



Archbishop Kaigama of Jos emerges President of RECOWA

Vatican Radio. The second West African Catholic Bishops' regional plenary assembly has concluded in Accra, Ghana with a passionate appeal to Africa's youth and for the persecuted Christians of the region. The RECOWA / CERAO Bishops' regional plenary assembly took place from 22 to 29 February 2016. At the end of the meeting, the Bishops expressed solidarity with countries in the region affected by

incessant terrorist attacks. In particular, the Bishops are concerned about persecutions in the region perpetrated against Christians by jihadist and militant groups. Most of the terrorist groups such as Boko Haram are affiliated either with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State.

The Bishops have thus identified insecurity and terrorism as a primary pastoral concern especially in the West African countries of Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

“We reiterate our deep sympathy to the families bereaved by terrorist attacks, the Christian communities persecuted as well as countries affected by these barbaric acts,” say the Bishops in a press statement released yesterday.

Other pastoral concerns tabled at the plenary assembly include themes of reconciliation, development and the family. The central theme of the whole meeting was, "New Evangelization and the specific challenges of the Church-Family of God in Africa; reconciliation, development and family".

In all, 150 West African Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops from sixteen countries attended the gathering. Former Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings participated in the opening ceremonies of the plenary while Ghana's former presidential chief of staff, John Newman represented the Republican president John Dramani Mahama. President Mahama however attended the closing Mass in person.

In their press statement, the Bishops further express concern for the causes of migration by many young people trekking from Africa to Europe and countries of the Middle East. They urge African countries to address the causes of the “migratory phenomena (causing) a significant number of young Africans (to go towards) uncertain horizons, often risking their lives.” The Bishops plead with the young people of Africa to continue to believe in the continent and not to lose hope.

“We call upon young people not to lose hope but to believe in the possibility of thriving in their lives and achieve their happiness on the African continent,” reads the communiqué.

Other issues of concern include political tensions caused by the manipulation of constitutions and electoral processes deemed inadequate and unfair in some countries; poor governance; corruption; social injustices and their corollaries. The lack of respect for religious freedoms by governments is another area of worry for the Bishops.

At the end of the plenary, Nigeria's Archbishop of Jos and President of the of the Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, Ignatius Kaigama was elected President of the RECOWA / CERAO region. He takes over from Cardinal Théodore Adrien Sarr of Senegal.

The Bishops say they shared fraternity, prayed together and reflected on the universal theme of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy promulgated by Pope Francis. In a closing Mass, the Bishops unveiled a pastoral communique in which they affirm the values of reconciliation, marriage and family life in nation building. (See pastoral statement below this article)

The Conference Episcopale Regionale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CERAO) and the Anglophone Catholic Bishops Region in West Africa (AECAWA) merged to form one union in 2007.

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