

FULL SPEECH OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN NIGERIA WHEN THEY VISITED PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI ON THURSDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2018 IN ABUJA

Preamble

Your Excellency,

We, the representatives of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, bring you our cordial greetings and blessings. We desired this meeting, in order to continue the dialogue we initiated with you even before your election as President. We therefore thank you for granting us this audience, which affords us the opportunity to share with you, once again, our thoughts and concerns on some issues affecting our dear country, Nigeria

First, we thank God for bringing you back to us after a period of ill health.

We hope and pray that you continue to make progress on the way to full recovery, in order to be able to face the enormous challenges emanating from your exalted office

Your Excellency, needless to say that, as President, you are the Father of our dear country Nigeria. It is therefore pertinent that as loyal citizens as well as informed members of the society we come to you from time to time to express not only our willing cooperation with the government in working for the progress of our country, but also to share with you the feelings of the multitude of Nigerians at this moment. We work with the people at the grassroots and therefore, have first-hand information about what they are going through. There is no doubt that when you came into office, you had an enormous amount of the goodwill of Nigerians, since many saw you as a person of integrity who would be able to bring sanity into a system that was nearly crippled by endemic corruption. Nearly three years later, however one has the feeling that this good will is being fast depleted by some glaring failures of government which we have the moral responsibility to bring to your notice, else we would be failing in our duty as spiritual fathers and leaders.

Our Concerns

Your Excellency, there is too much suffering in the country: poverty, hunger, insecurity, violence, fear... the list is endless. Our beloved country appears to be under siege. Many negative forces seem to be keeping a stranglehold on the population, especially the weaker and defenceless ones.

There is a feeling of hopelessness across the country. Our youths are restive and many of them have taken to hard drugs, cultism and other forms of violent crime, while many have become victims of human trafficking. The Nation is nervous.

Just as we seem to be gradually emerging from the dark tunnel of an economic recession that caused untold hardship to families and individuals, violent attacks by unscrupulous persons, among whom are terrorists masquerading as herdsmen, have led to a near civil war situation in many parts of the country. We are saddened that, repeatedly, innocent citizens in different communities across the nation are brutally attacked and their sources of livelihood mindlessly destroyed. Lives are wasted and property, worth billions of Naira, including places of worship, schools, hospitals and business enterprises are torched and turned to ashes.

We are still more saddened by the recent massacre of unarmed citizens by these terrorists in some communities in Benue, Adamawa, Kaduna and Taraba States which has caused national shock, grief and outcry. The silence of the federal government in the wake of these horrifying attacks is, to say the least, shocking. There is a feeling of helplessness among the people and the danger that some people may begin to take laws into their hands.

We therefore earnestly urge the government to take very seriously its primary responsibility of protecting the lives and property of its citizens and ensure that such mindless killings do not reoccur. Herdsmen may be under pressure to save their livestock and economy but this is never to be done at the expense of other people's lives and means of livelihood. We would like to add our voice to those of other well-meaning Nigerians who insist that a better alternative to open grazing should be sought rather than introducing "cattle colonies" in the country. While thinking of how best to help cattle owners establish ranches, government should equally have plans to help the other farmers whose produce is essential for our survival as a nation.

In a similar vein, daredevil kidnapers, who at present are having a field day, with a feeling of invincibility, must be made to understand that there is a government in this country. Government should invest more in equipping our Police Force with modern high-tech devices that will help them track down and arrest these criminals and make them face the wrath of the law.

The Federal Character Principle is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: "The government of the Federation or any of its and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (Section 14, Sub-section 3-4). Disregard for this Principle in some federal government appointments as well as perceptible imbalance in the distribution of federal amenities has created the loss of a sense of belonging in many parts of the country, hence the constant cries of marginalization, agitation for secession and calls for restructuring.

These and many more such problems are, in our opinion, grave matters that should be worrying all political leaders in our country today, rather than any bid for re-election.

Conclusion and Assurance of Prayers

Our Church has always complemented the efforts of government in such areas as providing quality education and primary health care services to our people. We continue to make our contribution to nation-building through our prayers, admonitions and assistance to needy Nigerians whenever we can. As the voice of the voiceless, we shall continue to highlight the plight of our people and play our prophetic role of sensitizing the government, thus promoting good governance, national unity and cohesion. We strongly feel that everybody in government at this moment has to take more decisive steps to restore the confidence of the Nigerian people in our governments. Our collective efforts must be seen in the desire to return to the fine principles of democracy, such as true federalism negotiation and consensus building, as means of achieving a more equitable distribution of the resources of our country and good governance.

Thank you, Excellency, for the audience and may God bless you.

Most Rev. Dr. Ignatius Ayau KAIGAMA
Archbishop of Jos
President, CBCN

Most Rev. Dr. William AVENYA
Bishop of Gboko
Secretary, CBCN