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**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
AT THE END OF ITS ANNUAL PLENARY ASSEMBLY HELD AT ADUTOR IN THE
KETA-AKATSI DIOCESE IN THE VOLTA REGION OF GHANA
NOVEMBER 3 – 13, 2020**

Greetings

“Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thess. 1:2).

Preamble

We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have held our Annual Plenary Assembly at the Madonna Hotel at Adutor in the Keta-Akatsi Diocese in the Volta Region of Ghana from November 3 to 13, 2020 under the theme: *“The Word of God: Christian Formation for Transformation in Ghana.”* Our theme was inspired by Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Aperuit Illis* issued on September 30, 2019, the Feast of St. Jerome, when the Holy Father invited all people of goodwill to observe 2020 as the *Year of the Word of God* to mark the 1,600th Anniversary of the death of St. Jerome.

Bereavement

In the course of our Plenary Assembly, we received with shock the sad news of the death of the Former President of the Republic, His Excellency Jerry John Rawlings. We pray for strength and consolation for the wife, children, family and the nation as a whole and for the peaceful repose of his soul.

Acknowledgement

At the start of our Plenary Assembly, we had a four-day spiritual retreat directed by Very Rev. Fr. Martin Asiedu-Peprah of the Konongo-Mampong Diocese.

We had the opportunity to pay courtesy calls on the Paramount Chiefs of the Avenor and Aflao Traditional Areas and some of their Sub-Chiefs and Queenmothers as well as the District Chief Executives of Akatsi South and South Tongu. We also visited, celebrated Holy Mass and interacted with the people of God in many parishes of the Diocese.

Our Plenary was graced by the Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, His Excellency Henryk M. Jagodzinski. We also met with the Director General of the Ghana AIDS Commission, the Executive Director of the National Population Council of Ghana, a team from the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) led by its Chairperson, the Country Representative of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Country Director of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and a Representative of the Inspector General of Police.

Congratulations to the Diocese of Keta-Akatsi

We congratulate our brother Most Rev. Gabriel Edoe Kumordji, SVD, and his predecessor, Most Rev. Anthony Kwami Adanuty, who celebrates 25 years as a Bishop, the Priests, Religious and the entire Faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Keta-Akatsi on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the creation of the diocese. We thank God for the many graces and blessings bestowed upon the diocese and pray that God will continue to prosper the diocese abundantly.

In the light of our theme and our deliberations in relation to the socio-political situation of our country Ghana, we wish to share with you the following reflections.

THE WORD OF GOD

The theme of our Plenary invites us to reflect on the Word of God as the source of Christian formation and the power that can transform our Christian lives. Jesus Christ is the Word of God par excellence, the Eternal Word of God spoken in time by God the Father.

In the Old Testament (OT) the Word of God was already at work, calling into existence that which was non-existent. Throughout the ages, this Word was addressed to our Fathers (Patriarchs) and spoken forcefully through the Prophets. In the fullness of time, God spoke to us through His only Son – whose life, death and resurrection inaugurated a new era of an enduring presence of the Word of God in our world (cf. Hebrews 1:1-4).

Thus Pope Francis writes: “The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians. Without the Lord who opens our minds to them, it is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth. Yet the contrary is equally true: without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and of his Church in this world would remain incomprehensible” (*Aperuit Illis* 1).

THE WORD OF GOD AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION

At the centre of every Christian formation is Christ himself. There can be no sound formation without Christ, for he is our only teacher and instructor (Matt 23:8.10). In every aspect, Christ defines our present and determines our future. Without him we lack orientation. Transmitting the message of Christ “living and intact is the central axis of evangelization” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 4). In the same vein, forming Christians in the teachings of Jesus to become active and living instruments of Christ should be viewed as the central axis of Christian formation.

All Christians by virtue of their baptism and their incorporation into Christ, are called to holiness. Holiness has to do with, among other things, shaping our will and continually forming our consciences in the light of the Gospel of Christ.

The conscience is not a closed territory of one's ego but rather the inner self which is totally open to the truth of God. It, therefore, needs to be properly formed.

We call on all religious leaders, teachers, parents who are the first teachers of their children and all adults to seek to form their own consciences properly and help form the consciences of their children. Let them learn to look upon life in the light of eternity and continually strive to make a well-formed conscience. A well-formed conscience is the one which observes the natural values of honesty, hard work, respect for the other, truthfulness, etc. On the contrary, a poorly formed conscience is that whose life is filled with lies, hatred, cheating, violence, etc.

WORD OF GOD AND TRANSFORMATION IN GHANA

In the Word of God is an inherent transforming power which enables it at all times to achieve the purpose for which it was intended. *"Indeed, the Word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12).

This Word of God impacts all aspects of our lives:

The COVID-19 Pandemic

We wish to commend the Government for providing strong leadership in our national response to the COVID-19 pandemic by developing a comprehensive plan with multidimensional programmes, resource mobilization strategies and regular feedback to citizens.

We also wish to acknowledge most profoundly donations and contributions made by individuals, Church societies, local and international organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the Church to respond to hardships imposed by the pandemic.

As some countries in the world, including Ghana, are experiencing a second wave of infections, we use this opportunity to call on Government to continue to keep a close watch on the dynamics of the pandemic locally and globally as well as planning a risk response that anticipates a worst scenario of a possible second wave. We also appeal to all Ghanaians, especially at funerals, other social gatherings and in this era of political campaigns, to faithfully observe the COVID-19 protocols of social distancing, wearing of face masks, regular handwashing under running water with soap, using hand sanitizer and staying at home.

As we focus on eradicating the COVID-19 pandemic, we should continue to fight all other diseases that contribute to the death rate in Ghana such as HIV/AIDS, CSM, etc.

Recent Political Disturbances in the Volta Region

We wish to express our grave concerns regarding the recent “secessionist” disturbances in parts of the Volta Region and wish to appeal to those who are perpetrating these acts of vandalism and destruction of property to refrain from them. Instead, let us work towards a united and stable Ghana.

We also call on all, especially politicians, who go out of their way to refer to some Ghanaians as ‘foreigners’ to desist from those unguarded comments. All divisive comments must cease if we intend to make any progress in our attempt to resolve the current threat being posed by the “secessionists.”

We wish to urge the Government to do all within its means to find a lasting solution to this emerging problem. We also hope that all state institutions involved in investigations will accelerate the pace so as to bring to book anybody found guilty after a fair trial.

THE 2020 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Our country will go to the polls on December 7, 2020. To ensure that we have peace in Ghana before, during and after the December elections, we wish to draw the attention of all Ghanaians to the following concerns:

1. Electoral Commission

The integrity and success of the forthcoming elections depend primarily on the Electoral Commission. We commend the Electoral Commission for all the measures it has put in place to ensure peaceful, free, fair, transparent and credible elections. We call on Ghanaians to repose trust and confidence in the work of the Electoral Commission throughout the period of elections and thereafter.

2. Political Parties

We appeal once again to politicians, members and supporters of the various political parties, during their campaigning, to avoid the temptation of making promises that they know they cannot fulfil, because this amounts to deceiving the people of Ghana. We urge them to avoid hate-filled statements and expressions that elicit revenge and vendetta.

We also call on party leaders, parliamentary and presidential candidates to conduct themselves honourably and to respect their opponents, both in their utterances and actions.

3. Security Agencies

We commend the Security Agencies for working towards security and peace in Ghana. We are pleased to hear from the Ghana Police Service of their preparedness to ensure an incident-free election. We urge them to discharge their duty with dispatch and without fear or favour. We encourage them and all other security agencies to demonstrate a high sense of professionalism by respecting the rights and dignity of all Ghanaian citizens.

The culture of impunity which has been manifested in sections of the Ghanaian society by some individuals and groups contributes to high levels of lawlessness in the country. We condemn, in no uncertain terms, the sycophancy and the operations of vigilante groups, etc.

Consequently, we state that the prevalence of so-called “machomen” who move about intimidating and brutalizing innocent Ghanaians should be dealt with by the appropriate law enforcement agencies by enforcing to the letter the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act 2019 (Act 999).

4. Electorate

Participation in the political life, in the light of fundamental moral principles, is an essential duty of every Christian and of all people of good will. We therefore encourage all registered voters to be vigilant as they exercise their franchise.

To decide not to vote is to neglect your duty and run the risk of leaving others to decide your future for you. In the name of peace, parents and guardians are reminded that they have a God-given responsibility to discourage their under-age children and wards from voting. In the same vein, we appeal to non-Ghanaians who might have registered, for one reason or the other, to refrain from voting. Let us all remember that we can have peaceful elections only if we ensure justice before, during and after the elections.

5. Media and Sensationalism, Fake news and Politics of Insults

We commend the media for the role they continue to play as the fourth estate by informing and educating the populace as well as deepening democracy in the country. We therefore call upon the media to uphold the highest journalistic values and ethics in their reportage of the electoral process.

We recommend that news about the elections should not be based on hearsay or prejudice. Information must be verified and the truth professionally ascertained. In recent times, however, the increasing use of virtual space and electronic medium of communication has also heightened the threat of widespread use of fake news, insulting language as well as dirty propaganda in political discourse.

News and stories should not be targeted at causing disgrace or embarrassment to personalities, especially where it is clear that such reportage may trigger disaffection or incite violence.

6. Traditional and Religious Leaders and Politics

Presidential and parliamentary aspirants share similar constituencies with various kings and chiefs of our traditional communities and also belong to various churches and mosques. We appeal to them not to take for granted or interfere with the authority and functions of these traditional leaders and the institutional structures upon which they rest. We also entreat our kings and chiefs and religious leaders to protect the integrity of their stools, skins and their ministry by refraining from meddling in partisan politics. They should always see themselves as unifiers of their subjects and members of their congregations. Traditional and Religious leaders must work to foster peace and seek the integral development of Ghanaians rather than to divide them. Further, we strongly urge Religious leaders to be circumspect in their pronouncements, predictions and prophecies on the outcome of the elections.

The Integrity of the Environment

Human beings connect with nature in various ways: “... *our bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters...*” (*Laudato Si'*, 2). The earth is our common home. Yet, we continue to inflict harm of various kinds and degrees on our natural environment by our irresponsible use of it. We plunder our environment recklessly through indiscriminate dumping of refuse and industrial waste, ‘galamsey’ activities, logging, deforestation, water pollution and other forms of ecological degradation.

We remind Ghanaians that our natural resources belong to those gone before us, those of us living and those who will come after us. We must therefore refrain from selfish exploitation of our natural resources to the extent that generations after us will be deprived of their fair share of these resources.

Inclusive Economy and Development

We are concerned about the outlook of our national economy beyond COVID-19 as the real impact of the global pandemic remains largely unmeasured and undetermined. We call on our Political Leaders and Development Partners to collaborate to support countries with fragile economies such as ours to benefit from economic reliefs that will help in their economic recovery from the COVID-19 economic downturn.

We appreciate the efforts by governments over the years to develop our country’s infrastructure. We, however, wish to caution present and future governments not to mortgage our natural resources to the detriment of future generations.

We urge our political leaders to ensure value for money through due diligence and transparency in contracting the various loans that are meant for developmental projects.

Education

The Church teaches that “true education is directed towards the **formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society** to which he belongs and in the duties to which he will, as an adult, have a share” (*Gravissimum Educationis* 1). We cannot but vehemently condemn all acts of occultism and homosexuality in some of our educational institutions, promoted or sponsored by people in and outside the schools to the detriment of human dignity and the standard of education in Ghana. We also condemn examination malpractices such as selling and buying of question papers and the trading of grades in cash or kind.

We want to stress the unique critical role Mission schools have been playing to assist Government to offer quality education delivery in Ghana. However, some policies of Government educational reforms in recent times have ignored the concerns of the Mission schools.

In the spirit of collaboration, we would like to, once again, urge the Government to implement without further delay the process towards signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government and Religious Bodies on the partnership in education delivery in Ghana. This, we believe, will bring to a close some of the challenges we face as Religious Bodies with regard to the management of our schools. We feel that this has dragged on for far too long.

We commend the Government once again for rolling out the Free SHS programme which seeks to make education accessible for many more graduates from the JHS level. We also encourage the Government to do everything possible to phase out the double-track system which has been fraught with several challenges confronting students, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff.

Human Dignity

We have drawn attention time and again to the many evils that have taken over our dear nation such as the rampant armed robbery cases, stealing, murders, careless and reckless driving on our roads. We particularly want to draw attention to the danger posed by unlicensed drivers and riders of various forms of vehicles.

The result is the many accidents on our roads leading to injuries and unnecessary deaths. We urge drivers and other users of the road to exercise caution and respect for human life especially during the coming festive season. We also call for more presence of the Police on our roads and for closer collaboration between our security agencies and local community institutions and authorities to strengthen the mechanisms that will ensure the safety of life and property in our country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to assure all Ghanaians of our prayers for a peaceful and successful elections in December. Once again, we wish to appeal to all to avoid the tendency of doing anything that will disturb the peace we currently enjoy as a people. We therefore join our voices to that of St. Paul in his exhortation to the Philippians and also say: *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen... Then the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8-9).*

May Christ the King of Kings, and Prince of Peace, continue to reign in our hearts, Amen.



MOST REV. PHILIP NAAMEH
Metropolitan Archbishop of Tamale and
President, Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference

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