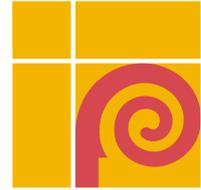


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PRESSEMITTEILUNGEN
DER DEUTSCHEN
BISCHOFSKONFERENZ



Statement

**des Vorsitzenden der Nigerianischen Bischofskonferenz,
Erzbischof Dr. Ignatius Kaigama,
beim Pressegespräch zur Lage der Christen in Nigeria
am 27. September 2012 in Fulda
zur Herbst-Vollversammlung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz**

“Nigeria today and the emergence of insurgents”

News of Nigeria in recent times have been news of militancy, political, ethnic and religious conflicts which in the case of the Islamic fundamentalist sect, Boko Haram, has dealt a devastating blow to the unity, stability and progress of the country. At different fora, I have maintained that it is wrong to conclude that Nigeria is at war and not to talk of a religious war. Nigeria is rather going through the throes of a nation seeking national rebirth and all she needs is support and understanding to overcome the multi-dimensional situations of crises.

We have witnessed crises involving communities: the Niger Delta militants fought against underdevelopment, environmental degradation and the unfair distribution of the oil wealth until the government recently offered them Amnesty; the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Odua People's Congress (OPC) claimed political marginalization. We had the Ife/Modakeke crisis, the Umuleri and Aguleri crisis, the Tiv/Jukun/Kutep, etc. The uprising ensued because peaceful and genuine aspirations of these interest groups were disregarded over long periods.

What is happening in the country today is that Boko Haram and its collaborators are unleashing terror on innocent citizens in sporadic dimensions, especially in the North. They have used various means to kill and maim thousands of women, children and men in their fatherland. The security agents seem to have failed to protect lives and property and the government is unable to tame the activities of these insurgents. Citizens are left to protect themselves, a situation that has created a perpetual state of tension and fear.

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In the last two years, the Boko Haram sect determined to fight western education and culture which it refers to as evil, has claimed responsibility for bombings and killings in many parts of northern Nigeria, with Christians as special targets. Only last Sunday, 23rd September, there was another attack on the Catholic Cathedral in Bauchi ending up in deaths and injuries, where a young man drove his vehicle into a crowd getting out of the Cathedral after Mass on Sunday morning. There seems to be no end to this cruelty. The frequent attacks on Churches during Sunday worship have adversely affected Church attendance. The sect is categorical in asserting that it wants to kill government officials, security agents and Christians whom it refers to as “unbelievers”.

The philosophy of Boko Haram totally contradicts what religion stands for. While condemning western education as evil and preferring rather the koranic norms and the implementation of total Sharia, it still makes use of modern western weapons of destruction and communication. The Islamic sect has called on President Goodluck Jonathan to embrace Islam or resign from office and has vowed that Christians will not know peace again as long as they do not accept Islam.

When I led the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria on June 3rd, 2012 to Aso Rock Villa after a National Catholic Prayer Pilgrimage in Abuja, we registered our displeasure over the insurgency of Boko Haram and its effects on the unity of the country, insisting that criminality and terrorism should not be negotiated even as government continues to respect the views of ethnic blocs and groups propagating legitimate causes. We alerted President Goodluck Jonathan on the outright denial to Christians access to land to build Churches in some core northern states; the refusal to allow Christian Religious Education in schools; to broadcast Christian programmes on national or state radio or television and to build chapels in tertiary institutions to render Christian spiritual support to staff and students; yet Muslim students and staff enjoy this privilege.

I am happy that the international community is closely monitoring the situation in Nigeria. It is now seeking more knowledge on Boko Haram and its activities. Perhaps, when this is understood, there might be a well thought-out intervention on eliminating the terror. On July 10, 2012, the United States Congress held a special session on terrorism in Nigeria and the activities of Boko Haram. It invited the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafar. I have shared thoughts about Nigeria in Italy and early this month in Berlin with senior officials in the Chancellor’s office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and at a programme organized to celebrate 50 years of development cooperation between the German State and the Church in Bonn on the 6th of September in the presence of the President of Germany, Dr. Joachim Gauck. We appreciate the support of the German people through MISEREOR, MISSIO and the CHURCH IN NEED. The social services such as water provision, primary health care, relief for victims of crises, agriculture, and programmes such as peace education, election monitoring and good governance etc rendered through MISEREOR’s assistance go a long way to help the Church in reaching out to all

without discrimination of tribe or religion. We have not forgotten the very memorable solidarity visit of the German Bishops' Conference to Nigeria in September 2009 led by the President of the Conference, Most Rev. Robert Zollitsch and his meetings with traditional and religious leaders as well as his well received speech on religious liberty.

When I received the International Golden Doves Peace Award on July 4th 2012 in Italy, it was for me an appreciation of our humble peace efforts in resolving the Christian/Muslim tension that gives birth to crises of multi dimensional proportions. In the past I have received visits in Jos from the American, Canadian, German, British and Italian Embassies all expressing solidarity with us. In my conversation with them I have not failed to mention that we do not feel supported in concrete ways. Each time violence erupts, rather, we get the uncomfortable security alerts given to their citizens and broadcast widely asking them to avoid certain towns or even the whole country. Such warnings could be given privately, considering that the citizens are not usually very many. In any case, the warnings give the signal of victory to the terrorists and put us in more jeopardy.

The occasion of the presentation of my two books: *Dialogue of Life: An Urgent Necessity for Nigerian Muslims and Christians* and *Peace, not War: A Decade of Interventions in the Plateau State Crises (2001-2011)* brought Christians and Muslims together in a very admirable manner and helped to buttress my emphasis on the essence of dialogue, reconciliation and peace in Nigeria. As an Archdiocese, we have gone beyond dialogue to robust project execution as we now run the Interfaith Vocational Training Centre, Bokkos where skills are acquired by Muslim and Christian youths who live and work together. We are in the process of establishing a Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Jos where proactive programmes for peace can be held and where dialogue, healing and reconciliation after ethnic, political or religious conflicts can take place. We need more collaborators.

In my pastoral ministry, I often feel more like a social worker than a pastor. I meet poor, hungry, sick, unemployed people, etc and I have to respond to their needs, even if very inadequately. There is a serious need for our government to improve infrastructural development, social welfare and the equitable distribution of resources.

While we admit that Boko Haram is misapplied Islam, we cannot generalize that religion is the cause of evil. Religion, as the word connotes, binds people and nations together and so it would be a total contradiction to seek to promote religion while killing with such insanity. Religion is about the respect for human life, honesty, love of human beings and peaceful coexistence.

Even at the risk of being termed insensitive to the plight of victims of Boko Haram, Nigerian Bishops have continued to preach non violence. The National Catholic Prayer Pilgrimage organized in Abuja from the 1st to the 2nd of June, 2012 was a spiritual response to an ugly situation and a clarion call that violence is not the answer; we must overcome evil with good.

Christians and Muslims in Nigeria must use the positive values of their religions to fight corruption, poverty, hunger and diseases and so bring peace instead of causing pain and destruction or resorting to hostile confrontation at the slightest argument.

Foreign companies working in Nigeria must not directly or indirectly encourage or support corrupt public officials especially in official business transactions.

The more corruption thrives, the more it cripples the future of our youth and the more we face a time bomb that will kill more mercilessly than the bombs of Boko Haram. It is in this respect that I even dare to see some good in the philosophy of the members of Boko Haram, who are bent on fighting against injustice, corruption, immorality, etc. What I hate in their approach is the violence that goes with pressing their demands and their suppression of religious liberty.

This situation in Nigeria calls for joint action by the government and citizens as well as the international community to combat terrorism in the land. We rely on the expert advice and support of western nations through intelligence training/gathering, sharing and help to deal with corruption, poverty and illiteracy which create the breeding ground for the eruption of violence.