

KENYA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



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Walking Together in Hope

“Do not be afraid, do not lose hope, I am the Lord your God, I will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1, 9)

Dear Kenyans and people of good will, we the Catholic Bishops of Kenya gathered in St Mary's Pastoral Centre Nakuru, send you our most sincere message of solidarity and hope, as we share with you our thoughts on the state of our Nation. We as the Catholic Church, have just concluded our Synod meeting in Rome, convened by Pope Francis. It was a meeting of representatives of Catholic bishops from all over the world, as well as other Religious and lay delegates. The theme of the Synod on Synodality, focused on how we can all journey together with Christ, seeking “communion, participation and mission”, that we all derive from God our Father. The Synod was an expression of great communion in many diverse cultures and traditions. This gives us great hope, that even here in Kenya, we can all find ways of working and living together as a Nation, within our diversities and even with our political, ethnic, and social differences, as we forge our common destiny.

We now wish to share with you some of our reflections on the current state of our Nation.

We Kenyans are ordinarily optimistic about the adverse situations we may face. This resilience is evident in the times of hardships in families and in society. Nevertheless, this resilience has been greatly tested in the current period, leading many to despair and a sense of hopelessness as they try to make ends meet. Our country is facing perhaps the most acute economic

strain, coupled with unemployment, drastic climatic changes and uncertainties in direction and decisions within our governance.

A. Emerging issues in our Country

1. The high cost of living

Whatever affects a Kenyan no matter his social status is a concern for all Kenyans. We have reiterated many times our great concern about the rising cost of living. We continue to witness the rise of the cost of fuel, the cost of basic commodities and the added demands from the care for the family, in school fees and healthcare.

We are particularly concerned that the people who are affected most by this situation are those in the lower income bracket, especially the very poor and miserable. This has created an added suffering to the people already strained by the recent Covid-19 pandemic and drought effects.

The high cost of living has deeply affected and shaken the social fabric of Kenyan society. It is especially strangling the very poor in their modest needs. Families are under immense stress as they struggle to make ends meet, leading to strained relationships and increased tensions within households. Parents find it challenging to provide for their children's education, healthcare, and overall well-being. This situation is perpetuating a cycle of poverty, limiting opportunities for personal and societal growth. This economic stagnation further exacerbates the unemployment problem, creating a vicious cycle of financial hardship for the population.

We, therefore, plead for a wider consultation and discussions among Government and other stakeholders, to review and study ways we can address and mitigate the effects of the high cost of living. We believe that the greater commitment and assistance in the agricultural production, and the better coordinated sale of products; the fair prices for produce like maize; waiver of certain licenses and zero rating farm inputs, etc. can relieve many Kenyans of this burden.

2. Over-taxation of Kenyans

We are aware that part of the cause of this rise in the cost of living, has been due to external factors like the cost of petroleum, and the effects of the Ukrainian and Middle East conflicts. However, we believe a more strategic approach based on the interest of the very poor, could accommodate decisions that would alleviate this situation.

We have appealed to the Government on several occasions to reconsider the issue of over taxation of the Kenyans, and especially to incomes of those in the lower income bracket. This one factor has greatly affected the family income in a disproportionate way leading to anger among Kenyans.

Many traders and businesses are now faced with the option of closure or laying-off employees due to the immense drain to their resources and added tax burdens. Further, there seems to be a lack of sensitivity in the way the business persons and individuals are being harassed by the KRA officials in view of collecting more taxes. This has also affected peoples' morale and sense of hope in a better future.

We appeal yet again to the Government to find reasonable balance between the desired income for the Government and the minimum protection of the basic needs of the very ordinary Kenyan, and respect to their dignity. Our true patriotism and true leadership, as Government, Churches and Faiths, can only be measured in the care we have for the most vulnerable in the society.

3. Plight of Unemployed Kenyans

Most of our young people are facing the problem of unemployment. This is leading to a bigger number of idle and desperate young persons, who had placed great hopes in their education and professional preparation. If not addressed, the frustration will reach alarming proportions, with great social risk and dire consequences.

We decry the obvious corruption within the public sector, whereby cronyism, tribalism and discrimination seem to dictate the chances of employment. The avenues of fair employment seem to be dwindling. The vice of bribery and favours for employment has truly discouraged job seekers especially the young people. We therefore appeal for more transparent and fair processes of employment especially in public offices.

4. Challenges in the Education System

The state of education in Kenya is a cause for concern. One of the critical issues aggravating this situation, is the discoordinated and abrupt changes of policies and directives in the entire system or in specific areas of Education. The most recent is the government's changes in providing university subsidies, specifically through loans such as the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). These changes have created barriers for economically disadvantaged students, hindering their ability to access higher education and jeopardizing the future of an entire generation.

Additionally, the reduction or withdrawal of capitation to universities has far-reaching consequences. Parents and guardians are forced to bear a heavier financial burden to ensure their children can access education. Students are forced to stay in deplorable living situations prone to delinquency. This situation raises valid questions about the decision-making process within the Ministry of Education, prompting the need for transparency and accountability in their actions. The delay in the release of capitation for secondary schools is also a major concern for school management and parents.

Therefore, urgent action is required from higher education stakeholders to collaboratively devise realistic measures, that ensure the continued provision of quality education and implementation of policy. It is imperative for the government and relevant authorities, to engage in open dialogue with all stakeholders especially religious organizations, educators, parents, and students to develop sustainable solutions.

Notably in many places, the current Grade seven of the Junior Secondary School, have had very little learning time. The operationalization of the Junior Secondary School is still very unclear.

We appeal to all the students and teachers in this period of exams, to observe the highest level of integrity and honesty, avoiding any form of cheating or exam malpractice, so frequent in recent years.

5. Protecting the Dignity of Every Kenyan

The debate surrounding the proposed digital identification, seems to indicate certain ambiguous components which we seek clarification and public engagement, before any implementation. From what we gather, it targets an element of violation of the human person, through the use of certain new

technology. We are therefore raising our concern that a process that involves any insertion of micro-chips or other digital elements, especially to new-borns, is unacceptable because this would compromise the inviolable dignity of the recipients. We are further worried about the data security of the information collected through digital methods, such as the iris-identification. We raise our ethical objection to such a project which would need further discussion and public participation.

In the same breath, we condemn all forms of human trafficking, involving children, workers, and especially women for economic exploitation. We have also noted the alarming increase of cases of human organ harvesting.

B. Ongoing Issues

1. Bipartisan Talks

We applaud all parties concerned for having heeded to the plea of Kenyans, Religious leaders and many other people of good will, to come together and seek an amicable solution of their differences, through dialogue in the ongoing Bi-partisan talks. This has given our Country a lease of life, and renewed hope for peaceful coexistence. Moreover, we believe that the spirit of dialogue can bring about great progress in political/social stability and common purpose for the good of our Nation.

These talks stand as a crucial initiative aimed at addressing the deep-rooted grievances among Kenyans, which often lead to divisions, particularly during general elections. Recognizing the significance of these talks, we encourage those charged with the discussions, to have the interest of Kenyans at heart. We also invite all Kenyans to support and contribute to this initiative according to their capacity. We believe the substantive discussions arising from these talks can be further expanded to include many stakeholders and Religious leaders to ensure acceptance and ownership by citizens. In doing so, Kenya can move forward with a stronger sense of national unity and purpose, ensuring a peaceful and prosperous future.

2. Security of Kenyans

Security of each and every Kenyan citizen is the primary duty of the Government. We have noted with concern the increased incidents of insecurity and loss of lives, which imply a huge lapse in security oversight.

Some of the recent conflicts in Sondu area of Kericho-Kisumu border, Lamu, Baringo-Samburu border and other parts of North Rift seem uncontrolled, in spite of presence of Security officers. We have also seen the re-emergence of armed criminal groups. We are appealing to the Government security agencies, to be more proactive and decisive in dealing with the situations swiftly.

The shocking loss of over 400 lives in Shakahola still begs for explanations and clear accounting of what really happened and how it escaped the security agencies. The alleged ritual deaths, and possible human organ harvesting has had no response from any responsible agencies. This is a major scandal for our Nation at this stage of our independence. We, therefore, ask the Government to come clean on alleged cases of human organ harvesting in the Country.

3. The Freedom of Speech

While we applaud the exercise of the freedom of speech in Kenya, there have been instances where some of our leaders have abused their freedom of speech. They have resorted to using language that demeans and belittles their fellow Kenyans.

Such behaviour not only erodes trust among communities but also fuels division and animosity. Respect for the dignity of every person should be at the core of public discourse, fostering an atmosphere where diverse opinions are valued and appreciated. We therefore call for sober and respectful attitudes from our leadership and from all Kenyans.

We are disappointed that this culture of hate speech is perpetrated by people who know better and are expected to be models in society.

C. Perennial Sticky Issues

1. Corruption

Corruption in our society, both within the systems of leadership and among Kenyans has been the most devastating sickness we continue to suffer from. Unfortunately, we don't seem resolved enough to truly and comprehensively rid ourselves of this great monster. We as Church continue to call upon each Kenyan to commit himself or herself to eradicate this menace.

In light of this reality, a collective effort is necessary to combat corruption at its roots. Collaborative endeavours between government institutions, civil society organizations, and concerned individuals are essential to creating a robust framework that discourages corrupt practices, enforces transparency, and ensures accountability in the management of public funds.

We, the Catholic Bishops once more call upon all Kenyans to take a strong stance against corruption within their workplaces and communities. On our part, we undertake to re-activate the campaign against corruption, starting from the grassroots, highlighting the importance of fostering a culture of integrity, honesty, and accountability at every level of society.

2. National Hospital Insurance Fund

For most Kenyans, the biggest risk and burden is often the cost of healthcare. We acknowledge the efforts of Government to provide Universal Health Care to all citizens. This would be a great milestone to improve the welfare of the citizens.

At the centre of the Universal Health Care is the smooth and efficient operation of the NHIF. It is for this reason that we once more raise our concern of the back-log of huge unpaid reimbursements to Mission Health Institutions that support the health provision at the grassroots.

By covering medical expenses, including surgeries, treatments, and medications, we can ensure that individuals receive the necessary healthcare services, improving their health outcomes and quality of life. However, this must also come with the commensurate responsibility to support these institutions, which now are facing unbearable financial strains. For example, among the many Faith Institutions, the Catholic Mission Hospitals are still owed over 1 Billion Shillings by NHIF. We are still worried what may happen after the planned reorganization of NHIF. There should be a clear plan to pay these arrears.

3. Care for the Environment

Following the clarion call of Pope Francis in his letter on Mother Earth, "*Laudato Si*", we are committed to enhancing our engagement in climate change and care for environment.

We applaud the Government for the initiatives in this area, and for the recent Public Holiday set aside for tree planting. We urge our Christians and all

Kenyans to fully engage in this initiative and come out to plant trees within their homes, churches, schools and villages. We can also engage in other environmental activities, such as cleaning of the environment, and preventing soil erosion. We urge the Government to enforce laws to reduce pollution of our rivers which are sources of water for many downstream communities.

Care for the Environment is part of our responsibility as Children of God and Christians, to care and preserve our mother earth for generations to come. Let us also take advantage of the ongoing rains to plant and harvest water.

Conclusion

We realize the delicate situation we all find ourselves in at this moment. We are encouraged by the words of Scripture, that Christ does not abandon us.

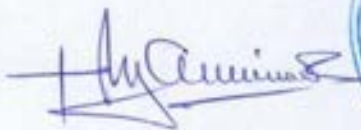
“I will be with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28, 20)

However, we all need to play our part, to navigate better these difficult times: Leaders, Government, Citizens young and old, and Religious Leaders.

We can rise above all these challenges and continue to build our country.

May God bless Kenya!

Signed:



10th November 2023

Most Rev. Martin Kivuva Musonde
CHAIRMAN OF KCCB/ Archbishop of Mombasa

PRESENT:

NAME

DIOCESE

1. Most. Rev. Maurice Muhatia Makumba - Vice-Chairman/Kisumu
2. Most Rev. Anthony Muheria - Nyeri/
Apostolic Administrator of Embu

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 3. Most Rev. Philip Anyolo | - Nairobi |
| 4. Rt. Rev. Joseph Mairura Okemwa | - Kisii |
| 5. Rt. Rev. Alfred Rotich | - Kericho |
| 6. Rt. Rev. Norman King'oo Wambua | - Machakos |
| 7. Rt. Rev. Peter Kihara | - Marsabit |
| 8. Rt. Rev. David Kamau Ng'ang'a | - Aux Nairobi |
| 9. Rt. Rev. Anthony Ileri Mukobo | - Isiolo |
| 10. Rt. Rev. Salesius Mugambi | - Meru |
| 11. Rt. Rev. James Maria Wainaina | - Murang'a |
| 12. Rt. Rev. Paul Kariuki Njiru | - Wote |
| 13. Rt. Rev. Dominic Kimengich | - Eldoret |
| 14. Rt. Rev. John Oballa Owaa | - Ngong |
| 15. Rt. Rev. Joseph Mbatia | - Nyahururu |
| 16. Rt. Rev. Joseph Obanyi Sagwe | - Kakamega |
| 17. Rt. Rev. Joseph Mwongela | - Kitui |
| 18. Rt. Rev. Michael Odiwa | - Homa Bay |
| 19. Rt. Rev. Willybard Lagho | - Malindi |
| 20. Rt. Rev. Mark Kadima | - Bungoma |
| 21. Rt. Rev. George Muthaka | - Garissa |
| 22. Rt. Rev. John Mbinda | - Lodwar |
| 23. Rt. Rev. Hieronymus Emusugut Joya | - Malalal |
| 24. Rt. Rev. Henry Juma Odonya | - Kitale |
| 25. Rt. Rev. Cleophas Oseso | - Nakuru |
| 26. Very Rev. Fr. Benjamin K. Maswili | - Apostolic Administrator
Military Ordinariate |