

# Hirtenbrief/Pastoral Letter Ostern 2020

## NOW IS THE TIME FOR PEACE

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To All the Clergy, Consecrated Men and Women, Christ's Lay Faithful and all People of Good Will, Archdiocese of Bamenda, Cameroon.

*"Let there be peace and justice throughout the land, known on every mountain and hill." (Ps. 72:3)*

### HAPPY EASTER 2020

1. *The Lord has truly risen, Alleluia, Alleluia!* He brought hope and joy to the Disciples who were shattered by the painful events of the Passion and Crucifixion. Jesus had been rejected by the leaders of the people, arrested, scourged, condemned to death and crucified. His death dashed the hope of all those who had put their trust in Him. But, the Resurrection changed everything. He brought hope, joy and peace. In the Risen Christ, the disciples once more, encountered the fullness of God's goodness, power and truth. They were freed from fear, regained confidence and their dignity. Significantly, Jesus' first words to them were : ***"Peace be with you"*** (Jn. 20:19). It was, as if to say: "Whatever you have gone through, **NOW IS THE TIME FOR PEACE!**" The Risen Saviour has conquered all human enemies, including death; and *He has done this, not by might, not by a show of physical power but in a peaceful and most gentle manner*. Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, is the Prince of Peace. In other words, in and through the Resurrection, He inaugurates a new era: a time for peace. And so, in answer to the Risen Lord, we are called to build and promote that peace.

2. Peace is an attribute of wisdom; and wisdom comes from the fear of God who helps us to see reality from its right perspective. When King Solomon sought the progress of his kingdom, he asked Yahweh for wisdom which he was given (cf. 1 Kgs 3:1-15). In Psalm 72 we are told that this wisdom helped Solomon to realize that if true development were to come to his kingdom, there was need for justice and peace. So, King Solomon worked hard and called on his people to seek justice and peace. After the devastating effects of the Second World War (1939-1945), and in the midst of the Cold War (1947-1991) Pope John XXIII was very preoccupied about peace on earth. On 11 April 1963, he made public his concerns in an Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, on how to achieve universal peace on earth. The Holy Father was clear that peace can only be achieved in truth, justice, love and liberty (cf. Nos 35&36).

3. On Monday, March 23, 2020, the United Nations Secretary, General Antonio Guterres, appealed to warring parties "to lay down their weapons." He said, "*It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.*" In a message that was transmitted to a global audience by Vatican Media on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, Pope Francis said, "*I associate myself with all those who have accepted the appeal, and I invite all [parties in conflicts] to follow up on the appeal by stopping every form of warlike hostilities.*" He called on leaders to facilitate the creation of

humanitarian corridors for aid, to open avenues of diplomacy and to attend “*to those who find themselves in situations of great vulnerability.*”

4. In the Archdiocese of Bamenda, we are celebrating Easter 2020 in the midst of very disturbing insecurity, violence and horrendous killings in our parishes. Therefore, in line with Pope John XXIII, and Pope Francis, this Easter is also an opportunity for us all to reflect on the need for peace. After all that has happened in our midst, and given the mayhem that we are still going through, the Risen Lord comes with a message of peace. **Now is the Time for Peace!** So, like Jesus said to His apostles, I also say to each of you: “*Peace be with you*”.

5. This is certainly an Easter with a difference, being my first Easter in Bamenda as the Metropolitan Archbishop and Servant of the People of God in Bamenda. This is the first Easter in the Archdiocese of Bamenda where Christians remained indoors during Holy Week and were not able to participate in the Holy Week ceremonies because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Yet, we continue to trust and hope in the Risen Lord because, our Christian hope will never disappoint us (cf. Rom.5:5). Remember, Jesus told his apostles: “*In the world you will have tribulations, but be brave. I have overcome the world.*” (Jn.16:33). Nothing can therefore ever separate us from the love of God- neither trials nor anguish, persecution or war, sickness or famine (cf. Rom 8:35). We know and believe that our God has everything under control; so, although we may not understand much of what is happening and why, we pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, I sincerely invite all of you to a deep Christian Faith.

## CALLED TO BE PEOPLE OF PEACE

6. The birth of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, was announced to the Shepherds as a beginning of the reign of Peace on earth. The Angels praised God in the heavens saying: “*Glory to God on High, and On Earth, Peace to People of Good Will.*” (Lk 2:14). God came into our shattered and sinful history, so that we could once more be forgiven, reconcile with God and with one another, and live in peace as God had always intended us to. That is why, in the midst of our turbulent society, there are so many calls for peace. No one is happy with the war, with the killings and with the atrocities committed so far. We all want peace; but peace is far more than just the absence of war.

Peace is a gift of God because God is peace; He blesses His people with peace (cf. Ps. 29:11). That is why, after the Resurrection, Jesus Christ assured his disciples: “*Peace I leave you, my peace I give you; a peace which this world cannot give.*” (Jn.14:27). Such peace was only possible because Jesus had reconciled us with God and with one another. Therefore peace is the consequence of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. In the Bible, it is not possible to talk about peace if we have not repented, have not forgiven others their faults and reconciled with one another. Children of God should seek, promote and build peace. Hence one of the Beatitudes teaches us: “*Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of God*” (Mtt.5:9).

7. During the Medieval Ages, the Franciscan Friar, St. Bonaventure, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, also known as the Seraphic Doctor (*Doctor Seraphicus*) argued in one of his works: *The Journey of the Mind to God*- that peace is primarily a personal achievement and only possible for people who sincerely want to reconcile with those who have hurt them. Therefore if we seek peace we must be ready to forgive those who have committed even the greatest atrocities against us. The Great St. Francis of Assisi believed that each of us has to work personally as an instrument of peace - to bring love where there is hatred,

pardon where there hurt; and union where there is discord. The demand of St. Francis may seem humanly speaking, very difficult, but, we remember that Jesus Himself set the example for us. To the Roman soldiers who were nailing Him on the cross, He prayed: "*Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.*" (Lk 23:34). To onlookers, these words of Jesus may have seemed like foolishness and a sign of weakness, but as St. Paul reminds us: "*God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom; and his weakness stronger than human strength.*" (1 Cor.1:25). The commander of the same group that was killing Jesus soon recognized the very truth they tried to kill: "*Truly, this was the Son of God*" (Mtt.27:54). Hence the Bible urges us: "*Do not seek vengeance; leave it to the Lord who sees and knows everything*" (cf. Romans 12:19).

8. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats "peace" under the Fifth Commandment; and teaches us that "*Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is the tranquility of order; Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.*" (cf. no.2304).

In his first Message on the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2014, Pope Francis, called on each and every Christian to make "*Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace.*" The Holy Father realized that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, therefore we must seek justice and peace for all.

## **THERE CAN BE NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE**

9. All the prophets of the Old Testament were convinced that there could never be peace as long as there were injustices among the people. That is why the Prophet Amos in particular, often known as the Prophet of Social Justice, was hard against anyone who did not respect justice and treat other human beings with dignity. The Prophet Isaiah also clearly told us that "*the work of justice shall be peace*" (Is.32:17). Throughout the Bible, Justice and Peace are always treated together or implied because one cannot exist without the other. In his *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor (*Doctor Angelicus*) defined peace as "*tranquility which rests upon order, which tranquility consists in all the appetitive movements in one man being set at rest together*". Peace is guided by justice which is the guardian of order. Without justice, people will always be fighting like wild beasts over the prey. In *Pacem in Terris*, which we already cited, Pope St John XXIII, equally believed that there can be no peace without justice. And, this is the official teaching of the Catholic Church as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2305 which states that "*Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.*" On 14 December 1967, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, standing outside a prison gate in California holding Vietnamese war protesters, kept on shouting: "*There can be no justice without peace, and there will be no peace without justice.*" Today, this has become a refrain among most People of Good Will. We are all human beings; and there is no human being who is more human than another. Therefore, we all share an equality in dignity; and this is the basis of justice. Each and everyone deserves what is his right. So, if we seek true peace, we must practice justice and ensure that there is justice everywhere, because as the late Dr. Martin Luther King also said: "*injustice anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere.*"

10. Justice is basically the respect of fairness, giving each person equal opportunities and rights; letting each individual have what is his right. Even the ancient Greek Philosopher, Plato, already believed that in order to have justice in a *Republic*, every citizen must have what he deserves (The Republic, I,331e). And this is due to the fact that all of us are subject to the Natural, Divine or Moral Law, the basis of every

other law in any *Republic*. So, any other law which violates the Divine Law sets the ground for injustice; and every law must be built on justice and aimed at rendering fair-play. Once people suspect that the rules are no longer the same for everyone, they begin to shout foul and protest against what they consider as lack of fairness; and this can sometimes lead to violence and war.

## THE CRISIS IN OUR SOCIETY AND THE NEED FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

11. We are into the 4<sup>th</sup> year of a crisis in the North West and South West Regions which has degenerated into an “Armed Conflict.” Definitely, this conflict has gone on for too long for anyone of us to be either indifferent or to seek to justify. The effects on the Archdiocese of Bamenda, have been devastating, and the facts on ground are there for anyone to verify: villages and institutions have been burned down and are today left in ruins; thousands of our people are internally displaced and others have become refugees in neighbouring countries, living in horrifying human conditions; human lives have been lost in the thousands and the atrocities committed against innocent civilians have been outrageous. In fact, no one will probably ever give us the true figures of our people who have been killed or are simply unaccounted for. Some have died out of shock at what they have seen and experienced. Worse, our “Armed Conflict” does not seem to respect any War Laws and International Conventions, which makes anyone and everyone a target of kidnapping, arbitrary arrest, exploitation, and torture. Hence we find an entire population in the Archdiocese of Bamenda and elsewhere in the Ecclesiastical Province, living in fear and insecurity. We have lost some of our most talented young men and women.

A good number of our cultural legacies and institutions have been destroyed, and the vast majority of our people are still hurting even as we write this Pastoral Letter. Kidnapping, shooting, fighting and killings are still going on in various areas of our Archdiocese; and there seems to be no clear sign that these will soon stop. Added to all this, we now have the scare of the Corona Virus.

12. Beloved, brothers and sisters, at such a moment, and after having journeyed for 40 days in our Lenten Exercise, this is not the time for apportioning blame or seeking vengeance; this is not even the time to lose hope or to continue fighting and killing. Rather, this is the time to learn bitter lessons from what has already happened and continues to happen. This is the moment for each of us to make personal introspection, and genuinely contribute to seeking a way out of this meaningless war. We all need justice and peace to be brought into our society; and each of us can become the vehicle by which this can, and should happen. In his Message on the 52<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Peace, 1 January 2020, Pope Francis called our attention to the fact that **“Peace (is) a Journey of Hope: Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Ecological Conversion.”** Therefore, aware of the gravity of what has already happened among us, this cannot be the time to seek political or personal gains; rather, this is the time for collective and personal effort towards the common good. The common good is always better and above individual gains and profit. In fact, what many of us forget is the fact that when the common good is achieved, all individual profits are assured. No matter how much we benefit as individuals or as a select group, we can never assure peace for all; and history has numerous instances to teach us.

13. In his 2020 Message for the Day of Peace, Pope Francis told us, among other things that peace is “*a journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity*”. (no.2). Our brothers and sisters who have gone through some of the horrors of our present war, know what it means to be caught up in violence; those who have lost dear ones know exactly what a pain it is; and those who have lost all property and everything they ever worked for, can tell us the frustration that they face. May these experiences help each and all of us to rethink our approach and reactions in the ongoing war. One more death, one more destruction, and one more kidnapping does not resolve our problems or make our case better. If anything, it only brings more pain to our society.

14. My dear brothers and sisters, some of us may even feel abandoned by God; in fact a good number of people have been challenged in their faith. But, our ongoing armed conflict and the effects that we can all see, rather call for sincere and deep Christian reflection. What does God want us to learn; and why has He allowed all the horrors to happen in our midst? These questions can be answered in multiple ways, but three important and obvious lessons stand out- First, violence has never resolved a problem anywhere on planet earth; therefore a real solution to our problem will definitely not come through any military or armed option. There have been numerous other armed conflicts in Africa from which we can and should learn. Second, some of our brethren trusted in, and used occult and satanic powers to fight. So far, we can clearly see that “*our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth*” (Ps.124:8). There can be no power, no authority and no armed option that will stand against God and win. The history of various civilizations before us should inform and help us. We are all creatures and children of God who alone sustains our lives. Third, we have treated human life with shocking levity, and this betrays the fact that we do not even value our own lives and dignity. Yet, we gain nothing by continuing to treat human beings like animals that can be tortured and killed at will. No human authority can afford to stand radically against the commandment of God: **Thou shall not Kill!** And, there can be no justification for acting to the contrary.

15. Beloved People of God, when we are faced with a troubling situation like the one in which we find ourselves, Pope Francis reminds us that at such moments, “*the world does not need empty words but convinced witnesses, peacemakers who are open to a dialogue that rejects exclusion or manipulation. In fact, we cannot truly achieve peace without a convinced dialogue between men and women who seek the truth beyond ideologies and differing opinions. Peace must be built up continually; it is a journey made together in constant pursuit of the common good, truthfulness and respect for law. Listening to one another can lead to mutual understanding and esteem, and even to seeing in an enemy the face of a brother or sister. The peace process thus requires enduring commitment. It is a patient effort to seek truth and justice, to honour the memory of victims and to open the way, step by step, to a shared hope stronger than the desire for vengeance.*” (World Day of Peace,2020, no.2). We can only gain true and lasting peace if we are ready for, and seek dialogue.

## DIALOGUE AT THE SERVICE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

16. In October 2019, the Cameroon Government called the Major National Dialogue to discuss the crisis rocking the North West and South West Regions of the country. As an event, it was successful, but we are far from having the peace we expected.

Thirty-seven years ago, on 16<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace, 1 January 1983, Pope John Paul II, sent a Message to us entitled: “*Dialogue for Peace: A Challenge For Our Time.*” So many years back, the Holy Father was already aware of the violence and wars in our world; and he saw the need for dialogue to resolve these conflicts. But at the same time, the Pope was sadly aware of the difficulties that the people of our times have with regards to “dialogue,” even though most speak eloquently about it. Pope St John Paul II was unequivocal in stating that in the world today, we can “*find cases where conflict seemed fatal, but where war was avoided or abandoned, because the parties believed in the value of dialogue and practised this dialogue, in the course of long and honest discussions. On the contrary, we can also find areas where dialogue did not really take place, or it was falsified, made into a snare, or deliberately reduced.*” (no.3). Aware of the human difficulties that could arise in *Dialogue for Peace*, Pope John Paul II insisted that dialogue is necessary; that it is possible, and that it is not a utopia. Then he presented 5 (five) virtues of true dialogue.

17. First, dialogue is the *search for what is true, good and just* for every person. Once we are involved in a dialogue, our aim is to get to the truth, to that which will bring justice and that which is good for the society in question.

Second, in dialogue *openness and welcome* are unquestionably necessary so that each party should explain its thoughts, but should also *listen* to the explanation of the situation such as the other party describes it.

Third, each party in a dialogue should accept the *difference* and the *specific nature* of the other party, aware of what actually separates it from the other. No one should attempt to reduce the other party to a mere object, but one should consider the other party to be an intelligent, free and responsible subject.

Fourth, dialogue is at the same time the search for what is, and *which remains common to people*, even in the midst of tensions, opposition and conflicts. Hence each party is to consider the other as a neighbour who wants to share responsibility in truth and justice; both parties must be ready to carefully study all the possible formulas for honest reconciliation.

Fifth, true dialogue is the search for what is good by peaceful means. It is the persistent determination to have recourse to all the possible formulas of negotiation, mediation and arbitration, to act in such a way that the factors which bring people together will be victorious over the factors of division and hate. It is a recognition of the inalienable dignity of human beings. It rests upon respect for human life.(Cf. John Paul, *World Day of Peace*, 1983, no. 6).

18. Pope St. John Paul II also identified and shared with us, some four obstacles to dialogue in modern times. In the first place, dialogue is blocked by an *a priori* decision to concede nothing, by a *refusal to listen*, and by a claim to be - oneself and only oneself - the measure of justice. We do not come to a dialogue with a fixed mind. In the second place, dialogue is very often blocked by *selfishness* and/or *the will to power*, by one or both of the parties concerned. In a dialogue there is no superior and inferior; all are parties each with a point to table for discussion.

In the third place, Pope St. John Paul II, points out that many dialogue sessions have broken down because of a *false concept of patriotism* and attachment to this false concept. There are no citizens who deserve a country more than others. In the Fourth place, the Holy Father points out that dialogue can breakdown by *ideologies*, which, in spite of their declarations, are *opposed to the dignity of the human person*, to his or her just aspirations according to the healthy principles of reason, of the natural and eternal law. (cf. *ibid*, no.7). Once people do not respect human rights and dignity, dialogue becomes problematic.

19. At the start of our present conflict in 2016, the Bishops of the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province, (**BAPEC**) wrote an open and well informed *Memorandum* to the Head of State. The bishops who were and continue to live the facts on the ground, carefully examined the situation and suggested that a dialogue was the best way to resolve the grievances.

Last year 1 January 2019, Pope Francis addressed a Message on the World Day of Peace, inviting all governments and the international community to consider that “*Good Politics is (must be) at the Service of Peace*” attained through Dialogue, not armed force. The Church is convinced that all wars always end in dialogue and peace talks; and in most of the cases, there are usually several discussions and dialogue before a final solution is found. That is why, **dialogue is an ongoing process, never just an event which we celebrate**. In fact, after each dialogue, we must already envisage yet another to discuss what was not foreseen in the previous, and to ensure that all available and useful opinions are gathered and represented. Dialogue goes on until all the issues at stake have been thoroughly discussed and negotiated; and this is what it means to engage in dialogue for peace. This is what the Catholic

Church understands and teaches; and this is what all our Christians are to understand and promote.

## THE NEED TO CEASE VIOLENCE, KILLINGS AND BURNINGS

20. Last year, during his midday *Angelus* Prayer of 29 September 2019 Pope Francis prayed for those who had been killed in the armed conflict in Cameroon; and called on the authorities to enter into dialogue so as to find a lasting solution. We are aware that the Vatican has continued to make this appeal because the Catholic Church, after the example of her Master Jesus Christ, proclaims peace in and out of season, accepted or rejected. The mission of the Church is to bring joy, hope and peace to all people.

In all the fifty Parish structures of our Archdiocese there have been horrible violence, burning, destruction of property and gruesome killing of people. We are particularly touched by the troubling numbers killed in Pinyin in the *Our Lady of the Assumption Parish* Santa; those in *St. Patrick's Parish* Babanki Tungo; others in Bambalang and in the neighbouring villages of *St. Mary's Parish* Balikumbat; *SS Peter and Paul* Bamunka Ndop; and in Babessi in *St Mark's Parish* Baba I. We also know of real mayhem committed in *St. Martin de Porres' Parish* Wum; in *St. Matthias' Parish* Widikum; *St. Sebastian's Parish* Batibo; *St. Francis Xavier's Parish* Bali Nyongha and *St. Anthony of Padoua's Parish* Njinikom. I sincerely appeal that all violence, killings and burnings should stop with immediate effect.

Beloved brothers and sisters, we cannot keep on watching silently and helplessly at these horrors. Curiously, hardly anyone ever takes responsibility for these atrocities, but all of the Synoptic Gospels tell us that whatever is done in darkness will one day be brought to light; whatever is hidden now will be made visible; and whatever is said in the secret will be trumpeted from the housetops (Cf Mtt 10:26, Mk 4:22, Lk 8:17).

21. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* categorically denounces all violence and horrors committed against the innocent and the poor. Furthermore, as Pastor and the instrument of peace among you, I owe a moral obligation first, towards the Christians who may be engaged in this violence. They have to rethink their faith and the meaning of Christianity, as a religion of peace and love. God is love and whoever has never known love has never known God (cf.1 Jn.4:3). The Incarnation is a unique moment when God communicated Himself to humankind as Love; and God loves each and all of us unconditionally. The New Commandment which Jesus gave His disciples was for them to love one another. "Love one another as I have loved you" (cf. Jn 13:34). I equally owe an obligation to the Church to ensure that the innocent, the poor, the marginalized and the vulnerable are protected. Every bishop is referred to as the *Chief Shepherd* of the local Church over which he watches. On 16 October 2003, Pope John Paul II reminded all bishops about their duties in a Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, entitled: *Pastores Gregis* (The Shepherds of the Flock). "*The ideal figure of the Bishop, on which the Church continues to count, is therefore that of the pastor who, configured to Christ by his holiness of life, expends himself generously for the Church entrusted to him, while at the same time bearing in his heart a concern for all the Churches throughout the world* (cf. 2 Cor 11:28)" (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, no.1). I, therefore, have a bounden duty, as Shepherd of the Flock, to make sure that wolves do not devour the sheep of God, or that the stronger sheep do not kill the weaker. Each of us has the right and reason to react against any injustice committed. However, after so many years fighting and killing each other, **now is the time for peace**.

22. As we should have all learned, it is easy to begin a war but it is never easy to end one. We lose everything through violence, killings and burnings; but, we can gain everything by sincerely seeking justice, reconciliation and peace. Seeking peace or a cease fire is not a sign of weakness or cowardice; on the contrary, it shows maturity and proper care for the fatherland and genuine love for others. St.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta did not use any force to fight the oppression of the poor and vulnerable; yet she accomplished far more than any wars could have. The *Social Doctrine of the Church* promotes active nonviolence as a rediscovery of a central teaching of Jesus Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sees the changes brought about by non violent politics as an anticipation of the Resurrection (cf nos. 2302-2317). In our ongoing war, we are not fighting a foreign force; we are fighting among ourselves and making the innocent, the poor, and the vulnerable to suffer most. So we can decide to cease hostilities and the killings, because it is within our reach to do so. As long as we continue to fight, others among us will use the tragedy to settle scores, to make sinister profits, and to gain positions at the expense of human lives and blood. And human life is sacred and has a unique dignity!

## **RESPECT FOR THE SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

23. Last year, 2019, my venerable predecessor, the Most Reverend Cornelius Fontem Esua and his auxiliary, Bishop Michael Miabesue Bibi, wrote a Lenten Pastoral Letter to you all on *The Sacredness and Dignity of Human Life*. Among the many things they emphasized was the painful fact that “*there has been increasing and rampant profanation and disrespect of human life and the dignity of the human person.*” The bishops rightly affirm that “*the dignity of the human being is rubbed in mud.*” I have been witness to some of the grotesque murders and killings; I have seen corpses littered on our highway unattended to; and some shamelessly abandoned to decay or for dogs and pigs to feed on. We have seen the brutal murder of clearly innocent people who had nothing to do with the fighting – children, women, the elderly and the sick. It is a fact that some of our Christian families in this Archdiocese have been decimated, and no one is held accountable. Both the *Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference* and the *National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon*, have each come out strongly and condemned in uncompromising terms, this lack of respect for the sacredness and the dignity of the Human Person. I do not want to go over a well tread road; but it gives anyone the shivers to think of some of the monstrosities that we have committed against each other.

24. We know, from the first recorded murder by Cain of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:10), that human blood cries out to God for vengeance! The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that “*Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its very beginning until its end: on one can under any circumstances claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being*”(CCC.no. 2258). The origin of man’s life from God is the basis of his human dignity. The Post Conciliar Document of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, explains this better when it says that “*The root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God’s love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator*”(*Gaudium et Spes* no.19).

Therefore, whatever we have as reason for our present armed conflict, two important elements must become non negotiable – respect for the sacredness and dignity of the human person; and respect for natural and basic moral principles. None of us has the option to decide otherwise because we are not our own property and creator. We belong to God who alone created and sustains our life.

## **A SPECIAL APPEAL TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN OUR CONFLICT:**

25. If we hope to get the peace that we all need in our present society, we need to make a special appeal

to eight (8) of the most important stakeholders in this Archdiocese – *Christian Families; the Military; the Amba Boys; Politicians; the Diaspora; the Media; the Traditional Rulers of the Bamenda Grasslands and the Government of Cameroon.*

26. **The Family** is the Domestic Church, the First School. It is in the family that children learn their first lessons of doctrine, morality and social existence. During the first *Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994*, the Synod Fathers all agreed that if there is anything Africa has to contribute for the growth of the Church and society, it is the deep African sense of the Family (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no.63). Whether we are Civil Administrator, politician, military or “amba”, each and everyone of us comes from a family, feels for his family and should always act responsibly towards the family. We gain a sense of belonging first in our own families, and we have always lived as Africans to know that the family is the main support we have. This is the time to make a special appeal to each husband and wife, to children and to all family heads to do whatever it takes to bring together all their relatives and families and to discuss peace with each other. We all know how it used to be when families came together. If this is restored and if Christian families begin to animate our Parish evangelization again, there is every hope that we can go far in the proper upbringing of our children, and in the way of resolving problems by peaceful means. I, therefore, call on all Parish leaders of the various arms of the Family Apostolate, to review their strategies and help our Christian families to establish themselves better in our parishes as agents of peace.

27. **Our next appeal goes to our military.** Many of us look on the military today as if they came from space; they are our own brothers and sisters; with families like each and everyone of us. A good number of them are caught in a situation they neither initiated nor want; but by virtue of their profession, they do things they should otherwise not do. In fact, until this senseless war broke out, a good number of our military men and women were engaged in our parishes, organizing one event or the other. Many of these are Christians who are also making a daily struggle to come closer to God. It is therefore in this light that I make a special appeal to our military men and women to remember that when all of this is ended, as it must, our family and social lives will remain and continue. It is important for each military man and woman to realize that whatever situation they face, human life remains sacred and dignifying. Each of you is a human being with a moral conscience and a freewill for which you will answer before God. And finally, the role of military men and women in any country is to be completely concerned only about the safety of the nation and the common good. There have been many saints who were in the military and it is possible that some military men and women today can be saints if they do the will of God and love their brothers and sisters and protect them from harm.

28. Next, I want to make an appeal to the “**Amba Boys**”. All of them are our children, our brothers and sisters; our relatives and friend. Some were very active altar servers and cadet girls in our parishes and institutions; so, many of them have even better moral formation than a good number of us. In fact, the overwhelming number of them believe that they are on the right track and are doing what is right in order to defend their inalienable rights and the truth. Some have made up their minds that they want to retaliate their villages which have been burned; their people who are being arrested, tortured and killed. Whether we think they are right or wrong, is immaterial at the moment. **Now is the time to talk Peace with them.** If we are appealing to the military to stop killing our people, we are also appealing to the Amba boys to drop their guns come out of the bush. Some of these young boys and girls are convinced and passionate in their resolve. Hence, they need us, not to continue to hunt them down, but to take them seriously, listen to them and allow them to express their frustrations and vexations. That is why as Archbishop of Bamenda, I make a special appeal to these “Amba Boys”. While we are all trying to

negotiate issues, I appeal to those of them who are guilty, to stop kidnapping, terrorizing and killing the very people they claim to be defending. Some of them are even fighting and killing each other. Such attitudes only further antagonize and complicate their cause. Too many atrocities have been committed and if each person goes out for retaliation and vengeance, we will only increase the amount of suffering in our society. God knows what has happened, what is happening and what will happen; so, let us hand over this course into the fatherly care of our God who loves each of us unconditionally. *The Name of God is Mercy*; and He brings us His compassionate love. Let us bring that love to others.

29. Some of **our politicians** also have a crucial role to play. Many of them are more interested in their personal gains and profit. Yet we all need to know that when the truth, justice and peace is achieved, it will be achieved for all, not only for some. Most of the issues at stake at the moment go way beyond party lines. During 50<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace, 1 January 2017, Pope Francis reminded all of us in general, and politicians in particular, about "*Nonviolence: a Style of Politics for Peace*." Politicians must be true to their consciences and work for lasting peace and not play double games when lives are being lost.

30. We also need to address **our brothers and sisters in the Diaspora**. They have shown a lot of support for the suffering masses. A good number have simply been great in their assistance to their families, friends and others in these trying moments of our history. We are grateful to each and everyone of these. However, we must honestly say that some have ignited the fire with inflammatory language, distorted facts, and thereby fooled us to fight each other, keep our own children out of school, while they went about their lives undisturbed. Furthermore, the clearly incessant in-fighting and tussle for power among them, makes many to doubt their motivation. We therefore call on these our brothers and sisters to review and evaluate their strategies so far, and to do whatever it takes to bring about justice and peace in their homeland.

31. Next are the **men and women of the media**. Use the media to promote peace, not war. The media has played a pivotal role in our ongoing war. It is a powerful force the world over; and it can be used for good as it can become a source of horror among us. In the midst of violence and war, the men and women of the media must realize more than ever before, the need for professionalism, investigative and truthful reporting. The manner and language with which they manage information is of utmost importance; hence journalists should not become either spin doctors or agenda setters. They are the watchdogs of society and they perform a very noble task today. However, once real journalism fails in any society, citizen journalism and fake news take over especially, online reporting. There is therefore need for the media to review their motivations; and this is the moment when Church media professionals should not only use media but equally evangelize the media world. That is the reason why the Archdiocese of Bamenda will do everything within the coming months and years, to overhaul and improve her communication organs for a more effective influence among the People of God. And on this, we neither have the option nor can we afford to be amateurish.

32. I would like to address a brief but very sincere word to **our Fons and Traditional chiefs**, custodians of culture and the traditional authorities in the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Many of them have suffered a lot and many of them are out of their palaces. Some palaces have even been burnt down. Many people outside Bamenda may not be fully informed, but the "Fon" in the Bamenda Grassfields, is believed to be more a Divine, than an administrative institution. Each *Fon* is primarily and almost exclusively a traditional High Priest of the tribe. He is the incarnation of the people and the tribe, hence his identity as a person is hardly ever brought to the public. The Fon is therefore expected to be neutral, because as High Priest, he has to offer sacrifices for all the living and the "living dead" of his *Fondom* without

exclusion. Therefore, I call on all *Fons* to go back to their original and ancestral role, and to do whatever it takes to reunite their tribes, reconcile their people and reassume their traditional leadership among their people. Only in this role of Traditional High Priests can our *Fons* help bring about peace in their respective tribes which make up the Archdiocese of Bamenda.

33. To conclude this section, I will like to make a special appeal to **the Government of Cameroon**. It is clear that the Cameroonians in the North West and South West Regions have never been this politically conscious and have never been so interested in their own political destiny. I recognize how much this crisis has shaken the fabric of our country and the government. Government has lost many lives of its citizens, government and private infrastructures have been destroyed, it has spent a lot of money and is managing a situation where disorder is trying to reign above order. It is said that “*if we want to end any war, we don't count the corpses on both sides*”. There is no price that we cannot pay for peace. When I led the Peace Caravan in the South West Region in November, 2019, practically everywhere, the people had one cry and request to Government: “*Release the political Prisoners*”. Releasing the political prisoners incarcerated because of this crisis will go a very long way to appease many aggrieved people and restore peace. Therefore, my Easter appeal to the Government of Cameroon is that they look at the greater good of the country and choose the lesser evil and liberate the political prisoners.

## **EDUCATION AS THE MOMENT OF PEACE**

34. Education, whether formal or informal, is such a basic right that no one can afford to toy with it. Education has to do with how a person is brought up for and into life; that is why the best gift which a parent could give his child is the best form of education that is available. It is often quoted as part of social wisdom that *if you love anyone who comes to you to beg for fish, do not give him fish; teach him how to catch fish*. We begin the learning process from the home and within the family before we get to formal school education. That is why the Book of Deuteronomy (4:9ff) and the Letter to the Ephesians (6:4ff) call on parents to be careful in bringing up their children. So, the right to the education of children belongs primarily to the parents who brought them to life. Formal Education as we have it today is a brainchild of the Catholic Church dating back to the Cathedral Schools of the Middle Ages. In most of Africa, Cameroon included, the Church brought about the first Primary and Secondary Schools into our land, long before what was known as the *Native Authority* or **N.A.** in British Southern Cameroons. And the Church was motivated by the desire to find a privileged milieu for evangelization. The Second Vatican Decree on Catholic Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, made public on 28 October 1965, clearly stipulates that in and through schools, the Catholic Church seeks to create an environment which is inspired by the spirit of the Gospel, and in which children can be properly brought up (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, no.2).

35. The Church has always seen her role in education as helping parents first, and then the government, to bring up citizens with well formed minds and consciences. Anyone can make a careful study of education in Cameroon, and he will come to the conclusion that when the Church still had a firm control over the education of many citizens, the standard of morality and commitment to leadership and duty was beyond reprimand. That is why, for the last three years when war has been raging, the Catholic Church in particular, has cried like a mother who sees disaster befalling her children. Today, the school option no longer fits into the whole scenario, because other more serious events have overtaken it. Yet the fact that we have kept children at home, has bred all kinds of crimes and horrors in our midst. We cannot therefore just sit and watch, if we seek a lasting solution to our problem. This is precisely the time when children should have been in school studying for a better tomorrow; this is the time when each

teacher should become more conscious of his responsibility to bring up children to fit well into life; this is the time when all education stake holders should put aside politics and think academics. Therefore, everything being equal, we of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, plead with all the stake holders whom we already addressed above, to allow all our schools to go fully operational by September 2020. It is one way of how to build peace and justice in our society.

## **HOPE FOR A NEW AND PEACEFUL ARCHDIOCESE OF BAMENDA**

36. My dear brothers and sisters, it is my prayer and hope that this Easter 2020 will usher in a new atmosphere of peace into the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Our people have suffered much and they continue to suffer; but each of us, can do something, by changing strategy, to help to alleviate the suffering that has now been brought on our people. On our own, things may seem bleak and almost impossible, but as the Angel of God told Mary: “For God, nothing is impossible” (Lk1:37).

So, let us put all our trust in Him; and let no one fool us with other ideas and preaching. Most of us come from good Christian backgrounds; let us not abandon our roots and turn to other powers and attractions. A frightening secularism is invading the world, and it makes many of us falsely believe that what matters in life are money, power and wealth. This is not true, as experience should have thought us. The world is threatened at the moment by a Virus which, among other things, has shown us the volatile nature of material possessions and power. People who clung tenaciously to money, to power and to wealth suddenly saw the vanity of the attractions of the world. Those who were unwilling to forgive others and come together to talk seriously about their lives, must have had enough time to rethink their way of doing things.

37. We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where there will be no more shootings and killings.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where we shall be able to move from one Division or town to another without fear of being harassed by anybody.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where there will be no kidnappings and taking of ransoms, no more torture and intimidation.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where children will go to school at all levels to prepare for their future without disturbances.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where taxi men, motor bike riders, transporters, pedestrians and all people will enjoy respect and freedom in their daily lives and work.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where uniformed officers will be free to mingle with the population without fear and without causing fear.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where Priests, Consecrated Men and Women, Pastors, Imams and other Religious Leaders will be able to do their work in tranquility.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese where Fons will regain their authority and return to their palaces as true leaders of their tribal communities.

We are looking forward to a new Bamenda Archdiocese, where Justice shall flourish and Peace till the moon fails.(Ps.71) **Now is the Time for Peace!**

38. We shall never get tired of praying and living the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi in the first person singular, “*Lord, make ME an instrument of your peace*”.

May St. Joseph, Husband of Mary and Special Patron of the Archdiocese of Bamenda remain our model. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace intercede for all of us.

I wish all the Members of Christ’s Faithful and People of Good Will in the Archdiocese of

Bamenda, a very Happy Easter, 2020, and may each one of you experience personally the words of the risen Christ, “*Peace be with you*”.

Given at Bamenda, in Archbishop's House, Mankon, this Easter Sunday, the Twelveth Day of April in the Year 2020

+ Andrew Fuanya NKEA  
Archbishop of Bamenda

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