

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT END OF THE 2021 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
CBCN'S CHURCH AND SOCIETY DEPARTMENT HELD AT CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT
OF NIGERIA RESOURCE CENTRE ON 16TH – 19TH NOVEMBER, 2021**

Preamble

The Church and Society Department of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) from 16th to 19th November, 2021. Participants included His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso – the Episcopal Chairman of the Department and the Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese, representatives of the Episcopal Chairmen of the different Units in the Department, 140 Coordinators from Dioceses and Religious groups across Nigeria, National Secretaries of the department's five composite units (Education, Family and Human Life, Health, Justice Development and Peace/Caritas, Migration and Refugees), and representatives of development partners working with the Church in Nigeria such as the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Caritas Germany and Misereor.

The theme of this year's AGM was, "National Security: Challenges for the Church and Society in Nigeria", with subthemes focused on the impacts of insecurity on education, family and human life, health, justice system, peace building, food security and overall development in Nigeria, including the generation of internally-displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring countries. The spate of agitations around the country, kidnapping, banditry, and indeed acts of terrorism, has left Nigerians helpless, as not much has been done by the government of the day to quell these vices and secure its citizens.

Observations and Recommendations

Participants reviewed the state of the nation, and based on the presentations and extensive deliberations, made the following observations and recommendations.

1. The successful conduct of the governorship election in Anambra state despite the contrived atmosphere of insecurity was adjudged as an indication of the people's resolve to grow Nigerian's democratic governance.
2. The passage of the direct primary voting system Bill by the National Assembly was welcomed by the participants; the President is strongly encouraged to expeditiously assent to the Bill in order to further build confidence and reassure Nigerians of their right to elect leaders through transparent processes.
3. Towards the 2023 electoral cycle, Nigerians are firmly encouraged to join any political party of their choice, register and obtain their PVC and be motivated to take active part in the processes. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was advised to step up its game, and improve on its processes, logistics and transmission of election results so that whoever is elected will enjoy the confidence and support of the masses.
4. Participants welcomed the submission of the EndSARS panel's report of investigation in Lagos state. While awaiting the white paper, they urged for justice to be done to all the victims of the Lekki massacre by ensuring that those found culpable face the full weight of the law.
5. Protection of lives and properties of citizens is a major mandate of every government. Accordingly, participants expressed utter dismay at the continued wanton destruction of human lives and the pervasive climate of criminality across the country. Therefore, we call on the government and its agencies to return the country to normalcy by restoring sanity to our fatherland through constructive engagement, dialogue and purposeful leadership.

6. In addition to the multifaceted impacts of insecurity on human lives, health, education and national cohesion, participants were concerned that the emigration of highly-trained technical manpower from the country has deleterious consequences to the wellbeing of our citizens, both now and in the future.
7. The destruction of schools, health facilities and worship centres breed poverty, hunger, diseases and increased mental health burden for the citizens. While commending the Church's social service structures for persevering in their missionary mandate of caring and supporting all persons in distress, we call on the government to show the necessary leadership by deploying workable strategies, rather than military force or psychological gaslighting.
8. In order to stem the increasing cases of youth criminality, substance abuse and proneness to violence, both religious institutions and the government were encouraged to support and revitalize extra-curricular activities for young people such as Man of Order, Boys' Scout, Girls' Guide and other youth-focused activities that would engage the minds of young Nigerians.
9. Nigeria's educational system should be reviewed, so that students and graduates of educational institutions will be ready for the labour market, and not as educated but unemployable. Participants advocated for the setting up entrepreneurial training centres for vocational programmes on skills and competencies needed for the current world of work.
10. Governments at all levels were implored to collaborate with the Church's organs and communities to provide physical security to social service facilities (schools, health centres, worship centres, etc.) in order to develop proactive and local preventative and rapid response mechanisms to reduce incidence of terror attacks, thus safeguarding available infrastructure.
11. The global development frameworks: Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved by Nigeria through partnership and collaboration with the various Catholic church's development organs (education, family and human life, health, JDPC and Migration/Refugees). This is quite possible because of the penetrative community presence of the church's structures, the delivery arteries and diligent local workforce.

Conclusion

The participants at the 2021 AGM of the Church and Society Department expressed gratitude to the leadership of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) for the efforts at building its organ that promotes integral human development. They prayed God not to abandon our dear country to the murderous interests and elements that assault our peoples, leaving many dead, maimed, displaced and/or unsure of tomorrow. May the gentle wind rise to soothe the distraught faces of Nigerians with justice, peace and development.

Signed:

Most Rev. Dr. Matthew Ndagoso
Chairman

Rev. Fr. Dr. Uche Obodoechina
Director

November 18, 2021
Abuja