



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA

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## TIME TO END THE DEATH PENALTY

Our Ref:

*Statement by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)*

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Just when we believe that Nigeria was on the verge of joining the civilized world in ending the death penalty, we are shocked to hear of the unfortunate execution of four convicted persons in Benin City Edo State.

It is sad to note that this event is coming at a time when the whole world is shifting away from capital punishment as a punitive measure. It will be recalled that the last execution took place in Nigeria in 2006 thereby sending signals that Nigeria has heeded the call for a moratorium on capital punishment with a view to its total abolition. Using the Constitution to justify this act is a clear departure from modernity to savagery. We therefore renew all calls for an amendment of the constitution to proscribe all laws that infringe on the rights of individuals especially the right to life.

Generally, punishment which is the deliberate infliction of evil on another is always in need of justification. This has normally taken the form of indicating some good which is to be obtained through punishment or evil which will be warded off. Three justifications for it include retribution, deterrence and reform. These justifications are all inclusive and capital punishment which is the imposition of death sentence on an offender does not serve these justifications for punishment. Capital punishment neither gives the person the opportunity to conform to the norms of the society, nor give opportunity of deterrence of actual and potential criminals from future deeds of violence.

We are not unaware of the fact that we live in a plural society with different views on the death penalty. However, it is the duty of our leaders to pull together these diverse views and provide a moral justification for the protection and nurturing of the lives of our citizens.

As believers in God, We insist on the sacredness and dignity of human life being created in the image and likeness of God. Man is called to fullness of life which far exceeds the dimension of his earthly existence because it consists of sharing the very life of God. Our faith is a moral framework for choices about the use of death penalty. Our response to crime and punishment is rested in our convictions about good and evil, sin and redemption, justice and mercy. It is also shaped by our commitment to the life and dignity of every human person and common good. Life is a precious gift from God This gift must be respected.

In 1996, the Holy Father, the late Pope John Paul II issued a Pastoral Letter titled, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life).





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This document was well received around the world and across faiths as an eloquent testimony to the sacredness of human life and our duty and responsibility to nurture and protect it. In it the Holy Father noted....If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and protect public order and safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are in more conformity to the dignity of the human person" (E.V. No. 56, CCC No 2266)

While mindful of the efforts of government both at the State and Federal levels to deal with the recent upsurge in crime, we maintain that such efforts should be channeled more on improving the environmental and social conditions that predispose people to crime. That is why we must renew the appeal that the use of death penalty ought to be abandoned not only for what it does to those who are executed but also for what it does to society. We believe that actions aimed at reforming criminals will do better good to the society than capital punishment.

In conclusion, we urge all State actors to show more restraint in carrying out functions that extinguish the rights to life and dignity of human persons. This has a way of reaching out to the hearts of mindless criminals who will feel accommodated despite their devious ways and an opportunity to change. We call on the President, the National Assembly, Religious and Civil Society groups, to join in this struggle to end this evil and rededicate ourselves to our common humanity.

Most Rev Ignatius Kaigama  
President Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)  
And Archbishop of Jos  
28<sup>th</sup> June, 2013