

Open Letter To Nigerian Christian Leaders

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Your Lordships,

Beyond The Communiqué Of The Catholic Bishops & CAN's Call For All Christians Protest Over The Killing Of Christians In Nigeria: Other Available Lawful Steps At Disposal Of Nigerian Christian Leaders

(Intersociety, Nigeria: 29th April 2018)-The two recent statements through a communiqué released by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, dated 26th April 2018 and a press conference addressed by CAN through its Secretary Gen, Musa Asake, PhD, dated 27th April 2018 on rising wave of killing of Christians and destruction of their sacred places of worship by Fulani and Boko Islamic Jihadists across Nigeria are a welcome development.

They are also a clear and commendable departure from weak, watery, cowardly, atrocity friendly and pro establishment statements issued by some key Christian leaders in recent months in Nigeria inclusive of that issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria on 8th February 2018. The said statement of 8th February 2018 is the weakest of such statements issued in recent years by the leadership of CBCN.

We further saw it as tantamount to “solidarity or carry go” message to the perpetrators and prompters of the ongoing inter-religious atrocities in the country. The referenced weak statement was issued by Your Lordships during Your Lordships visit to the President. The tune of the statement also suggested that the Buhari Administration was visited and thanked by Your Lordships for its quiet and inaction over the untamed wave of killing of Christians and destruction of their sacred places of worship in Nigeria.

It is recalled Your Lordships that the commendable and strong worded Catholic Bishops Conference communiqué of 26th April 2018 was issued following the killing on 24th April 2018 of two Rev Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tylolaha, of St Ignatius Catholic Church, Mbalom, Benue State; during which two catechists, altar boys and other parishioners of the Parish were massacred by Federal Government protected Fulani Herdsmen in the middle of the Parish's early morning mass or service. Their Lordships, the Catholic Bishops led by Your Lordship (Most Rev Augustine Akubeze) had also travelled to the Vatican City to confer with the Pope over worrying insecurity of Christians and their sacred places of worship in Nigeria, among other related issues in the Catholicism across the world.

Recall too Your Lordships that the referenced Press Conference of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), dated 27th April 2018 was addressed following unending massacre of Christians and destruction of their sacred places of worship across Nigeria by the duo of terror Fulani Herdsmen and Boko Haram insurgents; with the Buhari Administration and its security agencies strongly seen by many as complicit. The strong worded Press Conference also called for all Christian protests within the vicinities of their respective churches and other sacred places of worship; to be specifically held today 29th April and on 6th May 2018.

Having carefully read and studied the two statements, it gladdens our heart that Nigerian Christian leaders are beginning to wake up from their chronic slumber and realize the dangers of imminent extinction of Christian Faith in Nigeria and its replacement with Islamic Caliphate throughout the country particularly in the Middle Belt, Southeast and South-south Nigeria.

Our Organization has severally joined other Nigerians of good conscience and pacifism to call on all Christian leaders in Nigeria to shun crude pursuit and worship of ill-gotten wealth and their wielders and rise in strong defense of Christian Faith in Nigeria. We had also called on them to focus and properly direct their energies towards the protection and growth of Christian Religion from the crushing hands of Jihadism and be tolerant of indigenous religions and their sacred places of worship.

Instead of dissipating energies locating and destroying in bushes, forests, community squares and centres; of artefacts and other religious symbols of traditional religionists including cultural monuments such as communal "Ikoro Gongs" and labelling them "Satanic instruments of worship", Christians in Nigeria under Your Lordships including "crusade warriors" should focus their attention more in the direction of real enemies of the Christian Faith including conquering of aggressor Jihadists by prayers and anointing; and leave traditional religionists and their sacred symbols of faith and places of worship alone.

We had also in our research statement of Sunday, 22nd April 2018, graphically brought to the attention of Your Lordships and other Christian leaders in Nigeria the systematic patterns and trends of slaughtering in the name of Islam, of Christians and indiscriminate destruction of their sacred places of worship across the world; leading to global death of 270m Christians and ors since 622AD or past 1400yrs.

The research statement, titled: ***imminent extinction of Christian Faith and rise of Islamic Caliphate in Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria...***, was dated 22nd April 2018. See www.intersociety-ng.org for full details. The statement also gave detailed account of patterns and trends of killing of Christians in Nigeria since 1945, leading to death of over 300, 000 Christians excluding the massacre of over 3m Christians dominated by native Igbo Christians during the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War of 1967-70.

True to the choice of words of the Catholic Bishops in their strongly worded communiqué, Mr. President of Nigeria has been presiding over killing fields in the country since mid 2015. We also agree in totality with the leadership of CAN that Nigeria "has turned to River of Blood flowing endlessly" under the Buhari Administration and that "Islamist insurgents are pushing Nigeria off the Edge of Precipice". We further agreed with CAN which correctly accused "security forces of collaborating with killers of Christians and destroyers of their sacred places of worship" and "undeniable endorsement of the genocide by the Buhari Administration". It is a truism that MACBAN combines (religious) *blood with enterprise* in their so called cattle herding which is now a national security policy of the Buhari Administration or *Cattletocracy*.

As correctly observed and disclosed by CAN in its Press Conference of 27th April 2018, “past few days of April 2018 had witnessed wanton killing by Fulani Herdsmen and related others of over 300 defenceless Christians in Benue State alone” and that “no fewer than 74 Christians were slaughtered in the State in less than 72hrs between 24th and 26th April 2018”.

Further statistics by CAN showed that 19 Christians were massacred at St Ignatius Catholic Church, Mbalom. No fewer than 23 Christians were massacred in Guma Local Government Area of the State on 25th April 2018 and 27 Christians killed in the same Guma Local Government Area of the State on 26th April; with separate five others massacred in another community inside church premises located in the same Guma Local Government Area on same 26th April 2018; totalling death of 74 defenceless Christians.

Our statistics additionally show that Fulani Islamist Jihadists’ attacks on two churches in Benue State killed no fewer than 24 Christian worshippers on 24th and 26th April 2018. In the past four months of 2018, over 1000 Christians have been killed by terror Fulani Herdsmen in the States of Benue, Southern Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba and Adamawa States; out of which Christian killings in Benue accounted for 50% or over 500 deaths while over 500 others died in Taraba, Adamawa, Kogi, Plateau and Southern Kaduna. Scores have also been slain in Edo, Delta, Ondo, Enugu, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi States, etc.

By the end of this year 2018, if care is not properly taken, it may most likely be the bloodiest year for Christians in Nigeria in the hands of terror Fulani Herdsmen. Having killed over 1000 Christians in the past four months, Christian death toll may mostly likely hit 4000 or more by the end of 2018. In 2014 alone, terror Boko Haram killed over 5700 mainly Christians in Nigeria while terror Fulani Herdsmen killed 1,229 Christians in the same year.

Independent concerns over *undeniable complicity* of Nigerian security forces especially the Nigerian Army and the Police in these killings have continuously grown and manifested openly across the country. The invasion and ransacking by soldiers of the Nigerian Army on 26th April 2018 of the Parish House of Rev Father Vesuwe Benjamin; a priest attached to the Catholic Archdiocese of Gboko; barely 48 hours after terror Fulani Herdsmen invaded St Ignatius Catholic Church in same Benue State and massacred two Priests, two catechists and fifteen other parishioners; is a clear case in point.

The soldiers had invaded his Parish House and turned everything including his sacred cassock wardrobe upside down claiming that they were searching for weapons kept by the Rev Father; yet none of the Fulani Herdsmen that massacred 19 worshippers at St Ignatius Catholic Church in the State, with their AK-47s has been arrested.

As a clear confirmation that the ongoing killing of Christians and destruction of their sacred places of worship in Nigeria is solely targeted at Christians, their sacred places of worship, communities and farmlands/bans; Your Lordships, all the following fifteen names of the slain victims and four badly injured others; who are victims of terror Fulani Herdsmen attacks on 25th April 2018 in Ali-Agudu Village of Guma Local Government Area of Benue State are Christians.

The names of the fifteen slain Christians were given as Member Martha Ugbuusu, Okohol Nyamve, Zaki Michael Alaaga, Cosmos Alaaga, Ukaana Ujir, Terdoo Ivokor, Paulina Augustine, Ushiveer Tyeku, Mayooga Tyeku, Magreti Mtem, Charity Shomngi, Babangida Kuuga, Kulega Babangida, Akombobee Bua and Michael Akosu. The Four injured ones are Bridget Ugbuusu, Hannah Kaduna, Eucharia Anyoko and Wankaa Zende.

The above further shames and exposes the falsehood of the present central Government and a section of complicit media that the killings are grazing and farming violence related and raises the following questions: ***why is it that Fulani Herdsmen attacks and destruction of sacred places of worship are only targeted at Christian communities? Are Christians the only farmers in Plateau, Yobe, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue, Southern Kaduna, Taraba and Adamawa States? What have grazing got to do with killing of Christian worshippers, priests and destruction of churches?***

Beyond issuance of the two powerful and strong worded statements above by the Catholic Bishops Conference and the Christian Association of Nigeria, more lawful and coordinated efforts are needed to checkmate the ongoing orgy of butchery on the ground of faith in Nigeria. The CAN's call for all Christian protests locally and internationally and their methods of actualization is to say the least, weak, uncoordinated and incoherent with expressive traditions of Christian assemblies across the world. The expressive traditions of Christian assemblies including Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches are religious processions with signs of the cross and other Christian symbols and armouries such as Holy Bibles and the "Blessed Sacrament" of the Catholic Church.

Calling on "Christians to embark on mere mortal protests" without their spiritual armouries such as Holy Bibles, signs of the cross and Blessed Sacrament is like a benevolent native doctor embarking on a tasking journey without his seer's bag and sacred sceptre (Offor). The national leadership of CAN should therefore retreat and return to their planning or drawing board, re-jig their strategies and come up with effective modalities for organizing "national and zonal holy processions" with full sacred Christian procession paraphernalia involved.

The processions should be effectively covered by local and international media and periodically held on Sundays under the coordination of CAN and CBCN. This method must be devoid of "hit and run" tactics or fire brigade approach but made bi-monthly until the federal authorities are compelled to wake up to their constitutional responsibilities of properly and equitably manning the security of the country, persons and properties irrespective of religious and ethnic sentiments or considerations.

Another part of lawful steps by Christian leaders to checkmate the orgy of butchery against Christians and destruction of their sacred places of worship in Nigeria will be to get all Christian members of the National Assembly to embark on periodic including bi-monthly boycott of the proceedings of the National Assembly with effective local and international media coverage until the Presidency of Muhammadu Buhari reverses itself and do the needful including rising to its constitutional duties of properly administering the pluralistic Nigeria and its securitization.

There is also need to introduce *benevolent political Christianity to checkmate malevolent political Islam and its social, security and political schisms in Nigeria*. Establishment of research centres by CAN and CBCN with periodic generation of research findings across the country on number of Churches destroyed and Christians killed by Islamist Jihadists as well as identification of State and non State actor perpetrators involved and related others is of particular importance.

This should include proper profiling of witnesses including relatives of the slain and wounded victims and scenes of crime testimonials as well as welfare committees to cater for slain victims' relatives and wounded others. Church services and sermons should be reviewed to accommodate enlightenment sessions for the congregants and the clergies from research findings generated from Christian research centres across Nigeria; on the state of church or Christianity in Nigeria including its growth or under-growth, threats and challenges, etc.

Christian leaders should organize periodic national and international press conferences on the state of Christianity in Nigeria including periodic international joint press conferences and communiqués with the likes of the Papacy at Vatican's St Peter's Square in the case of Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, etc. Effective international networking and contacts as well as diplomatic pressures are further needed especially by engaging the United Nations and its relevant bodies and world leading democratic nations including United States and other nonviolent and liberal religious friendly countries, bodies and institutions.

Further research is periodically needed by Christian leaders especially in the areas of regional and international criminal and civil justice remedies such as using the instrumentality of the ICC and its Rome Statute to cause and bring State and non State actor atrocity perpetrators to be held to account for their crimes against humanity, conscience and religion including atrocities they committed in the ongoing wave of violence against defenceless Christians and their sacred places of worship. Other lawful steps to quench slaughtering of Christians in Nigeria or any part thereof are lined up for release in our subsequent public statements.

Attached Pictures are those of killing fields in Benue (courtesy of Stop the Benue Genocide Facebook page) and ransacked Parish House of Rev Father Vesuwe Benjamin of the Catholic Archdiocese of Gboko (posted on 26th April 2018 courtesy of Morris Bogzy Bogbenda Facebook page).

Yours Faithfully,

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