



ADDRESS

BY

**MUHAMMADU BUHARI,
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,**

AT THE

**OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2ND PLENARY
MEETING OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS'
CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA (CBCN)**

HOLDING AT THE

**HOLY FAMILY CATHEDRAL,
SOKOTO**

9TH September 2018

Protocols,

I am delighted to be amongst you today on the occasion of the 2nd Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

2. Let me start by thanking God for the opportunity to be here with you all today. I want to thank the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze, all the 73 Bishops who serve in the 55 Archdioceses and Dioceses of Nigeria for inviting me to Sokoto.

3. I have gathered that the hosting of this plenary is unique in several ways. Among other reasons, it is the first time in the history of the Church that the North-West Geo-political Zone of the country will be hosting the Church hierarchy, and in the citadel of the Islamic Faith, the seat of the Caliphate where the Sultan of Sokoto, the Head of Islam in the country is resident. The Bishops' plenary comes up twice in a year, the first in Abuja and the second in a Diocese under one of the nine Provinces of the Church in Nigeria. This year, Kaduna Province is hosting and Sokoto Diocese is chosen as the venue. It is our belief that the visit of the Bishops to the Diocese and the State will bring spiritual blessings to the people of Sokoto State and Nigeria as a Country.

4. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the incorporation of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, which serves as the organ of unity, communion and solidarity not just for Catholics but for the entire Christendom spread across the nation, Nigeria. The Conference through the 55 ecclesiastical jurisdictions shepherds souls in their Archdioceses, Dioceses and Vicariates, where they pray, study and work together. This has actually helped the Catholic mission to speak with one voice and spearhead the teaching, prophetic and pastoral ministry in Nigeria. The Catholic Church, no doubt, has played and will continue to play strategic role in the overall development of Nigeria and peaceful coexistence of all Nigerians. Government appreciates the Church's constructive engagement and dialogue which has contributed to our high level of responsiveness to the needs of the Nigerian people.

5. My Lord Bishops, due to circumstances we found ourselves, suspicion, especially on religious grounds has almost destroyed the fabrics of unity and love that bind us together. Similarly, the country has been faced with several security challenges in recent past.

6. There has been a lot of negative propaganda on the plan to Islamize Nigeria by this administration, without verifiable facts. Issues and actions of Government pointed at as sign-posts for such plans include the following four important issues:

- i. Membership of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC);

- ii. The Sharia;
- iii. Boko Haram insurgency; and
- iv. Herdsmen/Farmers Clashes.

Historical and existing facts however fail to support these claims because some of these issues either developed before the return to democracy in 1999 while others have been re-occurring under every Administration since 1999. I will like to set the records straight through this medium, in view of the important roles our churches play in the stability of the polity.

7. Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) dates back to 1969 when the then Government secured the observer status. Another administration formalized membership of the OIC in 1986 while a subsequent civilian administration took Nigeria into the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in 2005. It is important to note that subsequent to this development, the seat of the IDB Governor for Nigeria has been occupied by the Minister of Finance irrespective of his/her creed.

8. Another key issue already in focus is that of Sharia Law. My Lord Bishops, Sharia provision in the Constitution has remained the same since 1979 (but was only civil law, not criminal). While recognizing that some Northern States declared Sharia Legal System in year 2000-2002,

it is important to emphasize that politicians, playing on religious and ethnic sentiments aim to cause division by spreading hate speech which the Church must halt, being the custodian of the conscience of the people.

9. This Government came into power offering security as one of the core promises to the people. More than any other previous administration, the fight against religious fundamentalism and insurgency has been backed up by political will and military action. Fundamentalists' activities have been drastically curtailed and those found culpable have been brought before the Courts of Law. Similarly, the fight against Boko Haram insurgency is achieving the desired victory while efforts are on to address other socio-political issues.

10. Perhaps the most touching of all issues is the scattered incidents of killings and attacks on worship centres and leaders of the community. This is unfortunate and Government is seriously addressing it. Suffice it to

state however, that every religion and their adherents have been victims of these dastardly acts.

11. Mention must also be made of the farmer/herdsmen clashes across the nation. I must categorically state that this administration believes in a sustainable solution to the problems and assure all

Nigerians that criminals of whatever hue and their sponsors would be fished out and brought to justice. No Nigerian life deserves to be taken prematurely. I swore to protect the lives and properties of Nigerians and I remain committed to that pledge. Let me ensure you that all these unfortunate incidents will soon be a thing of the past

12. I want to use this opportunity to assure the Catholic community that we will continue to provide a free and safe environment to accommodate every tribe and creed. Nigeria belongs to all of us. We will continue to deliver on our Change Mantra to provide Security; fight Corruption; and improve the Economy for the betterment of all Nigerians.

13. Our religious fathers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, let me reiterate that the Government remains committed to collaborating with religious bodies in the development and management of schools. Missions who want their schools back should approach the appropriate government(s) with their requests and a sustainability plan that will not cause more hardship on the citizens, but that will bring more development and access to quality and affordable education for our teeming youth population.

14. Let me also use this opportunity to encourage you to use this Conference to pray, study and deliberate on important issues concerning the evangelization of the Church in Nigeria, the pastoral care of the

faithfuls, and the promotion of human dignity, human rights, truth, justice, reconciliation, peace and wholesome development of the Nigerian society.

15. Thank you all for your kind attention and wish you a very successful conference.

16. God bless.