



**Communiqué Issued By The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference At The End Of  
Their Annual Plenary Assembly Held At Takoradi In The Western Region  
From 2<sup>nd</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

*“The grace and peace from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thess. 1:2)*

***Preamble***

We, the Catholic Bishops of Ghana, have held our annual Plenary Assembly in Takoradi in the Western Region from 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011 under the theme “*Good Governance for Peace*”. Preceding our plenary with four days of spiritual retreat, and reflecting on *Good Governance for Peace*, we took cognizance of the fact that at the heart of the Preamble to Ghana’s 1992 Constitution is the affirmation that Ghanaians are a God-loving people. Further, *Good Governance* should enable us develop, grow and sustain our faith and belief in God. The great messages of Christ—LOVE, FAITH AND PEACE—should therefore be nurtured by and through the governance system. That is why clause 1 of Article 1 to our constitution stipulates that

*“the sovereignty resides in the people of Ghana In Whose Name And For Whose Welfare The Powers Of Government Are To Be Exercised In The Manner And Within The Limits Laid Down In This Constitution”.*

In connection with the theme we have given some thought to issues of national, ecclesiastical and human importance and wish to share with all Ghanaians that the basic instrument for peace is good governance.

***Good Governance and Peace***

Essentially, good governance, constitutional democracy and constitutionalism refer to the same universal ideas about how to manage the public affairs of a people in order to create the space that enables them to live their lives here on earth in dignity, prosperity, security and peace. Properly understood, then, good governance is a means to an end as well as an end in itself.

Our dear country Ghana has gradually gained a reputation for good governance. Since the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution, the people of Ghana have gone to the polls five times to elect a President and members of parliament. These elections have generally gone off successfully and the transfer of power from one government to another has on the whole been smooth. As a result of good governance, we enjoy some measure of political stability, which has brought relative peace to the country. It is our contention that for this peace to be guaranteed there is the need to safeguard good governance in our country, especially with the 2012 elections not too far away. There are various roles that we can all play in the promotion of good governance and peace in our country.

### ***The Church, Good Governance and Peace***

We, Bishops, Priests and Religious should seek first and foremost to pursue good governance within the Church entrusted to us according to the laws of the Church. The Church, as a divine and human institution, has both the mission and the obligation to practise good governance and peace because Jesus brought and left us peace. The Church must therefore take the lead in translating this peace into the streets, the hearts and minds of our people throughout the governance machinery.

### ***People of God, Good Governance and Peace***

The Church respects the decision of each individual. This reality is evident in all our congregations composed of members belonging to all existing parties. However, within the party of their choice, Christians must act as the “salt”, “light” and “leaven” (cf. Mt. 5:13, 14; Lk. 13:21). There must be a *“firm commitment to justice and solidarity by each member of the People of God. Catholic professionals and teachers, businessmen and businesswomen, civil servants, lawyers and politicians are especially expected to bear witness to goodness, truth, justice and love of God in their lives”* (Ecclesia in Africa, #105, 108). We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in the light of a properly formed conscience, and that the participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election. Voting should be guided more by one’s moral conviction than by one’s attachment to a political party or interest group.

To ensure good governance in our country, it is important for you, our lay Catholics, and indeed all Ghanaians, to be actively involved in politics. As citizens of the nation, you

have every right to take an active part in the political life of the country. All who are qualified should register to take part in voting, seek key positions in government, district assemblies, etc. Indeed, you should even strive to become members of parliament. If you refuse to vote, or show indifference to political issues, you deny yourself a right and a responsibility to yourself and the nation. As Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*) says,

*“Those who are suited or can become suited should prepare themselves for the difficult, but at the same time, the very noble art of politics, and should seek to practise this art without regard for their own interests or for material advantages. With integrity and wisdom, they must take action against any form of injustice and tyranny, against arbitrary domination by an individual or a political party and any intolerance”* (no.75).

We urge those who are already doing active politics to do their work conscientiously and avoid deceit and intolerance. They should shun bribery and corruption and the misappropriation of funds. They should do politics in a holy manner. In this connection we should bear in mind that the 1994 African Synod held in Rome *“prayed fervently to the Lord that there would arise in Africa holy politicians — both men and women — and that there would be saintly Heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served”* (*Ecclesia in Africa*, par. 111).

### ***Politicians, Good Governance and Peace***

We entreat our politicians not to engage in the practice of pulling down their political colleagues in the interests of their personal political agenda. Furthermore, they should avoid unnecessary and unhealthy rivalry among themselves and between political parties. They should put an end to the culture of insults that is a common phenomenon these days in political discourse, just as they should refrain from making pronouncements that, instead of promoting peace, create confusion, rancour, bitterness and resentment. We join St. Paul to admonish our politicians to *“conduct yourselves wisely... making the most of the time. Let your speech be always gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone”* (Col 4:6).

We appeal to all Ghanaians to be objective and constructive in their criticisms and not to be blinded by their party affiliation. We should eschew sycophancy and have the courage to correct our politicians when they go wrong. While we need to be frank with our

politicians and point out their mistakes to them, we should also acknowledge and encourage them for their good deeds. Consciously, and at all times, we should avoid doing politics along ethnic lines.

### ***Government, Good Governance and Peace***

In the pursuit of good governance that will bring peace to the country, the Government has an indispensable role to play. It must ensure that, in the matter of preparing for elections, there is a level playing field for all the political parties. This means that they must all have the freedom to campaign anywhere in the country without hindrance. They should have equal access to state resources when it comes to media coverage, security, and financial subsidies. The abuse of incumbency to influence the electoral process should be avoided.

It is also the duty of Government to see to it that the rule of law prevails. It should ensure, through the security agencies, that all those who take the law into their own hands and commit crimes are brought to justice, irrespective of their political affiliation, origin or status. This is especially important during elections. Government should ensure that the security agencies are provided with the logistical support that they need for their work. The security agencies that will be responsible for maintaining peace and order during the elections should conduct themselves professionally, remain absolutely neutral and take the appropriate action against all troublemakers.

### ***Metro/Municipal/District Assemblies, Good Governance and Peace***

Metro/Municipal/District Assemblies have a major role in the governance in our country. Constitutionally, they have the responsibility to manage the affairs in their respective political areas. Further, the Assembly Men and Women have firsthand information about conditions in their areas. The assemblies therefore have a major role to play to promote good governance and peace. We urge them to use the resources at their disposal judiciously for the good of the people. We urge the assemblies, further, to seek not only the physical development of their areas but should also take keen interest in the education of the populace with regard to their civic rights and responsibilities to their communities and country. The cumulative effect of good governance at the Metro/Municipal/District Assemblies goes a long way to promote peace in our country.

### ***National Development Plan, Good Governance and Peace***

We have noted with some concern that after 54 years of independence, Ghana's national aspirations seem to be captured piecemeal only in political party manifestoes, which are at best short-term. The lack of a national development plan results in uncompleted and abandoned projects and wasted resources. We call on the government, as a matter of urgency, to facilitate the development of a strategic national vision shared and owned by all Ghanaians. As a first step, the membership of the National Development Planning Commission should be broadened to include all stakeholders to develop a long-term national development plan. This, we hope, will put an end to the culture of abandoning projects and programmes initiated by previous governments. As a country, we ought to appreciate the fact that development is building upon what one inherits and not starting afresh any time the reins of government change hands.

### ***Education, Computerized Selection of Schools and Placement System (CSSPS) and Peace***

We have, in our Communiqués over the years, spoken about the direction of the educational system in our country. All the successive governments and their respective Ministries of Education have ignored our observation and the cry of the people as if governments are free to do with the educational system whatever pleases them. The massive failure of students in the BECE and the appalling performance in the CSSPS this year also tell us that government is still not listening to the people. The present government and successive ones must take note that there is a quiet but growing anger among the people about the politicization of education in the country. We, therefore, appeal to the government to let us maintain the four year system of Senior High School for some time to know its full benefits and disadvantages before we decide whether to make any changes or switch to another system.

Further, we appeal to the government to abolish the CSSPS, for there appears to be as much, if not more corruption, confusion and inefficiency in this system as the former. After years of experimenting with the CSSPS, we think that the time has come to abolish this system and replace it with a workable alternative. Seven weeks into the first term, some students are still at home waiting to know which schools to attend. The use of the internet to know in which schools students are placed further complicates the process, especially for students who have no ready access to this service.

### ***Oil and Gas Find, Good Governance and Peace***

An unlikely source, which is putting pressure on and raising the political temperature in recent times is, surprisingly, the oil-find off the coast of the Western Region. The oil find should ordinarily be good news. Countries like Norway have shown how, with good governance, the additional resources which are made available can be harnessed to create a nation at peace with itself generally. In Ghana the early signs give cause for apprehension. The debates in Parliament on the question of whether a fixed percentage of these resources should be reserved for the development of the Western Region and government tussles with Kosmos, Exxon, Mobil and EO Group suggest that we are in danger of repeating the mistakes associated with oil production elsewhere in Africa, with ominous consequences.

Good governance entails the judicious use of the resources of the nation. Last year in our communiqué issued in Sefwi Wiawso, we thanked the Lord for the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities in our country. We urged the Government to factor the real concerns of the people into the contracts with the oil companies and the management of the oil revenues for the benefit of all. To ensure transparency and accountability, we stated that oil companies and the Government needed to develop the culture of publishing regularly all information regarding contracts, exploration and planned production activities as well as annual audited accounts by reputable audit firms of their fiscal activities. We would like to reiterate those concerns here and urge Government to make judicious use of the revenue that will accrue from the oil and gas. As Blessed John Paul II says in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, “governments have the binding duty to protect the common patrimony against all forms of waste and embezzlement by citizens lacking public spirit or by unscrupulous foreigners” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, # 113). We would also add that the Western Region, where the oil and gas have been found, should be given the attention it deserves in terms of development and infrastructure. The deplorable state of most of the roads in the Western Region, such as the Bogoso-Ayanfuri-Tarkwa road, needs immediate and urgent attention. Similarly, other major roads in the country, such as the *Accra-Kumasi* road, and the proposed “*Eastern Corridor*” need urgent attention. We believe tolls taken on such reconstructed roads, if properly managed, can be used to repair and construct other roads in the country.

### ***Judiciary, Good Governance and Peace***

In recent times, there has been an expression of disaffection with the performance of the judiciary which has been expressed in a manner which seems to undermine the public's confidence in this institution and to sap the energies, especially, of its leadership. We totally condemn all such acts against the judiciary and call for an immediate halt to such attitudes and interferences in the exercise of their duties.

Of course the Judges have problems. Like the rest of our human institutions, some of them may not be above reproach. But, if for this reason alone, we destroy the confidence the public has in the administration of Justice, or the Judges are too frightened to administer justice fairly to all without fear or favour, clearly, one of the first casualties will be peace. We therefore exhort the judiciary to correct the perceived disaffections in their ranks.

### ***Parliament, Good Governance and Peace***

As Pastors, we wish to commend our Legislature and Executive for making the effort to put the interest of the country first in their dealings. We are, however, concerned about the high levels of partisanship in discussions of some national issues. We urge our Legislators and Executive to promote the National interest and the Common Good. Consensus should be sought on key national issues and therefore numerical strength should not compromise substantial debates, especially on matters that have long lasting implications on all Ghanaians. Finally, let us remind our legislators of their duty to pass good laws in the public interest.

### ***Politics of Respect, Civility and Peace***

Media proliferation in Ghana may be a symptom of Ghana's maturation in the democratic culture. It is in the light of this that we wish to remind both State and Independent media of their unique and sacred role in society, namely, educating, informing and entertaining the citizenry. Sensationalism should be avoided at all cost to protect the peace and stability of the country. As a people, we need to redirect our political discourse, raise concerns and issues dispassionately for the common good of all Ghanaians.

It is regrettable to note that while media pluralism is encouraged, the political elite, party functionaries and activists as well as known and unknown 'serial callers' to radio and TV

programmes have engaged in negative practices such as mud-slinging at opponents, non-constructive criticisms and use of offensive language against their political opponents during radio and TV discussions. These engagements have sometimes been poorly moderated, resulting in inflammatory statements made by some panelists. The result is the mobilization of supporters to media houses all in the name of defending the cause of parties. In the run-up to the elections, such actions can deepen the antagonism between the major political protagonists, increase existing tensions and possibly lead to chaos if not checked. We are therefore appealing to the leadership of all political parties to keep their followers in check and to remind them that governance is about issues and alternatives to development and not insults.

An impression is being created that the political parties survive on inflammatory and foul language and that deviants are celebrated and motivated outside public domain. It is important that we treat others as we would want them treat us; that is, leaders of political parties should be held responsible if they fail to keep their functionaries within acceptable conduct. Together we wish to appeal to the media to set the agenda that enhances the wellbeing of the Ghanaian.

### ***Biometric Registration, Voting and Good Governance***

We commend the government for the release of funds to enable the Electoral Commission (EC) to implement a new biometric voting register as the country seeks to advance the cause of democracy through transparent, free and fair elections. Since, to a large extent, our peace in the country depends on transparent elections, we urge the government and the Electoral Commission to procure all the equipment necessary to authenticate the identity of voters.

While urging our political parties to learn to trust and help the EC to deliver on his mandate, we equally urge the EC to be proactive and accountable to the citizenry it represents. We call on the Electoral Commission to come out clearly to inform Ghanaians what the biometric register is about, how it functions, so we the people of Ghana are able to give our inputs to enrich the process. Further, we call on the government, as a matter of urgency, to embark on civic education of the populace to dispel the ignorance, not only about the biometric system of election, but also about their rights and obligations as citizens.



### ***Governance and Peace before Elections***

As the 2012 elections appear on the horizon, it may be helpful to examine how close we came to disaster during and after some elections and to recognise that post-election peace has to be engineered throughout the run-up to the election. The recollection is not intended to frighten anybody; rather, it is meant to assist us to reflect realistically on what peace will require in 2012 and beyond.

The environment before elections is critical and must be conducive for free and fair elections. People should be afforded ample time to register and verify their registration as voters at a reasonable pace. Qualified voters should have clearly designated and easily accessible centres to register. Long queues discourage some people from registering and from voting and should be avoided at all cost.

Political parties should be cautioned against double registration and the registration of minors and foreigners. As key stakeholders, political parties should be guided by a high sense of integrity and national pride and so uphold high standards and values that will enhance good governance and democracy. Political parties should avoid provocative utterances in campaigns which should be peaceful and respectful of other parties, while challenging each other's views and opinions on issues.

### ***Towards a Smooth Political Transition***

As a Conference, we wish to add our voice to the call by numerous well-meaning Ghanaians for the establishment of a political framework for the efficient management of post-election transfer of political power from one administration to another. This framework is also to provide and regulate political transfer of power and other related matters. There is no doubt that the Fourth Republic has witnessed the successful change in government through the transfer of political authority from one political party to another. It is unfortunate that these transitions have been characterized by administrative lapses, controversies and acrimonies with regard to the management of state assets and resources. Let us all throw our weight behind the institutions that are making strenuous efforts at making this a reality.

### ***Conclusion***

Peace is a precondition for human development and fulfillment. Good governance is the only platform on which sustainable peace can flourish. The state is a political organization whose welfare and survival should be matters of concern for every citizen, especially those entrusted with public power. Its government must be open and allow active participation by all its citizens. We exhort all who have the responsibility to govern to “... *tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly*” (1Pt. 5:2).

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