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COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE
GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
AT THE END OF ITS ANNUAL PLENARY ASSEMBLY
HELD IN ELMINA IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CAPE COAST IN THE CENTRAL
REGION OF GHANA
NOVEMBER 8 – 15, 2019

1.0 Greeting

1.1 Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of goodwill who live in our land, grace and peace of God the Father, whose Son Jesus Christ has charged us to go into all the world to proclaim the Gospel to all creation, be with you! (cf. Mark 16:15).

2.0 Preamble

2.1 We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have held our Annual Plenary Assembly in the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, at the Hospitaller Retreat Centre in Elmina in the Central Region of Ghana from November 8 to 15, 2019 under the theme: "*Baptized and Sent: Living our Mission in Ghana Today*". Our theme was inspired by the universal call of Pope Francis to the Church to make a renewed commitment to mission as the Church marks the Centenary of the Apostolic Letter "*Maximum Illud*" (The Great Charge) of Pope Benedict XV issued on 30th November, 1919. As part of this missionary renewal, the Church in Ghana has just concluded the celebration of the "Extraordinary Missionary Month" in October 2019 as was declared by Pope Francis.

2.2 In the course of the year and during our plenary, we had the occasions to meet and interact with the President of the Republic of Ghana and some of his Ministers, the Leadership of the National Democratic Congress, the Deputy Director General of the Ghana Education Service, the Chairperson and Commissioners of the Electoral Commission, Security Experts, the Auditor General, the Special Prosecutor, the National Peace Council, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment among others. We have also deliberated on our theme and appraised the socio-political situation of our country Ghana. From our interactions and deliberations, we wish to share with you the following reflections, many of which were dealt with many times in our previous Communiqués.

3.0 Elmina

3.1 Our Plenary Assembly took place in Elmina, the cradle of Catholicism in Ghana. Here, the Catholic Faith was reborn in 1880 after its unsuccessful attempts to gain roots in 1482. The chosen site for the plenary offered us the opportunity to visit places of historic significance for the Catholic faith in Ghana, such as the Elmina Castle, the St. Joseph Minor Basilica and the Dutch Cemetery where many of the early missionaries and the pioneers of our faith in Ghana are resting. The tombs of these missionaries are a strong call to us to keep the faith they shared with us at the cost of their lives. They also remind us that we are baptized and sent to live our mission, especially in our country. As we prepare to celebrate, next year, 140 years of the continuous growth of the Church in Ghana, we ask all Christians, especially Catholics, to join us to thank God for the early missionaries who brought the faith and the many indigenous people who received the faith and nurtured it to take root in Ghana.

4.0 The Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (The Great Charge)

4.1 In his Apostolic Letter, *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict XV sought to return to the roots of the great commission which defines the principles and priorities of missionary activity in the Catholic Church all over the world.

4.2 *Maximum Illud* also defined mission as a momentous and a holy charge and insisted that missionary activity must consist of the proclamation of the Lord Jesus and his love for all humanity; a love that brings all persons into one family of God. We have been *baptised and sent to live our mission* by word and deed, identifying and promoting the presence and love of God among all peoples, especially in our families, communities and our nation Ghana and beyond.

5.0 Missionaries from Ghana

5.1 The presence of missionary vocations in and from Ghana has enriched our local Church. This missionary dynamism is to be strengthened for the benefit of those dioceses that do not have many priestly and religious vocations and eventually to support the mission of the universal Church.

6.0 Living our Mission in Ghana Today

6.1 There are religious, social and political contexts in our country that call the whole Christian Community, and Catholics in particular, to renew their missionary commitment to themselves, others and to the nation. Similar to the times in which Pope Benedict XV addressed his letter to Catholic Christians, we are experiencing a widespread tendency of nationalistic politics of exclusion. On the national level, we are facing our share of selfish interests that have become primary in the choices we make.

6.2 Economic and social challenges in Ghana relate closely to lack of consciousness of Gospel values that must form the basis of a successful society that is oriented towards God. There is the need, therefore, for each and every one of us to renew our baptismal commitment and be re-sent to renew the face of our nation, the vineyard of the Lord.

7.0 Youth Unemployment

7.1 Once again, we would like to commend the many initiatives of successive Governments and the current Government, to address the problem of youth unemployment. In spite of these efforts, there is a steep rise in unemployment. This situation is a veritable national security threat which has to be addressed immediately and urgently with a well-articulated programme.

7.2 As we have stated in our previous communiqués, we urge all stakeholders, the Government, Private Sector, Political Parties, Faith Based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations to treat the growing menace of joblessness among our youth as a national emergency and come up with practical and innovative solutions to relieve our young citizens of the lingering stress of persistent unemployment.

7.3 At the same time, we urge our youth to note the changing times, to be more creative and to explore the available opportunities to establish their own businesses to be self employed.

8.0 Memorandum of Understanding

8.1 We acknowledge the efforts Government is making to dialogue and collaborate with Religious Bodies on matters of national interest.

In the spirit of this collaboration, we would like to repeat our appeal to Government to kindly hasten the process towards signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government and Religious Bodies on the partnership in education delivery in Ghana as promised in the NPP Manifesto. We are worried that that this has dragged on for far too long.

9.0 Free Senior High School (SHS)

9.1 We commend the Government for the introduction and implementation of the Free SHS programme. We have to acknowledge, however, that there are some significant challenges that need to be looked into.

9.2 We therefore call for a broad national dialogue of relevant stakeholders to review all aspects of the Free SHS and the challenges associated with the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) programme to find the best way forward for our nation.

10.0 Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Lesbians Gay Bisexuals Transsexuals Queers (LGBTQ)

10.1 We appreciate the President of our Nation assuring all Ghanaians that Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) will not see the light of day under his Government. The general uproar that greeted this controversial CSE curriculum is broadly indicative of what should be expected, when an externally imposed policy is accepted without adequate engagement of citizens who would be affected by it.

10.2 We would like to implore the President to take further concrete steps to prevent future reintroduction of the CSE in any form or guise into our curriculum. We are aware of the subtle agenda of lobbyists and some NGOs to promote a lifestyle that is against universal natural values and, certainly, against Ghanaian cultural and moral values. We already have an acceptable sex education in our educational system. As a nation, therefore, we must make our position unequivocally clear and put in place measures that will stop those who propagate this evil agenda.

10.3 While we recognize that there are people with these abnormal sexual orientations and request that they be treated and helped, we oppose very strongly any CSE that teaches the acceptance of LGBTQ and same sex marriages as normal.

11.0 Safety of Residents in Ghana

11.1 The safety and liberty of the citizens and foreigners are the primary justification for the existence of the State. A number of pointers suggest that the State security apparatus needs to do more. The recent widespread reports of kidnappings and murders of the Takoradi girls, the gruesome murders in cold blood of five police personnel of the Motor Traffic and Transport Department (MTTD), the Gomoa Buduburam and the Tamale Police Officers, and other such heinous crimes, raise serious issues of national security and heightened concerns about the general safety of citizens and foreigners. If the police whose primary responsibility is to guarantee the safety and protection of our people are not themselves safe, no one can feel safe in our country. We are also alarmed by the persistence of armed robbery at homes and on high ways that puts human life and property in our society in an even greater danger.

12.0 Political Parties and Security

12.1 A major security concern is the undue interference in the selection, training and operations of Security Personnel by political parties when in office. Such interferences make these officers ineffective.

12.2 It is alleged that there is some dissatisfaction among the top-echelon of the Ghana Police Service and Ghana Armed Forces because of political appointments that saw Junior Officers promoted ahead of their Senior Colleagues. This surely engenders indiscipline among the Security Forces.

13.0 Protocol and Security

13.1 Also of grave concern is the protocol recruitments that are made into our Security Services. We wish to admonish that this practice should not be allowed to continue because it brings about trust issues and also makes it easy for unqualified candidates and dubious characters to be recruited. We hereby call for competitive recruitment to ensure that only the best are recruited into our Security Services.

We therefore urge closer collaboration between our security agencies and local community institutions and authorities as well as the citizenry to strengthen the mechanisms for ensuring the safety of life and property in our country.

14.0 Economic Growth, Poverty, Inequality

14.1 The Government deserves commendation for the successful completion of economic reforms under the IMF-sponsored Extended Credit Facility (ECF) programme. The reforms have put the economy on the path of sustainable growth. Today broad economic indicators are pointing in the right direction. Our economic growth rate is reputed to be one of the highest in the world, and inflation is down to single digits.

14.2 It is deeply troubling, however, that the gap between the rich and the poor has grown to an embarrassingly high levels. We therefore urge our national political leadership to take urgent steps to ensure equity in the distribution of the benefits of growth.

15.0 Financial Sector Reforms

15.1 We cannot comment on the economy without touching on the Financial Sector clean-up that resulted in the closure of several indigenously owned Banks and many small Loans and Savings Companies. According to the Central Bank the action was necessary to save millions of depositors from losing their deposits as some of the Banks and Savings and Loans Companies were already in danger of faltering.

15.2 To the extent that the exercise is meant to protect depositors from losing their hard-earned monies, we commend the Central Bank. We, are however, concerned about many Ghanaians whose monies have been locked up in these defunct institutions with no hope of redeeming their investments and appeal to the Government to help these, recover their monies.

15.3 The exercise also pushed thousands of Ghanaians out of work. We urge Government to consciously protect indigenous financial institutions that are only starting, from being swallowed up by the big international and other powerful financial institutions.

16.0 District Level Elections and National Referendum

16.1 We wish to draw attention of fellow Ghanaians, specifically those who have registered as voters, of two very important civic responsibilities we all have to perform in this coming December, namely the district level elections and the national referendum on the participation of political parties in local government. On Tuesday December 17, 2019 the nation will go to the polls to elect Assembly members for all 260 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies and Lower Local Government Units.

16.2 Local Government is the level of government that is closer to the majority of our people. This is the level of government that delivers basic services such as education, sanitation, lorry parks, markets, planning, etc. Our participation and support are critical to the effective performance of local government.

16.3 We should therefore exercise our political responsibility as citizens by turning out in our numbers to vote for the candidates of our choice. In the past, participation in local government elections has not been impressive. This is our chance to go out to vote massively and change the trend.

16.4 On the same day that we shall be electing our District Assembly and Unit Committee members, we shall be voting in a historic national referendum. In this referendum, all citizens will answer a simple question on whether or not we favour the amendment of our national constitution to allow political parties to campaign and present candidates for Metropolitan, Municipal and District elections and other Local Government Units.

16.5 We have an important civic and Christian responsibility to make our voices heard on this matter. Let us put Ghana first and vote massively in the referendum on Tuesday December 17, 2019.

17.0 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in 2020

17.1 In December 2020 we shall for the eighth time in the Fourth Republic be called upon to elect a President and members of Parliament. Elections are a major exercise for the expression of the sovereign will of the people and the very core of democratic governance.

The principal lesson elections teach us is that no one can govern except by the sovereign will of the people. As we do, prior to all elections, we earnestly appeal to all Ghanaians to go about their preparation towards the 2020 elections in a manner that gives true meaning to democracy. In this regard, we should all desist from bribery, threats, violence, lies, insults and other evil means to secure any electoral advantage.

17.2 We ask that issues concerning the Representative of People's Amendment Act (ROPAA) must be discussed and executed carefully to ensure a successful implementation because it has implications for national security.

18.0 Fight Against Corruption

18.1 We have, as a nation, taken several measures to counter corruption in Ghana including the adoption and implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP). In 2017, the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) was created. The impact has not yet been felt. After two years of existence, the OSP does not have adequate office space and the needed personnel. To fight the culture of corruption, we urge maximum support for the OSP in terms of resources, information and open political dealings for the operations of the office. We are, however, pleased to note that, in spite of these bottlenecks, the OSP is making courageous efforts to fulfil its mandate.

18.2 We have observed in our previous communiqués that corruption is rife and has eaten into the very fabric of our society. Regrettably, corruption seem to be institutionalized and has become acceptable as part of our culture. We should not accept this negative culture. All our leaders have vowed to uproot corruption. If the leadership means to do this, it will definitely be able to do it with the support of all. We therefore urge the Government to use, as a matter of urgency, all powers within their means to change the structures that promote corruption. Ghanaians cannot accept any longer the fact that there are weak institutions which do not make it possible for corrupt persons to be prosecuted.

19.0 Implementation of the Universal Health Coverage 2030

19.1 We commend the Government for signing on to the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) 2030 Global Compact. It is reassuring to learn of the prescribed contents of Universal Health Coverage, which include financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for everyone.

19.2 In the spirit of providing sound health to the people of Ghana, we urge the Government to assume its rightful leadership role in resource mobilization and equitable allocation to implementing partners, to ensure alignment and holistic implementation of the UHC roadmap.

20.0 National Health Insurance Scheme

20.1 Retooling the National Health Insurance Scheme is necessary to achieve the UHC.

We therefore call on the Government to have an all-inclusive review of the entire NHIA with stakeholders to address the economics of the health delivery system. Certainly, some payments are made to the health facilities but they are never on time. The system is proving to be less and less comprehensive. Many payments have had to be passed on to the patients because the prescribed NHIA tariffs are not enough to pay for these services. Reports from our Health Facilities indicate that they are finding it extremely difficult to manage their institutions under the scheme. We would like to appeal that there is an extensive review of the entire NHIS. Meanwhile, we call on the Government to strengthen NHIS to ensure prompt payment to service providers to reduce the stress our facilities are going through.

21.0 Deplorable Roads

21.1 We urge the Government to speed up the maintenance, rehabilitation and construction of our roads that are in various degrees of deplorable state. The poor state of these roads is not only affecting economic activities of the areas concerned but has enormous health and development implications. We are aware of the initiative and plans of Government to fix some of the roads. We plead that Government tackles many more roads and ensure that these roads are built to stand the test time.

22.0 Exploitation of our Natural Resources and Climate Change

22.1 We, welcome the global events during the month of September that highlighted the precarious situation of our "*Common Home*"- the Environment and the need for urgent actions. We commend Government's tireless efforts in fighting the menace of illegal mining that has plagued our nation. Unfortunately, it looks like the fight against illegal mining and deforestation has now become a mirage since the very institutions and personnel mandated to stop the menace are rather collaborating with the illegal miners and loggers for their selfish gains.

22.2 We continue to request Government, Traditional Leaders and other Stakeholders to further put in place measures that will help citizens refrain from the selfish exploitation of our natural resources, leading to the pollution of water bodies and the destruction of forest reserves. Ghana is losing its forest cover at a very alarming rate with very visible signs of desert-like conditions now being experienced in the country. Even rare and economic tree species like the rosewood and shea trees are being felled with impunity in Northern Ghana and in parts of the Oti Region. The continuous dumping and burning of hazardous waste; especially electronic and plastics at Agbogbloshie, Ashaiman and other cities in Ghana have become a public health menace.

23.0 Government White Paper

23.1 While we respect the Government's right to issue a White Paper, we would like to observe that this practice has become a strategy by successive Governments to neutralize the work of Commissions set up to address certain criminal issues. We appeal to the Government to have the courage to implement the recommendations of the recent Emile Short Commission, especially those sections that refer to instances of criminality.

24.0 Weak and ineffective Institutions

24.1 The inability of State institutions to effectively address issues such as Chieftaincy disputes, implementation of public policies, lack of political will to crack the whip in dealing with crime and corruption, over politicization of issues, procurement malpractices, poor land management, inflation of contracts, leakages in the tax system leading to inadequate revenue mobilization, lack of time frame for public service delivery, lack of contingency planning in respect of certain critical sectors of national life etc., are making citizens lose confidence in politics and democracy in general. This puts democracy at risk in Ghana because citizens feel democracy is not working.

25.0 Abandoned and Unfinished Government Projects

25.1 The Constitution of Ghana (Article 35, clause 7) states that a new Government shall continue with projects left behind by previous Governments. We therefore deplore the culture where Governments come into office only to discontinue projects started by previous Governments. We are disturbed to see that many projects in areas of education, health, housing and roads started by the previous Governments are abandoned.

We hereby appeal to the Government to hasten to complete ongoing projects to bring relief to the affected communities.

26.0 Conclusion

26.1 We call on all People of God to embrace a life of holiness, justice, righteousness demonstrating patriotism. For, *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9)

May the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Saint Francis de Sales, the Patron Saints of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast continue to intercede for us! Amen

Issued on Friday, November 15, 2019



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