

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA DURING A
COURTESY VISIT TO HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU, GCFR ON 28 JULY 2026**

PARTNERS IN BUILDING A JUST, PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS NIGERIA

Mr. President,

1. Greetings: I bring you warm greetings and prayers from all the members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. I am Archbishop Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, the Archbishop of Kaduna and the newly elected President of our Conference. I thank you immensely for granting us this audience, which offers us the opportunity to share with you some of our observations and genuine concerns about our country. This ensures the continuity of our collaborative engagement in the task of building a healthy nation that all of us would be proud to belong to: "a nation of justice, love and peace."

2. The Visit of Archbishop Gallagher: Your Excellency, may we use this opportunity to express our gratitude to you and the Ministry of External Affairs for the warm reception that you gave to the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States and International Organisations, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, during his recent visit on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between the Holy See and the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We, as Nigerians and Catholics, are happy to share the two identities and proud of the healthy and unbroken relations between the two states. We believe that the relations will bear perceptible fruits for Christianity and Christians in our country. This, Mr. President, is a time when many Christians have legitimate concerns about their place in Nigeria, especially regarding the departure from the Christian/Muslim presidency, and we hope that, through deliberate government policies, those concerns will be addressed and Christians will be reassured of their rights as citizens. We expect that you will take steps to soothe frayed nerves and address the concerns.

3. Quality tertiary education and the challenge of limited spaces: Mr. President, Sir, you have shown a commitment to giving hope and succour to our youth through NELFund, the Student Loan Initiative. This deserves commendation. Unfortunately, by global standards, Nigeria does not as yet have enough universities to cater for a bulging youth population. Only a tiny fraction of the persons seeking admission into the university actually get it, owing to limited number of places available. We therefore hope that the recent moratorium placed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) on the establishment of new private universities does not cancel out the gains of NELFund.

4. Sustaining the gains of the democratic experience: Mr. President, on matters of the state, we are genuinely concerned by fears expressed across the country on the fate of opposition politics. You have a track record of having been in active opposition. Many voices are screaming over what they consider to be the constriction of the political space, with some fearing that a one-party state is being anticipated.

Whether these fears are genuine or not, can only be tested by the signals citizens receive from Your Excellency as the leader of the party in power. To this end, we urge you to encourage elected political office holders who are members of your party – Governors, members of the National Assembly, Local Government Chairmen – to ensure that a genuine level playing field is maintained and that focus is placed on making everyone see that the rules and processes are fair to all and respected by all. As a man who risked so much in the struggle for the return of democratic rule in the dark days of military dictatorship, your greatest legacy would be the strengthening of our democratic institutions.

5. Credible elections for the avoidance of disaster: Furthermore, there have been growing concerns about the electoral processes. We note the efforts being made to ensure that the elections are free, fair and credible. Sadly, there is an increasing feeling of disenchantment with the clear manipulation of the electoral processes, and the collective feeling that people's votes do not count. Lower voter turnouts are a mark of distrust in the electoral processes. It is our hope that you be on the forefront in demanding that the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, delivers credible elections, to ensure that Nigeria is set on the path of national development and integrity. This ought to start with making voters' cards easily available to all eligible voters and end with election results that reflect the true choice of Nigerians. Adequate and timely funding of INEC is required to ensure that the Agency inspires the confidence of citizens. Anything short of transparent, free, fair and credible elections in 2027 would be an invitation to avoidable disaster against which all well-meaning Nigerians have been praying. We urge that the conduct of the political class should be in tune with the voices we lift to God in prayer.

6. But we need to be alive and secure first: Mr. President, we congratulate you for the recent successful release of the kidnapped school children and their teachers in Oyo State. The arrest of some of the kidnappers and their speedy prosecution is one of the few positive indicators of what a willing government and its agencies could do to protect the life and property of the citizens. We commend you for this and for other such cases in recent times. Unfortunately, these remain few and isolated exceptions. Our nation still remains a favourable destination for terrorism, banditry and high levels of insecurity that threaten our collective existence. Schools, places of worship, homes, farms, rural roads and highways. Nowhere is safe anymore, as bandits and criminals freely carry away scores of worshippers and schoolchildren, even in broad daylight undisturbed, kidnap and butcher simple as well as high profile citizens mercilessly and unapologetically. Our sovereignty is at stake and, even by African standards, our insecurity continues to diminish our standing and our ability to serve as the leader of Africa.

7. Worsening quality of life, suffering and pain: When the security situation in the country is taken together with the deterioration and near collapse of the power sector, the sorry state of our roads, the economic hardship, one wonders how much of the renewed hope agenda flaunted by your administration is being realised. Mr President, our nation is bleeding. The citizens are suffering and crying. Not only on account of the constant threat to their life by criminal elements, but also because of some policies of government whose promised positive effects have been delayed too long before being felt. You have said a couple of times that you hear their cries and feel their pain. But words are not enough. They expect concrete action that engenders some change in their condition.

8. Pope Leo XIV among us will strengthen our collective prayers and efforts: Finally, we believe that the problems and burden of our nation require a sincere commitment to good governance for the common good to the glory of God. We continue to pray for our dear country and appeal to you to take seriously our pleas for greater collaboration between the Church and the State for the overall wellbeing of our people. We believe that Mr President is aware that the Holy Father, Pope Leo holds our country very close to his heart and constantly prays for us. During our visit to him in March this year, he was quite enthusiastic about a visit to Nigeria on a date in the future. As you know, Sir, that will only happen if you invite him. We request that this be done soon. Our land and its people will benefit immensely from his presence and blessing.

9. Two particular requests: Mr. President, we respectfully place two specific requests before Your Excellency. First, we ask that Your Excellency give favourable consideration to the request on the return of mission schools to their original proprietors. We recall that this matter was raised during our meeting with you last year, and we remain hopeful that your Government will take the necessary steps towards its implementation.

Second, in the light of the Supreme Court judgment of 10 February 2026 affirming the constitutional right of Muslim students at Rivers State University to freedom of religion and worship, we respectfully request that Your Excellency direct the appropriate Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government to ensure that this same constitutional principle is faithfully implemented throughout the Federation. In particular, we appeal that Christians, especially in the northern part of the country, who continue to face difficulties in acquiring land for the construction of churches or in freely exercising their right to worship, should enjoy the same constitutional rights and protection accorded to all Nigerians. Equal citizenship must be reflected not only in law but also in practice.

Once again, we thank you very sincerely for granting us this audience. We pray that the Almighty and merciful God may grant you the wisdom and strength to lead our nation and all its citizens towards that greatness that God has destined for us.

✠Matthew Man-Oso NDAGOSO

Archbishop of Kaduna

President, CBCN