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THE IMPACT OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA ON FAMILIES

Introduction

Family and Human Life Unit (FHLU) is the pro-life and pro-family ministry of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria and this unit is found in all the dioceses in Nigeria. Its vision is to see a nation that is thriving with the Culture of Life and the promotion of authentic marriage and family values with the mission to propergate the gospel of life, protect the sanctity and dignity of every human person from conception to natural death as well as to support families to live out authentic marriage and family values. Hence, the core values of this important ministry include, but not only limited to the following:

➢ Sacredness of every human life - from conception to its natural end
➢ Dignity of the Human Person
➢ Sacredness of Marriage and Family Life
➢ Responsible Parenthood and Natural Family Planning
➢ Children as Supreme Gifts by God to Marriage/Parents
➢ Parents as the Primary Educators of Children
➢ Dignity and Rights of the Elderly, the Infirm,
   and Persons with Disabilities

The importance of the family in any society is indisputable. This is why when family life breaks down or shattered, the society is deeply affected. As a result of this, the violence and insecurity we witness today in Nigeria tragically and fatally impacts on the family.

Insecurity and the Family

Insecurity caused by terrorism and other related negative activities have been a major challenge to Nigerian citizens in recent times. The activities of the Islamic sect (Boko Haram) had led to loss of lives and properties in the country especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria, and across the country. Some of these activities include suicide bomb attacks, sporadic shooting of unarmed and innocent citizens, burning of police stations, churches, kidnapping, including kidnapping of school children (primary, secondary, tertiary), etc. Kidnapping, rape, armed robbery and politically motivated muder cases, destruction of oil facilities as well as the attacks carried out by Fulani

herdsmen on some communities have been part of an ever-increasing epidemics of insecurity challenges facing the country. Lately, the mayhem appears to have shifted from killing and maiming innocent citizens to killing of security men which includes policemen, vigilantes, etc. The terrorists also hide under various nomenclatures such as: "unknown gunmen", "hoodlums" etc.   All this has negative implications for the family.

The Implications of the Current Spate of Insecurity on the Family

The family which is the primary cell of every society has always provided safe haven for its members. The family makes it possible to form close bonds and emotional relationships amongst siblings and their parents. But when these members are emotionally and physically traumatised, the impact is tremendous. Many lives and properties have been lost, and a large number of citizens are rendered homeless. Families have lost their loved ones and means of livelihood. As a result of this many women have become widows. Children have been rendered orphans without much hope for the future. In addition to the death of family members, the surviving ones are left traumatised, fearful, and uncertain about the future. Their means of livelihood has been shattered as many can no longer go to their farms for fear of being kidnapped, maimed, or killed. Thus, hunger, disease, and uncertainty of the future have become part of their existence on daily basis. In fact, following the insecurity in the country, members of the family may react differently to this situation. For instance, psychologists assert that the level of anxiety could be abnormally raised as parents continue to be afraid for each other's safety and the safety of their children that are away from home. Family members may experience nightmares or begin to experience upsetting dreams about most of the events taking place in their neighbourhood previously considered to be normal. The continual experience of fear arising from the occurrence of several distressing events could spiral into consistituting an unwholesome environment that may negatively impact on the healthy upbringing of children.

It is possible to inadventently develop an attitude of displacement of anger onto people who may not have caused them the harm they suffer. Once a culture of anger is nurtured and developed its effects could spread even to family members as well. Family members may feel overwhelmed by insecurity or may run out of the control of their lives. It might leave everyone to guess on what would happen next. Therefore everyone would be left to be his/her wits ends to understand and accommodate this air of uncertainty as long as it exists. If talking makes people upset, they will

often avoid it. Impatience, misunderstandings, arguments over small things and withdrawal from each other can all negatively impact on family life and relationships.

Many of the families affected by the insecurity described above are farmers. Their means of livelihood is destroyed as the kidnappers and killers destroy their farms and kill them if they resist the attack. They run away from their comfortable homes and are "exiles" in their own country and are unfortunately designated as internally displaced persons (IDP). Consequently, hunger and disease would become inevitable. Thus their children's future is jeopardised as they would find it difficult to go to school. The recurring question on the lips of so many is when will all these atrocities end?

The Way Forward

Given the foregoing, the Family and Human Life Committee of the CBCN together with the Family and Human Life Unit of the Catholic Secretariat desire to encourage all Nigerians to remain resolute and hopeful. We do not have another country to call our own. God our Father could not have been mistaken in creating us as members of the Nigerian family. He will not abandon us. The Church on her part collaborates with all the stakeholders in ensuring the protection of lives and properties of Nigerian citizens in all parts of the country.

In the face of security challenges that Nigeria is passing through, the role of the family, especially parents cannot be overemphasised. Proper upbringing of children is paramount. As parents raise their children and wards, they help to inculcate habits and behaviours that help build the society as well as become aware of those that would destroy our society. Parenting is very fundamental in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of the individuals because it exposes children to various experiences during their formative years. As the process of raising and educating a child starts from birth until adulthood, parents should take this responsibility seriously. At home, parents have to promote the ethical values of tolerance and genuine/authentic love for each other. They should demonstrate this by being good neighbours to each other in their neighbourhood. This has become imperative since children learn more by examples, especially those values their parents exhibit. In addition, parents can use our traditional folk storytelling and proverbs and especially those texts from the Scriptures that stress tolerance, endurance, justice, forgiveness, love, and peaceful co-

existence among mankind. More emphatically, they should teach their children and wards the genuine words of God from the Holy Scriptures by stressing those aspects of the Scriptures texts that enjoin and admonish peaceful co-existence in the society. Also parents need to teach their children and wards how to be security conscious – around the house and in the neighbourhood, and encourage them to report to the security agencies of people in their neighbourhood noticed to be of suspicious characters.

Individual members of our society are also encouraged to become aware of the threats to security that exist in their respective communities and resolve to protect human life and property and to ensure that they protect their own lives by eschewing violence and aggressive behaviours. These national security threats have greatly challenged the physical well-being of the population and jeopardises the stability of the nation's economy and institutions. It is therefore the responsibility of the government to ensure that proper investigations are carried out about any known security challenges and their perpetrators. To embrace the perpetrators as "friends" or turning the other way cannot stop their deadly activities. Governments can also conduct massive training of security agents on how to deploy rapid responses. It can also direct funding to provide palliatives to affected families as well as enforce existing laws on possession of illegal weapons.

Conclusion

To conclude, no one can simply ignore the catastrophic impact of the security challenges in this country today, especially as the family is grossly endangered. All hands should be on deck to tackle this menace as we still place our trust in God who consoles and does not abandon His people in the face of difficulties. He assures us of His comfort and closeness:

"Comfort my people, comfort my people, says your God….Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 40:1; 41:10).

If we do our part in curbing the insecurity in our midst God will protect and safeguard us.

Thank you.

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