbridled right of any person, or group of persons, to Freedom of Association as enshrined in the Constitution, and more particularly, Article 20 (1) of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act CAP 10 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, to wit:

“All People shall have a right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to Self-Determination”. We therefore, endorse and embrace in its entirety the Statement by the President, Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) to the effect that “every Nigerian is a stakeholder in the affairs of the country. Every Nigerian has the right to express themselves in a manner that does not incite people to violence or chaos whenever they perceive that the elected Government is failing”.

We, therefore, call on relevant authorities, to respect at all times, and in all circumstances, the unfettered and constitutionally fundamental freedoms available to all law-abiding Nigerians who conduct themselves within the confines of the Constitution and other relevant legislation. We condemn in strong terms the recent reprisal attack on communities in Konshisha Local Government Area of Benue State by officers and men of the Nigeria Army and call on the Government of Benue State to immediately set up a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to ascertain the immediate and remote causes of the circumstances leading to this attack, ascertain the number of lives lost, the extent of damage caused to property, and persons culpable in anyway, with a view to meting out appropriate and deserving sanctions.

We restate our commitment to the constitutionally guaranteed Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, and we call on the political class and other persons of influence, to refrain from dubious utilisation of religion as an effective tool to inflame passion, cause disaffection and ill-will amongst Nigerians, further dividing us along ethnic and religious lines. We remain committed to the ideals of inter-religious dialogue, mutual respect for diversity and harmonious relationship with persons of other faith and civilisation, and will continue to do all that we can to sustain this.

As Catholics, and as Lawyers, we are conscious of the right of workers to associate freely as expressly contained in the Papal Encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII- Rerum Novarum (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour) on May 15, 1891, and do hereby restate our solidarity with members

of the Judiciary Staff Association of Nigeria (JUSUN) currently on an industrial action to press for Autonomy and Independence of the Judicial Branch of Government at all levels.

We find it completely unacceptable that the activities of an entire Branch of Government, in this case the branch that holds the last hope of the Common Man, will be shut down for such an extended period of time. Consequently, we call on the National Assembly, the Executive Branch of Government and the Nigeria Governors Forum to immediately accede to the legitimate demands of JUSUN and allow for the resumption of full operations of courts at all levels.

We further call on the Executive to be more pro-active and take governance seriously. The President should address Nigerians more often especially as we move through greater challenges and where he has challenges in the delivery of the fruits of Governance should consider stepping aside.

CONCLUSION:

The deplorable security situation in our country Nigeria is no doubt disturbing and often overwhelming, but as a faith community we remain unshakeable in our belief that our Nation Nigeria will triumph over these challenges of development, and rightly reposition herself on the path to becoming “one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity”. We rely on the old saying of Cicero’s De Legibus „Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto!“ (The safety/welfare of the people is the Supreme Law).

Barr. Chukwuma Ezeala

Barr. Angela Odunukwe

President

Secretary General