

WE MUST PULL BACK FROM THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE.

A Message of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria to all People of Goodwill in Nigeria 23 February 2021

Our dear brothers and sisters,

1. Our country Nigeria has gone through many crises, and so far, has managed to survive them, by God's grace. But the ongoing crisis in the country should be of grave concern to everyone who still believes in "one united nation under God". We are really on the brink of a looming collapse, from which we must do all we can to pull back before the worst overcomes the nation. This is not merely crying wolf without cause!

2. 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. Time is running out and the situation needs to improve!

3. The clamour for self-defense is fast gaining ground. Many ethnic champions are loudly beating the drums of war, calling not only for greater autonomy but even for outright opting out of a nation in which they have lost all trust and sense of belonging. The calls for secession on an ethnic basis from many quarters should not be ignored or taken lightly. Many have given up on the viability and even on the desirability of the Nigeria project as one united country. No wonder many non-state actors are filling the vacuum created by a palpable failure of government. The Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari can no longer delay rising to its obligation to govern the nation; not according to ethnic and religious biases but along the lines of objective and positive principles of fairness, equity and, above all, justice. It is not too much for Nigerians to demand from Mr President sincerity both in the public and private domain. There are no more excuses.

4. We, of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, with members from all parts of Nigeria, are very highly disturbed about the present state of instability in the land. This must not be allowed to continue to fester and degenerate. We are raising this alarm because of our deep patriotic love for our nation, not for any sectional interests, be they political, ethnic or even religious.

5. Despite the persistence of crises around us; assassinations, Covid 19, kidnappings, murders, banditry, armed robberies, we sincerely affirm our faith in the viability and desirability of the Nigeria Project, as one prosperous nation under God. But we are also convinced that building such a nation, especially in our present circumstances, comes at a cost. We are also convinced that the alternative of tearing ourselves apart, comes with a cost that is far higher than what it takes to keep ourselves together. We must be ready to seek a common purpose with sincerity of mind. As individuals and as groups, we ought to be ready to make the necessary sacrifices that would enable us to manage our differences better and turn them into a positive rather than a negative force. Governments at different levels ought to lead the way.

6. We need to have the courage to admit that there is a lot wrong with our nation. It is our patriotic duty to point this out, with all objectivity and sincerity. The rule of law has too often been disregarded, giving way to widespread impunity, leading to a progressive break down of good order. There is a wide consensus that even the laws and rules we have made for ourselves are often the cause of our problems. No wonder there is an on-going clamour for constitution review, restructuring, decentralization of the security agencies and calls for many changes to many things we have been taking for granted. Examples include issues surrounding national census, constituency delimitations, states and the nagging issue of Local Government autonomy, violence and lack of internal democracy in political parties, a weak and compromised National Assembly, the Amendment of the Electoral Act etc. In these matters, the nation is not lacking in many good and brilliant ideas. What has been lacking has been the political will to embrace the change that is necessary for building a better nation.

7. We note the changes in the Command of the Service Chiefs. They are insiders and should be familiar with the problems of the insurgency and banditry. It is our prayer that we will witness a more co-ordinated strategy with State Governments and other security agencies for winning this sad war.

8. In conclusion, we wish to remind our countrymen and women that there are some basic values and principles that we need to uphold if the Nigeria project is to be successful. These include mutual respect for and acceptance of our diversities, a deep sense of justice for every person, equity, solidarity and inclusiveness. In addition, we must be ready for sincere dialogue, in the true sense of the word, as it was once defined by His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze, who is a renowned expert in dialogue: "You talk, I listen. I talk, you listen." On the one hand, there should be a dialogue between the people and the government. Government has the duty to create room for such dialogue, with groups and with individuals. It means being open and receptive to criticism. On the other hand, we the people need to dialogue with one another across our various lines of diversities and identities. In particular, ethnic and religious groups need to find a way to put their heads together to deal with our common challenges.

9. We note with deep sorrow, the events that have occurred in Niger State. These developments still expose our collective vulnerability. There is an urgent need for a clear strategy between the federal security agencies and the state governments to end the tragedy that we face. In addition, we propose the need for a formal meeting of statesmen and women across the board for us to think through the challenges that seem poised to push us into the abyss.

10. We pray, and we call on all to pray and work for the achievement of one Nigeria under God where the principle of the common good will be thought out and enshrined. We submit ourselves to the directives of God the Almighty Father to fill us with the wisdom and courage to pull back from this brink of collapse. Amen.



Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze
Archbishop of Benin-City
President.



Most Rev. Camillus Raymond Umoh
Bishop of Ikot Ekpene
Secretary.