



**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS'
CONFERENCE AT THE END OF THEIR ANNUAL PLENARY
ASSEMBLY HELD AT KOFORIDUA IN THE EASTERN REGION OF
GHANA FROM NOVEMBER 2 – 9, 2012**

Preamble

May the Peace of Christ be with you!

We, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have held our Plenary Assembly **in Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana from November 2 – 9, 2012** under the theme ***“The Church, Family of God in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”***. Taking inspiration from the two past special assemblies of the Synod of Bishops and developments on the African continent, and especially in our own country Ghana, we wish to share with you some reflections on the Church, Family of God and indeed our beloved nation Ghana as a family of God. As a family we have responsibilities to treat one another as family members, cultivating reconciliation and justice to produce peace especially during trying times such as the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

The Church as Family of God

The 1994 Synod with its consequent Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* opted for the model: Church-family of God (*Ecclesia in Africa*: 63). The Exhortation invited Christian families in Africa to become ‘domestic churches’ (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio*, 21). This image emphasises our common origin and destiny as children of God (Eph.3:14; Acts 17:26). Furthermore, for the African, the family is the fundamental base of humanity and of the society. As a family, respect, sense of belonging and care for one another are our values and discord, chaos and hatred give way to unity and peace. Like the African family, the Church always aims at building up her members, to uphold her image and reinforce her values of care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust (*Ecclesia in Africa*, #63). This explains why the Church is appreciated as a gift from God given to building the kingdom of reconciliation justice and peace here on earth, and in Ghana (*Africae Munus* 7).

Family of God in service of Reconciliation Justice and Peace

For the Church, the family of God, justice is the first virtue of social institutions. Justice is inextricably linked with peace. Human peace obtained without justice is illusory and ephemeral and human justice which is not the fruit of reconciliation in the “truth of love” (Eph 4:15; *Africae Munus 18*) remains incomplete. The fruit of justice and reconciliation is peace that we all yearn for in the country and in our families. The Church, the family of God, has the mission to be an instrument of reconciliation, justice and peace in the wider society. Ghana, our beloved country, is a family of God.

Ghana, a Family of God

We cherish family as the basic unit of society. One characteristic that distinguishes the Ghanaian family is our emphasis on communal values such as family, respect for the elderly and for our traditional rulers as well as the premium that we place on the importance of dignity and proper social conduct. Thus the family, especially the extended family, constitutes the point of reference and identity in Ghana. It has to do with relatives from the mother’s as well as the father’s side. It is through this extended family that, among other things, the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation is nurtured and experienced. Family obligations take precedence over everything else and the entire family shares any gain or loss.

As one people and nation we should endeavour to transcend our ethnic and tribal boundaries and consider ourselves as one people in spite of our differences. It is against this backdrop that we appeal to all Ghanaians to see our country Ghana, as one extended African family with the President as the head of this family. At the same time we appeal to governments to observe their role as the father of the extended family, mindful of the fact that all authority comes from God (Wis. 6:3). Our governments need to ensure that reconciliation, justice and peace prevail in this extended and varied family of Ghana. It is for this reason that we commend the government, for the many interventions mentioned below which it has made to protect the family of Ghanaians.

Presidential Transition Act

We wish to commend the Executive, Legislature and all Ghanaians for the various roles they played in the passage of the Presidential Transition Act. This Act, we hope, will, to a large extent, address unacceptable political practices, and enhance transparency and accountability in the management of public assets. We urge all especially politicians to be open-minded about the Act as we recommend to government to put the necessary institutions in place for the implementation of the Act.

Constitutional Review Process

We also commend the government for the Constitutional Review Process aimed at introducing reforms to the 1992 Constitution after twenty years of democratic practice. We note that the government has issued a white paper on the Commission's Report and has inaugurated the Constitutional Review Implementation Committee. It is our expectation that the process will continue to be open, participatory and inclusive to deepen our democracy and governance for the well-being of citizens. In this vein we look forward to reforms that will expand economic, social and cultural rights, and strengthen national institutions and systems that reduce bribery and corruption, and the elimination of the death penalty.

National Development Plan

We are happy that there is a body appointed to develop a National Development Plan that will generally be acceptable to all Ghanaians. The short-term nature of the present "Ghana shared growth and Development Agenda" does not adequately meet the developmental needs of Ghanaians. We therefore wish to endorse the proposal of the Constitutional Review Commission to have a medium to long term development plan, and that such a provision should be entrenched in the constitution to make successive governments abide by the plan. This, we believe, will stop the practice whereby the development of our country is subjected to the party manifesto of the government in power. Such method of planning often abandons projects of preceding governments with untold financial and social costs to the People of Ghana. The People of Ghana deserve better than this. We therefore urge the National Development Planning Commission, which has been given this onerous yet honourable responsibility, to work as fast as possible to make us have a sense of common direction in our developmental agenda.

Church-State Partnership in Education Delivery

In the course of this year the Church organized educational fora in all the ten regions of the country and engaged officers of the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service and some members of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education to seek views on the nature of the partnership that should exist between the Church and State in education delivery. We are encouraged by the candid discussions we had with the Minister of Education on this issue, and the Minister's affirmation of the need for such agreement to guide Church--State Partnership in Education. It is our hope that very soon we will have the report of the Committee constituted by the Honourable Minister of Education to synthesize the Spio Garbrah and the Prof. Ansu Kyeremeh documents on the Church-State partnership in education.

As we commend the Government for these and other important and bold decisions they make to promote reconciliation justice and peace in and among the family of Ghanaians, we wish to draw the attention of Government and the attention of the People of Ghana to some other pertinent issues that we need to address as a family to promote reconciliation, justice and peace in our nation, Ghana.

Education

Last year we appealed to the government, in our Communiqué, to “let us maintain the four year system of Senior High School (SHS) for some time to know its full benefits and disadvantages before we decide whether to make any changes or switch to another system”. This year we make the same appeal to the government. There is no denying the fact that it is possible to finish the academic syllabus within three years, given greater commitment on the part of teachers and cooperation from students. But basing ourselves on the testimony of teachers and the formative needs of the students we urge that the four years SHS program be brought back. Further, we will like to appeal once again to the government to reconsider the challenges involved in the computerised system of placing students in schools which are well known to the State and to parents and guardians.

We have also taken note of the recent calls for “freedom of worship” in the country's Senior High Schools by our President, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, at the last Eid ul Adha celebration (Daily Graphic, October 26, 2012). We like to state that the Catholic Church respects and practices freedom of worship in our schools.

We, however, like to raise this concern that what some are calling for in the name of “freedom of worship” could lead to very complex challenges of indiscipline and other pitfalls in education delivery in our schools. We are therefore calling for a broader involvement of all stakeholders and a very careful study of what this right of “freedom of worship” should mean in practice, and its implications in schools and in education delivery in our dear country.

The Plight of the Vulnerable in God’s Family in Ghana

One of the main duties of the State is to protect the rights of all citizens, especially weaker members such as women and children and the poor. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that come from God. This dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, individual merit or accomplishment.

This notwithstanding, we have situations in this country in which a large number of our compatriots do not have access to good drinking water in the rural areas. In the Eastern Region where we have been holding our conference and in many parts of the country, there is monstrous and reckless exploitation of our forests and land resources; the prevailing indiscriminate mining activities by illegal and armed individuals and companies is frightening; armed herdsmen feed their animals on the crops of defenceless subsistence farmers; water and river bodies which are the people’s only sources of drinking water are muddied and poisoned with extremely dangerous chemicals which pose health hazards to the folk in the rural areas. Armed foreigners threaten our people on their land and, according to reports, even murder some of them who they want to protect their farm lands. These have nobody to defend them from the aggressors.

We interacted with the clients of the “Matthew 25, a home for HIV and AIDS patients in Koforidua. The Directors of the home complained that there is an acute shortage of Anti Retroviral drugs not only in their home but in many other hospitals and clinics that need them for their patients. Where they were available the supply has been irregular. We appeal to Government to make available these drugs to these vulnerable people.

We wish to remind the Government and Parliament, District and Municipal Directors, our civil and traditional leaders of their oath to protect the entire citizenry of Ghana. Their

inaction and silence on these illegal and destructive activities is frightening and quite discouraging, just as it is incomprehensible. It is only reconciliation, in the sense of healing the brokenness and lack of attention to the other perceived as ‘part of our own’ that can overcome these crises and restore the dignity of these members of the Family of Ghana who have been marginalized.

Bribery and Corruption

These evils are now endemic in every section of the society. They call for determined efforts of all Ghanaians to rid ourselves of the canker that is gradually eating us away. In most offices and places of work people make demands before they render the services they are already paid to render. This practice has become an “acceptable” part of our life so much so that the few who would not indulge in it are considered as odd by their friends and fellow workers. And yet if we all stopped giving and receiving bribes, we would all stand to gain immensely. We appeal to the Church, Government and all people of goodwill to take the lead to make the whole nation accept this weakness together as a people so we can start addressing the problem together. We appeal once again to all Catholics to continue to pray the “Prayer Against Bribery and Corruption”, while at the same time refusing to give or take bribes.

Peaceful Elections

In less than a month Ghana will be going to the polls to elect our President and Members of Parliament. Since we have successfully conducted these elections several times in the past, we should benefit from the mistakes and successes of the past elections to make the impending elections even more successful. We owe it to ourselves, as one big family, to safeguard the electoral process for the peace we all cherish. All Ghanaians, especially politicians, need to be reminded that politics, like religion, is devoted to the service of personal and social vocation of the same human being (*Gaudium et Spes*, # 76). All politics should thus promote the integral development of all citizens as one family.

We therefore call on the Government, the Electoral Commission, leadership of political parties and supporters, Security Agencies, the Media and all peace-loving Ghanaians to exhibit a high sense of professionalism in the discharge of their duties. All Ghanaians have a stake and should protect it.

The Electorate

While an election, in and by itself, cannot guarantee good governance it can facilitate or hinder development depending on how it is managed. Participation in the political life, in the light of fundamental moral principles, is therefore an essential duty of every Christian and 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 underage children and wards from voting. In the same vein we appeal to non Ghanaians who 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.

Political Parties

Political parties and candidates and their supporters need to fairly contest the elections educating their supporters on the dangers of cheating. Precisely, they should discourage their supporters from engaging in multiple voting, and voting in the name of the deceased.

We urge all political party leaders to exhibit a high sense of statesmanship by undertaking to accept election results declared by the EC. They should be magnanimous in victory and gracious in defeat. Losing candidates and parties in a free and fair election concede defeat with pride. Good losers are also peacemakers. Good losers also command respect. Losing parties become the minority in Parliament to serve as a check for government policies and performance through constructive criticism. Both the minority and majority in parliament should have one common aim, which is the realization of the common good of Ghanaians and should therefore respect the declaration by the EC.

All political parties and media houses are reminded to desist from declaring any results that have not been authorised by the electoral officers. The Electoral Commission is the

only body mandated by law to declare the official winner of elections. In addition, we call on political parties to educate their representatives to use due process of the law to address any grievances they may have.

After the declaration of results, we urge all to continue in the spirit of togetherness to join forces to build Mother Ghana. We appeal to all citizens to adopt a spirit of oneness and solidarity.

Electoral Commission

We commend the Chairman of the Electoral Commission and his team for their steadfastness and the preparations they have made for the upcoming elections. They have surmounted formidable challenges to make the biometric registration and voting a reality. Our appeal to the EC is to remain vigilant and to ensure that all relevant resources are deployed for the elections and all anticipated problems have anticipated solutions. Unnecessary delays or late delivery of human and material resources for the elections, creating unduly long queues and causing frustrations should be avoided at all cost. The application of justice, transparency and good management of the electoral process are very critical at this stage for sustaining the peace we enjoy.

Security Agencies

We commend the Security Agencies for what they have done so far with the resources available to them. We urge them to discharge their duty with dispatch and without fear or favour. The culture of impunity which has emboldened sections of the Ghanaian society contributes to the high levels of lawlessness in the country. We are very hopeful that they are well prepared and equipped to deal with the menace of ‘machomen’ who terrorize voters and create tension and an atmosphere of intimidation on polling days. We would encourage them, in the discharge of their duty, to demonstrate a high sense of professionalism by respecting the rights and dignity of all Ghanaian citizens.

Observers, Monitors and the Elections

The presence of observers and monitors, both local and foreign, helps to create a free, fair and peaceful atmosphere. We would urge all those responsible for them to ensure that they are not restricted to the big cities only. They should be made to also visit the hinterland to experience the level of participation of citizens in governance in Ghana.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we, your Shepherds, urge the whole Family of God and all peace-loving people to promote reconciliation, justice and peace among the family of God's People in Ghana. As our country prepares for yet another election, the Church, aware of her nature as a Family, invites all her members and people of goodwill to embrace the culture of dialogue in the settlement of all misunderstandings. As one people sharing in a common destiny, the Church as family of God reminds us that openness to dialogue should be the attitude practised by all within the Family of God. We repeat our call for mutual respect in our discourses and engagements always reminding ourselves about the Golden Rule, "Do unto other as you would want them do to you". (Mt. 7:12). The commandment of mutual love and respect, which represents the law of life for God's people, must inspire, purify and elevate all human relationships in society and especially, in our politics (*Dogmatic Constitution, Lumen Gentium, # 7*). In the context of this forthcoming election we repeat our appeal to all Ghanaians to pray and work for God's peace.

"... may the Lord of peace himself give you an everlasting peace in every place. May the Lord be with you all" (2 Thess. 3:16).

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