

Inter-Conferences Workshop on Security in the Sahel
Ouagadougou, November 12-13, 2019
Message of Bishops, Priests, and Secular Delegates of Episcopal Conferences
Burkina-Niger, of Mali, of Ivory Coast, and of Ghana

Faithful of Christ, men and women of good will, loving of justice and peace,

1. In view of the seriousness of the security and humanitarian situation faced by the populations of their respective countries, the bishops, priests, and secular delegates of the episcopal conferences Burkina-Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, met for 2 days in Ouagadougou, in a climate of prayer and reflection, on November 12th and 13th, 2019, in order to assess the extent of this crisis and to further contribute to the efforts already made to assist the populations affected.
2. The crisis that has been going on now for a few years in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has its roots in a diversity of causes both endogenous and exogenous: historical, identity, cultural, religious, economic, territorial, ideological, political, or geostrategic.
3. This crisis is essentially manifested by daily violations of fundamental rights on the human person: violation of the right to life characterized by mass killings, violation of the right to religious freedom resulting in attacks of places of worship, targeted attacks on religious leaders or members of particular religious denominations, violation of the right to education for all resulting in the closure of schools, violation of the right to property characterized by forced appropriations, violation of the right to live in a secure and peaceful environment. Thus, many civilians as well as the Defense and Security Forces paid a heavy price in this wave of violence. Such violations result in harm to human dignity, in inter-communal tensions, in the degradation of living together, in psychosis within populations, and in the massive displacement of populations, all of which ended up creating an unprecedented crisis in the affected countries.
4. This crisis is fostered or fueled by many factors: poverty and ignorance of populations, poor governance, corruption, radicalization and religious intolerance, weapons and narcotics trafficking, the predation of natural resources by both internal actors and external, private or state, the weakening of the Sahel states and the annihilation of local initiatives of development by the same actors.
5. Many initiatives have already been undertaken by states, by the international community, by private or public entities, religious or civil society, as well as by individuals of good will, to relieve the suffering of the people. Unfortunately, although laudable, they remain below expectations, especially as the humanitarian crisis continues to increase and insecurity to spread.
6. Faithful to the mission received from his Divine Founder, Jesus Christ, mission whose ultimate expression is to manifest to every human the immeasurable love of God who only wants joy and happiness of humans and also to bring together all men in a universal fraternity based on our common identity which is our humanity, the Church cannot remain insensitive to the magnitude and the consequences of the drama in which populations are plunged. Indeed, as the Council Vatican II teaches, “the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the men of this time, especially the poor and all who suffer, are also the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of disciples of Christ, and there is nothing really human that does not find an echo in their hearts” (Gaudium et Spes, 1).
7. Therefore, we, archbishops and bishops, priests, and secular delegates of Episcopal Conferences Burkina-Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, make an urgent appeal:

To the perpetrators of attacks and massacres, to put an end in the name of the respect of life that is a sacred gift of God that no one can dispose of, whatever his ambition, his ethnic, cultural, political, or religious belonging;

To the public authorities, to make the protection of the populations the priority of the priorities, to promote good governance, to be translated by concrete actions, the fight against corruption, and the just distribution of wealth;

To the leaders of religious communities, to educate respect for human life, preserve religious freedom, human and spiritual values common to all men created by God and to promote interreligious dialogue;

To international actors, to respect the right of people to dispose of their natural local resources for their own development, to stop the activities of predation or looting of natural resources, to put an end to the unfair agreements that undermined the development of states, and the sale of weapons that fuel conflicts, destabilize states and incite attacks that sow desolation within populations;

To the diplomatic representation in the Sahel countries, to promote a true partnership respectful of international law and open cooperation between people;

To the sister Episcopal Conferences, to hear the call of the poorest and most vulnerable, to promote greater solidarity in the fight for the protection of life and the defense of human dignity in conflict-affected countries, through awareness-raising, advocacy, and to develop concrete solidarity initiatives with all those affected by crisis;

To the affected populations, so that they know how to remain worthy and stay confident without giving into hatred nor revenge;

To NGOs and all people of good will, physical or moral, so that they work for a world of justice and peace;

8. **We reaffirm our commitment to collaborate** with all people of good will do so that, in an emergency, we will put a stop to the killings and the displacement of the populations, that their causes are eradicated, that the victims are not abandoned on their own, but that their material, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual care is insured, and that work is committed to effective conflict prevention, and lasting peace and sustainable living, especially through the practice of dialogue, justice and reconciliation.

On you and on the people of the Sahel, we implore the blessing of God.

May Mary, Our Lady of Peace, come to our aid.

For the participants

Monsignor Laurent B. Dabire
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Burkina-Niger

Monsignor Jonas Dembele
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