

**A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF IBADAN
ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE AFTER THEIR MEETING HELD AT THE JUBILEE
CONFERENCE CENTRE, OKE ADO, IBADAN FROM 16th to 17th JANUARY, 2023.**

NIGERIA: NOW IS THE TIME OF GRACE

We, the Catholic Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province, comprising Ibadan Archdiocese, Ilorin, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and Osogbo Dioceses, after our meeting at the Jubilee Conference Centre Oke Ado, Ibadan from 16TH to 17TH January, 2023 prayerfully issue the following Communique:

1. Grappling For Authentic Change

The general elections coming up between February and March 2023 nationwide offer all Nigerians a long-awaited opportunity to democratically choose their leaders for the next four years. We Bishops fully identify with the suffering and pains of all Nigerians over these years while enduring numerous threats to security of life and property, crippling economic downturn and bad political leadership. We share the aspirations and yearnings of all Nigerians to have new leaders who will be true patriots and servants of the people, responsive to the security and welfare needs of all Nigerians without discrimination. Nigerians, now is the time to elect leaders at all levels who have integrity, goodwill and the fear of God, who will truly serve the nation rather than help themselves to her vast resources and status for their private interests. We therefore urge all eligible Nigerians to secure their permanent voters' cards (PVC), and vote in the elections according to their consciences, without fear, in order to secure their own future and that of their children.

2. Security: Not Yet Time for Celebration

It is with deep sorrow that we learn of the dastardly murder of yet another dear priest, Rev Fr. Isaac Achi of the Catholic Diocese of Minna. We are painfully aware that the priest has suffered the fate of many other Nigerians, some, sadly unannounced. May all the casualties of insecurity in Nigeria rest in perfect peace and may God comfort all the bereaved who mourn them.

We have repeatedly commended the governors of the South West for setting up and sustaining the Amotekun Corps and others for the relatively improved security situation in the Southwest. Yet we note now with regret that the security status of our region took a major hit last week with the kidnap of Rev. Fr. Michael Olofinlade, a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ekiti. This is an ill wind that blows no good especially in view of the general elections. We pray for the quick and safe release of Rev. Fr. Olofinlade and all others in captivity and urge all evildoers among us to repent and work with others to build a better Nigeria.

3. For Government, More Work to Do

We urge the authorities to bolster existing security measures to safeguard life and property, to add new technology and apprehend and decimate those who engage in such criminal

activities in our region and all over the country. Nigerians have a right to enjoy free and safe movement wherever they live and go and it is the sacred duty of government to make this possible. To the government at all levels, we say it is never too late to do the right thing because adequate security of life will have an impact on the integrity of the forthcoming general elections.

4. Politicians Must Practice Noble Politics.

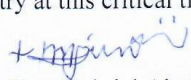
We emphasize that politics is a noble art aimed to serve the common good. It must not be denigrated by the unscrupulous utterances and actions of those who engage in it. At this historical moment for Nigeria, we exhort all Nigerian politicians and electoral umpires from the Federal to the grassroots levels to ensure nobility and fairness in their speech and actions towards free, fair, and peaceful elections in February. We all stand at the threshold of history and history will have its time to judge our speeches and conduct. May we all receive fair judgment when our time comes.

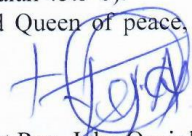
5. To Succeed, Be Disciplined, Obey the Law, Work, and Pray

We encourage all, especially the youths, who are working hard to deliver free and fair elections, and who are raising awareness about participation in the general elections, come February 2023. We ask them to persevere. We urge them not to be intimidated by the daunting challenges that seem to surround the elections. When we have performed our civic duties we must have the courage to work for the Nigeria of our dreams. Nothing good comes easy and the harder the battle, the sweeter the victory. Let us all secure our voters' cards, go out and vote according to good conscience for the sole purpose of securing a better Nigeria. We urge that the prayer for successful elections recently composed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) should be prayed more fervently along with other prayers, individually, in all homes, churches and gatherings so that God will bless our efforts. He can write straight even on crooked lines. Indeed, for Nigeria, the time is now!

6. Hope Does not Fail Us

By God's grace, all things shall be well! We call on all Nigerians to sustain hope by relying on the unchanging promise of God to rally his people in peace to their own inheritance as he declared through the prophet: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I shall bring your offspring from the East and gather you from the West. To the North I shall say, Give them up! And to the South, 'Do not hold them back!' Bring back my sons from far away, and my daughters from the remotest part of the earth" (Isaiah 43:5-6). May the Blessed Virgin Mary mother of Jesus and Queen of peace, intercede for our country at this critical time. Amen


Most Rev. Gabriel Abegunrin
Archbishop of Ibadan Archdiocese
President


Most Rev. John Oyejola
Bishop of Osogbo Diocese
Secretary