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11 March 2010

His Excellency
Ignatius Ayau Kaigama
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Dear Archbishop Ignatius

I thank you for your emailed report of the recent attack of 7 March 2010 near Jos. It saddened my heart and that of the many people of my own Archdiocese and indeed throughout Scotland to learn from you directly of the sad troubles at present afflicting your own Archdiocese and other areas in Nigeria.

As you know, our Archdiocese has been linked with the now Diocese of Bauchi, once part of your own Archdiocese, since the time of my predecessor, Cardinal Gordon Gray, and those bonds have continued into my own time. I well remember the words of your beloved predecessor, Archbishop Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka, when 'in receiving back' Bauchi at a wonderful ceremony here in Edinburgh. He said: "Would a mother forget her child?". I assure you that we have never forgotten Bauchi – nor indeed the mother diocese of Jos.

Consequently, our prayers are indeed with you at this present time; and we ask God to send his Holy Spirit on you and on all of the peoples in positions of responsibility that there may indeed be lasting peace in Nigeria.

I renew my sympathy with you and with the people of the Diocese of Bauchi on the tragic death recently of Bishop John Moore SMA, the first Catholic Bishop of Bauchi. I will be celebrating a Memorial Mass for him in our Archdiocese in the Parish of St Mary's, Stirling with many of our priests, religious and people who were previously associated with Bauchi, present with me. The Mass will be celebrated, as you see, on the Feast of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, Thursday 25 March 2010 at 7.30 pm.

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We will pray at this Mass, not only for the happy repose of the soul of the late Bishop John, but also that the announcement of the 'good news' of the coming of the Lord will indeed be a reality in our lives, affecting the way we all live in peace and harmony.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien
Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh
President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Herdsmen (Pastoralists) raid Villages near Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria,

A report by Most Rev. Ignatius A. Kaigama, Catholic Archbishop of Jos, 9th March, 2010

Less than two months after the January 17th 2010 Jos ethno-religious crisis in which hundreds of people lost their lives, what seems to be a reprisal attack, in which over one hundred persons have been reportedly killed in an early morning raid occurred on March 7th in the villages of Dogon Nahawa, Ratsat and Zot Foron, some 15 kilometers South of the city of Jos. The villagers of the Berom ethnic group (mainly Christians) alleged that their attackers were Fulani Muslim herdsmen who swooped on them while they slept. The attack which lasted more than two hours began at about 2:30 am and the victims were completely unprepared for the fury of the marauders. The free use of guns, cutlasses and other lethal weapons left little chance for the victims, mainly children and women who were hacked down and burnt as they attempted to escape the massacre.

The exact figures of casualties are normally difficult to ascertain in such circumstances. The electronic and print media have given divergent figures ranging from 150 to over 700. The parish priest of St. Thomas Parish Shen who pastorally serves the affected areas, Rev Fr Philip Jamang said he physically witnessed the mass burial of sixty four (64) persons in Dogon Na Hawa village, thirty (30) persons in Ratsat and twenty-four (24) in Zot Foron not including those still missing. A resident of the village, Peter Jang, described how the attackers went about their dastardly act by starting to shoot in the air in order to bring people from their houses and then when people came out, they started shooting at them and cutting them with machetes and other weapons while at the same time burning their houses. The attackers were said to have departed the scene of their mayhem unscathed; arriving and departing with such speed that neither the surrounding villagers nor the police could mobilize fast enough to stop their escape. Many believe that the attackers are Fulani Muslims from the neighbouring Bauchi State.

Information at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, Jos and the Jos University Teaching Hospital indicates that many persons were receiving treatment arising from serious gun shots and machete cuts while others had died. Right now, the attack has stopped and military personnel have been deployed to control the situation while top level peace talks calling for rational reasoning are being held at several levels in the search for peace.

As of yesterday, the 8th of March, fear and suspicion spread throughout the city of Jos and the Bukuru areas and anxious residents mostly kept vigil around their homes, especially when reports spread that the mood in the surrounding villages was tense. People feared the possibility of more reprisal attacks.

Government, community, religious and people of goodwill in Plateau State and across Nigeria have expressed shock about the beastly manner of the March 7th attack and killings even while efforts were still being made to address the security challenges created by the 17th to 20th January upheavals.

A Peace Conference was planned by the Institute of Governance and Social Research, Jos in collaboration with the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Plateau State Government for the 8th of March 2010 at the Hill Station Hotel with the theme, "Peace in Jos: Arresting the Cycle of Violence". The conference still went on despite the early morning unfortunate incident. In attendance were three former Nigeria heads of State: General Yakubu Gowon, Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Chief Ernest Shonekan. Representatives of the Bauchi, Nassarawa and Kaduna State Governments were in attendance just as the Governor of Plateau State and his team of officials, many serving and retired security officials, Ministers, Senators and House of Representative members and religious leaders. Women and youth groups were represented and spoke passionately against the acts of barbarism being witnessed and often mistaken to be inspired by religious zeal.

Everyone at this forum condemned the attacks as heartless while advising that the root causes of the recurring crises must be looked into, examined and solutions proffered for permanent peace. My intervention at this forum in my capacity as the co-chairman for the Inter religious Council for Peace and Harmony dwelt on the need to transcend the religious motives usually associated with the crises to look for the social, ethnic, economic and political causes. There must be concerted efforts by the state governors to address the problems permanently as most of the issues that lead to these crises are not necessarily about religion, but religion is a convenient tool used to press for demands.

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Jos crisis set up by the Acting President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, has been meeting for the past three weeks and will continue to meet for another ten days or so. The Committee has visited places affected by the crises and is seeking for sincere ways of preventing similar occurrences in the future. I am a member of the committee and I believe it has a lot to offer.

As was the case in 2008 crisis, the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos is organizing a Mass of solidarity to pray with and for the victims of the affected persons. The Holy Mass will hold on the 19th of March 2010 at St. Jarlath's Parish Church Bukuru, an area which experienced most of the physical destruction to lives and properties, especially homes and means of livelihood. We hope to pray for and fraternally inspire at this Mass a greater courage and confidence in all those affected. We have taken collections of material items as well as made monetary contributions to help the affected. We got support from some dioceses in Nigeria, international church agencies and individuals. Our Justice, Peace and Caritas Department has already attempted to attend to some food, medical and clothing needs of the many thousands who were displaced (Muslims, Christians and others). At the Mass of solidarity which is meant for only the Catholic victims, a card with the design of our Lady of Peace will be presented to each affected person with some monetary token as a symbol of the prayers and good wishes of our family in the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos.