

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE: A LIGHT FOR A NEW NIGERIA

A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the CSN Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi, Abuja, 8 -14 March 2025

1. PREAMBLE

We, the Catholic Bishops' of Nigeria, held our First Plenary Meeting for the year at the CSN Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Durumi, Abuja, from 8-14 March 2025. Having prayerfully deliberated on issues affecting the Church and the Nigerian State, we issue this Communiqué:

2. THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE

The Holy Father Pope Francis on 9 May 2024 issued the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 titled, *Spes Non Confundit* ("Hope does not disappoint" Romans 5:5). With this document, the Holy Father invites the whole Church to reflect on and embrace the virtue of Hope. In his words: "Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the Cross" (*Spes Non Confundit*, 3). The Jubilee Year of Hope invites the whole world to a new impetus for renewal. It also presents the Church with a profound opportunity for introspection and renewed commitment to its mission within both the Nigerian and global contexts. It serves as a rallying call for renewed catechesis, scriptural literacy, and authentic Christian witnessing, ensuring that the Church remains a beacon of light to the society (cf. Matthew 5:14-16). In spite of the numerous challenges of the modern times, there is still a firm basis for hope. We are invited to embrace the virtue of hope with the certainty that it does not disappoint. The Lord is ever faithful to his Word (cf. Romans 8:28).

3. THE STATE OF THE NATION

(i) Positive Developments and Some Challenges

Our nation has recently witnessed some positive development. These include the reinvigoration of the Petroleum Industry, the rehabilitation of some dilapidated roads and the construction of new ones across the nation, the introduction of the student loan scheme, the new minimum wage, and the reduction in the debt service-to-revenue ratio and the proposal for new tax regime.

The Nigeria Correctional Service Act 2019 was a landmark in the history of prison services in Nigeria. It was a shift from the perception of the prison as a centre for retribution to a "correctional" facility with focus on reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration. We commend some cheering strides made by governments at various levels to promote agriculture. We equally appreciate the efforts of some security operatives, who put their lives on the line to fight the criminality and put an end to their savagery. We pray for healing for the wounded and eternal life for the dead. In spite of all these, our nation still has

some serious challenges bordering on harsh socio-economic situation, persistent insecurity across the nation, rising youth unemployment and restiveness. There is high cost of essential goods, including food. Cases of kidnapping and the mindless killing of innocent people still abound.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

(i) Need for Unity and National Integration

We invite all to always pursue actions that make for unity and national integration. Again, we request our political, religious and traditional leaders to promote the spirit of national integration in the citizenry in order to instill hope and development. We demand that those governments that ordered the closure of all schools in some parts of the country, withdraw such order in the light of the rights of the children to education and the multi-religious nature of our society. We, as Church, promote integral education, health care and agriculture for individual and national development, and we require the enabling environment to play these roles among others.

Despite disappointments in the conduct of 2023 General Elections, we still encourage all eligible citizens to come out en masse and participate in future elections. We call for a strengthening of electoral laws and sincere execution of duties by state agents such as Independent National Electoral Commission, security agencies and the courts in order to restore trust in the electoral system. We urge our people to refuse to be cowed to silence and helplessness, but rather insist always on doing the right thing and having it done.

(ii) Some Insights for National Growth

For the provision of security of life and property in our nation, we urge that governments at all levels deploy high technology, like is already done in some states, to complement the efforts of security agencies for efficient intelligence gathering. There is also need for good remuneration for security personnel, better equipping of our security outfits and determination to prosecute crime without fear or favour. We still stop call on government at all levels to create an enabling environment for job opportunities in an ongoing manner. More investment is needed in agriculture to facilitate the involvement of the youth in it and boost provision of food in a sustainable manner. With improved security and safety for farmers, there will be greater production of food and reduction in the escalated cost of food all over Nigeria. We reaffirm the stand of the Catholic Church that capital punishment is unacceptable (CCC2267), we therefore make a passionate appeal to the President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu especially in the light of the Jubilee Year of Hope, to grant pardon to Mr Sunday Jackson whose conviction was recently upheld by the Supreme Court.

To improve on the State of our custodial centres, we enjoin the Federal and State Governments to undertake the following:

Uphold fundamental rights of inmates, treating them with dignity and adopting non -custodial measures in deserving cases.

Expedite the dispensation of justice.

Decongest the existing correctional centres by granting parole to well-behaved minor offenders.

Rehabilitate the existing facilities, and

Construct new correctional centres to ease overcrowding.

5. SPREADING A LIGHT FOR A NEW NIGERIA

The Jubilee Year as enshrined in the Book Leviticus 25 was a time of restoration, freedom and renewal. It was a time when debts were forgiven, captives were released, and the land was given rest. The Jubilee of Hope invites us to be agents of renewal, arising from restoration and freedom. We are called to be the light that dispels the darkness hovering over our land, which necessarily begins with each of us, from our homes to our Churches, from our workplaces to our government institutions. The desire for a New Nigeria must commit to truth, justice and love. We, therefore, call on all to be true to our worship of God, eschewing external religiosity and competition geared towards religious superiority or supremacy

While we put our hope in the Lord and continue to pray for a better nation, we must all play our prophetic role to create a new Nigeria by bringing about the necessary change and so rekindle hope once more in our nation. To bring our people back from the brink of despair, we must start with a clear call for a radical change of attitudes, and a veritable spiritual revolution. We have the spiritual resources to undertake this mission in the genuine values of Christianity and Islam the two major religions practised in our land.

Above all, to create a New Nigeria and rekindle hope among the populace, our nation needs political leaders of a high moral profile, who are able to administer public goods in line with the principles of honesty, transparency, and accountability (Ecclesia in Africa no, 111). As a purveyor of hope, the Media must resist obsession with reporting bad news at the expense of balanced reportage, which highlights what is happening in the society with equal passion. We enjoin the Government and security agencies to see the Media as partners in nation building.

6. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

In union with the whole Church and the entire world, we pray for the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in this critical moment of ill health. We continue to pray for his speedy recovery. The Synod on Synodality, which dominated the attention of the Church from 2021 – 2024 was concluded with the approval of the Synod's final document on 26 October, 2024 by Pope Francis. We are now at the implementation stage. Local Churches and groupings of Churches are invited to imbibe and implement in their context the authoritative indications contained in the Documents.

The Church in Nigeria as well as the Nigerian State is indeed happy to welcome the Apostolic Nuncio to Nigeria, His Excellency, Most Rev. Michael Francis Crotty. He arrived the country on 23 October 2024. For him, we pray for a fruitful and pastorally ministry in our midst. Likewise, we congratulate

Very Rev. Fr. Michael Leke Banjo, who assumed the Office of the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria on 1 January 2025. While wishing him a wonderful tenure, we thank the former Secretary General, Very Rev. Fr. Zechariah Samjumi, and wish him all the best of luck in his future endeavors.

We received with great sadness but with hope in the resurrection the news of the death of Most Rev Ayo- Maria Atoyebi, OP, Bishop Emeritus of Ilorin on 8 March, 2025. We convey our condolences to Ilorin Diocese, the Dominican Friars, and the Atoyebi family, with the assurances of prayers for his repose and the consolation of all who mourn him.

7. CONCLUSION: THE SEASON OF LENT AS A JOURNEY OF RENEWAL

As we begin the Lenten Season we pray with our Muslim Brethren who are observing the season Ramadan. The Season prepares us Christians to better embrace the virtue of hope. It invites us to repent of our sins and misdeeds against ourselves, the Church and our Country. It calls us to purge ourselves of our cynicism against the possibility of a better Nigeria. By this we are enabled to spread the light within the various segments of the society. May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of hope, a yearning for the treasures of heaven, spreading the joy and peace of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, throughout the earth. May it ignite in us a renewed faith, and may the light of Christ guide Nigeria to a future of peace, prosperity and righteousness. May our Blessed Mother, Mary ever Virgin, accompany us in this holy season, and may we emerge from this journey renewed, purified, and victorious. Amen.

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