

LEADERSHIP FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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, 19 - 26 February 2026

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 19 to 26 February 2026. Having prayerfully deliberated on issues affecting the Church and the Nigerian State, we issue this Communiqué:

2. LENT: A SPECIAL SEASON OF PRAYER, FASTING, ALMSGIVING AND REPENTANCE

The season of Lent this year coincides with the Ramadan, the Muslim period of fasting. We believe that this is not a mere coincidence but God's invitation to work and live together in harmony and mutual respect. We enjoin all to use this opportunity to intensify their prayer life, works of charity, refrain from sin, and repent. We call on adherents of both faiths to worship God and contribute to good neighbourliness and a better society.

3. THE MEANING OF THE COMMON GOOD

God created human beings for community life after the pattern of the Blessed Trinity, a community of persons. Drawing from this, the Church has always taught that the good of individuals is bound up with the good of the community. The Common Good, therefore, is both the good which is meant for all and the totality of conditions that make possible the flourishing of life. Common Good therefore is a social good meant for all people by the fact of human existence. The Common Good presupposes respect for the dignity and rights of everyone. It involves the social welfare and development of one and all in the society. All have a role to play in the actualization of the Common Good by ensuring that human dignity and rights are respected and protected. Pope Saint John XXIII affirmed this truth when he taught that "the Common Good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained" (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 60). This reality opens the door for the participation of all in the realization of the Common Good.

4. LEADERSHIP FOR THE COMMON GOOD

We affirm that responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all that we do. It is, therefore, necessary that all participate, each according to their position and role, in promoting the Common Good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. We, therefore, call on all Christians to be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the Common Good (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, no 75).

Similarly, leadership is the platform for working for the Common Good. It is the responsibility of public authority to ensure that the citizenry has access to what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education, culture, suitable information, the establishment of a family, etc. The Common Good also requires peace, stability and security of a just order. The obligation of government to the Common Good must not become the usurpation of the rights of the governed. It must be carried out without repression or tyranny because each sector of society as well as individuals have their proper contributions to make, and government must respect and encourage these contributions. This approach paves way for the participation of all in politics and, most especially, contributes to leadership effectiveness at all levels of society. Indeed, effective leadership means the prioritization of the Common Good over selfish and sectional interests.

5. STATE OF THE NATION

i) Persistent Insecurity and Loss of Lives

We support the move by our President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to declare a national security emergency, ordering the recruitment of more security personnel alongside far-reaching measures. This has led our military to step up its operations against terrorists in the country. However, our country has continued to experience more security challenges. We continue to experience tragic events of senseless massacre, mass burials, endless tears, and grief. There are incidents of mass murders in different communities, particularly in Woro and Nuku villages in Kwara State, where over 200 people, both Christians and Muslims, were gruesomely massacred by scores of Islamist jihadists for refusing to embrace fundamentalist Islam. Most recently, in many parts of the country, particularly in the Northern region and the middle belt, there are cases of attacks and mass killings involving many students, pupils and worshippers. Still more, while many farmers cannot go to their farms for fear of being injured or killed, many other persons are still displaced from their homes and business areas, owing to the activities of insurgents and bandits. In all, the gunmen operate brazenly, freely and unchallenged.

To deal with the problem of insecurity and recognizing the need for more proactive measures to secure Nigeria, we call on governments at all levels to invest more in modern technological equipment for surveillance. We also urge them to strengthen measures for intelligence gathering by security agencies to enable them to proactively perform their duties. Governments should ensure that culprits involved in insurgency, banditry or kidnapping and those who fund and support their activities are quickly arrested, prosecuted and punished under the law to deter others. There is the impression that government is complicit when there is delay in the prosecution of arrested terrorists or when there is outright pardon and reintegration of so-called repentant Boko Haram adherents and other criminals into the security forces.

We commend the fact that our government has finally admitted that it is not coping adequately with its responsibility to secure the lives and property of its citizens and is seeking external help. While external help is commendable and appreciated, the security and destiny of our nation are in our hands, and we do have the wherewithal to achieve them, with the help of God.

ii) Socio-Economic Sabotage to the Common Good

Nigeria is richly blessed with abundant mineral resources. With good leadership, these resources would have been contributing significantly to our national economic growth and development. In our country, the ownership of all mineral resources is vested in the Federal Government, which also regulates their exploration and exploitation. Yet, trillions of Naira are annually lost to bunkering and illegal mining owing to banditry, kidnapping and other organized crimes in parts of our country. Often, these criminal groups use proceeds from the sale of minerals, such as gold and lithium, to fund terrorist activities across the country. Yet, the Nigerian government has continued to borrow huge sums of money without much to show for the welfare of citizens. Furthermore, taxes paid by individuals and businesses are not adequately utilized for the Common Good.

To stem the tide of economic sabotage, especially in relation to illegal mining and stealing of our mineral resources, with the attendant environmental degradation, we enjoin the government to devise a more aggressive approach to fighting these illegalities across the country. For instance, the "Mining Marshals" deployed by government to secure mining sites and arrest unlicensed miners have not been fully effective in covering the vast, remote, and difficult terrains, where illegal miners operate. The efforts of these Marshals should be complemented by using drone technology and artificial intelligence (AI) for monitoring remote and high-risk mining sites. Again, rather than importation of food as is currently being done by the government, to lower the prices of food, which invariably has negatively affected the local farmers, we demand that the government provide adequate security and grant sufficient subsidy to the farmers to enable them to produce enough food for the nation.

iii) Bad Leadership as a Major Cause of our Afflictions

We observe that a major cause of our problem as a nation is poor leadership and the wrong idea of politics. Where politics is erroneously understood only as rigging of elections and stealing of other people's mandate, leadership is unfortunately taken as the amassing of illicit gains or engaging in other fraudulent activities. We note that bad leadership in our nation has caused systemic damage showing up in a worsening economy, widespread and persistent insecurity, and extreme poverty, despite the blessing of rich human and natural resources. This situation has fueled corruption, infrastructural decay, high rate of unemployment and a deep lack of trust in government institutions.

In our nation, governments in power usually have their own candidates in the election and therefore are parties in the contest and are thus technically not impartial. We call on the governments in power at all levels to resist the temptation to seek to win at all costs including the misuse and manipulation of state institutions, such as the INEC, the security agencies and the judiciary, to achieve selfish purpose. In our country, various forms of electoral malpractice exist because of illegal conducts displayed by the electoral umpire, political parties, candidates or some members of the electorate. These malpractices influence and disrupt the smooth conduct of elections. These acts range from the inclusion of fictitious names in the voters register, vote buying, artificial scarcity of electoral materials, to the use of thugs and intimidation, disenfranchisement, falsification of election results and so on. These malpractices would naturally shortchange the will of the electorate in choosing their preferred

leaders. The result is the undermining of the confidence of the citizens in the electoral process together with its further destruction of our democracy and increase in the suffering of our people.

In a democracy, elections are the means through which political leaders are chosen by the electorate. Regrettably, in our country, the process of electing political leaders has been for a long time marred by gross irregularities. These irregularities affect the confidence of our citizens in the electoral process and have led to the steady decline of voter turnout during elections. According to the data from INEC itself, it was only 23% of registered voters that exercised their franchise in 2023 general elections, a very sharp decline from participation in previous elections. Again, the recently concluded FCT elections, touted as a full-dress rehearsal for 2027, fell to an abysmal 7% of registered voters, a strong indicator of increasing voter apathy. This calls into question the legitimacy of elected officials in a democratic dispensation. To save democracy in our nation, there is need to respect the will of the people and promote free, fair and credible elections in our nation, we demand that the National Assembly review its recent stand on the electoral reform. We urge our law makers to try to revive the confidence of voters by ensuring that the Electoral Act provides for the mandatory transmission of election results in real-time from the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) at the polling unit, to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, to prevent any human interference with the expressed will of the people. Failure to do this will only aggravate voter apathy. At the same time, we continue to urge all eligible voters to come out en-masse, vote, and ensure that their votes count.

6. EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

As a follow up to the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, proclaimed the Special Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi from 10 January 2026 to 10 January 2027, to mark the 8th centenary of the death of St Francis of Assisi. This Jubilee is an auspicious occasion for authentic spiritual renewal of the faithful in imitation of St. Francis' life of humility and simplicity, poverty and detachment, and for all to become models of holiness of life and constant witnesses of peace. We encourage our faithful to participate actively and gain spiritually from the celebration. We congratulate Enugu Diocese on the completion of her 4th Enugu synod which took place from 16 to 22 November 2025. We equally congratulate the Archdiocese of Owerri for celebrating 75 years of its existences as a diocese, along with Onitsha and Calabar. The event took place on 27 November 2025. We rejoice with the Archdiocese of Onitsha for celebrating, on Friday, 5 December 2025, the 140th anniversary of the missionaries' arrival in Onitsha, the Metropolitan See of the Province. We express joy with the Diocese of Umuahia for a successful celebration of the silver jubilee of the dedication of their Cathedral, Mater Dei, on Wednesday, 10 December 2025. We are joyful with the Diocese of Nnewi, for the successful dedication of her Cathedral, Our Lady of Assumption, on Wednesday, 14 January 2026. May these events give added impetus and usher in a flowering of the faith in these dioceses.

7. ELECTION OF CBCN PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

Our Conference held her elections in this Plenary Assembly. We congratulate the new executive and other officers of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. In a special way, we congratulate the new President, Most Rev. Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, the Archbishop of Kaduna; Vice President, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, the Archbishop of Lagos; Secretary, Most Rev. Peter Odetoyinbo,

the Bishop of Abeokuta, and Assistant Secretary, Most. Rev. Peter Chukwu, the Bishop of Abakaliki. We wish them a successful and impactful tenure. We thank the past executive and other officers for their service and pray God to bless them in their future endeavours.

8. CONCLUSION: WE MUST NEVER GIVE IN TO DESPAIR (ROM 5:5)

A better Nigeria is possible, and we enjoin everyone to contribute to building our nation. This calls for a change of attitude across board and a generous and selfless disposition to serve the Common Good. In pursuit of the Common Good, our Christian faith challenges us to serve "the least of the brethren" - feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, caring for the sick and prisoners (Mt. 25:31 - 40). As believers in Christ, who are called to be the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13), the light of the world (Mt. 13:14 - 16) and the leaven of the society (Mt. 13:33), we must collectively work for the social transformation of our country, rooted in the Common Good, and ensure that those who occupy positions of leadership in our land, at both the national and sub-national levels, are people with track records of probity, competence and commitment. Through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope and all Consolation, Queen of Nigeria, we shall get there.

+L Ugorji

✠Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji
Archbishop of Owerri
President, CBCN

+A Ogun

✠Donatus A. Ogun, OSA
Bishop of Uromi
Secretary, CBCN