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## COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE AT THE END OF ITS ANNUAL PLENARY ASSEMBLY HELD AT OFOASE KOKOBEN, OBUASI DIOCESE IN THE ASHANTI REGION OF GHANA NOVEMBER 8 – 16, 2024

### 1. GREETINGS

1.1 *“Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you”* (Phil. 1:2).

### 2. PREAMBLE

2.1 We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have held our Annual Plenary Assembly at Pope John Paul II Formation and Training Centre, Ofoase Kokoben, in the Diocese of Obuasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, from November 8 to 16, 2024 under the theme: *“Jubilee Year: A Time to Proclaim Christ, Hope for the Church and Ghana”* (cf. 1 Tim. 1:1).

### 3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

3.1 Our Plenary Assembly was graced by the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, His Excellency, Most Rev. Julien Kaboré, Friar Joseph Blay, OFM, the Vice President of Ghana and the Flagbearer of the New Patriotic Party, His Excellency Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, the National Chairman of the National Democratic Congress, Hon. Johnson Asiedu Nketia, the Ashanti Regional Minister, Hon. Simon Osei-Mensah, the MCE for Obuasi West, Hon. Elijah Adansi Bonah, other DCEs and Lawyer Franklin Kwabena Asamoah, who was the Chairman of the Opening Ceremony.

3.2 In the course of the Plenary Assembly, we visited parishes, celebrated Holy Masses and interacted with the People of God in the towns and villages of the Diocese. We also had the opportunity to visit the AngloGold Ashanti Mines to acquaint ourselves with the technology of underground mining and were delighted to note that most of the staff of the company are Ghanaians.

3.3 We wish to express our gratitude to Most Rev. John Yaw Afoakwa, the Priests, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful of the Obuasi Diocese for their warm hospitality and selfless contribution towards the success of our Plenary Assembly.

#### **4. THEME FOR THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

4.1 Our theme, “*Jubilee Year: A Time to Proclaim Christ, Hope for the Church and Ghana*” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:1), was inspired by Pope Francis’s theme for the Jubilee year 2025: “Pilgrims of Hope”.

#### **5. Jubilee Year**

5.1 The concept of “Jubilee Year”, originates from the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 25). It refers to a Special Year, a Holy Year of liberation and restoration, to be observed at the end of every seven weeks of years (50th year) by the Israelites. It is the “Year of the Lord’s favour” heralded by the prophet Isaiah, not of his own accord but effected through the unction of God’s Spirit as an unmerited gift (cf. Isaiah 61: 1-3a). The celebration of the Jubilee Year also included the restitution of land to the original owners, the remission of debts, the liberation of slaves and the land left fallow.

5.2 Pope Francis, in the Bull of indiction “*Spes non confundit*” – Hope does not disappoint, expresses the wish that this Jubilee Year may be for everyone, “... *a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the “door” (cf. John 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as “our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1). A Jubilee Year is necessarily a three-dimensional event, requiring retrospective reflections of the past, an appreciation and living out of the present, and a thrust into the future with confidence and hope in God.*

#### **6. A Time to Proclaim Christ**

6.1 The Church’s mandate is to proclaim Christ as Lord (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:5) and to make disciples (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). This duty is a non-negotiable imperative (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Corinthians 9:16), a daily preoccupation (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:28), a programme of life and action, and a fundamental commitment to Christian witness (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi [EN]*, 41).

6.2 “*The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity*” (*EN*, 3). This is a call for renewed zeal and vigour and strategies which are suited to the needs of the time.

6.3 This call is even more urgent in the wake of the rather unflattering statistics of the Catholic population in Ghana revealed by the 2021 census. All Catholics, but most especially the Church's pastoral agents - Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons, Catechists, and Society Leaders- must work more assiduously towards re-proposing the Gospel to those who are experiencing a crisis of faith, and reach out to lapsed Catholics and even non-Catholics who are seeking the Gospel message of salvation.

## **7. Christ, Hope for the Church**

7.1 In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI reminds us that “there is no doubt that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity” (EN, 1).

Christ, the hope of all creation, is hope for the Church, a hope that does not disappoint. The implication of this affirmation is the centrality of Jesus Christ to the faith and mission of the Church. He is the cornerstone of the Church (cf. 1 Corinthians 3: 11), embodying hope through His life, death, and resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 1:3). It is from these that the Church draws her strength, legitimacy and relevance.

7.2 Christ is the hope for the Church in a number of specific senses. For our sinfulness, He is our salvation (cf. John 3:16); in our hate, He is our reconciliation – restoring our relationship with God and with one another (cf. Romans 5:10); in our struggles, He is our comfort and strength (cf. Matthew 5:4); and in our division, He is our unity and peace (cf. Philippians 4:7). Therefore, the Church must look up to Him as her guiding light.

## **8. Christ, Hope for Ghana**

8.1 Christ is the hope for all nations (cf. Matthew 12:21) in several profound and interconnected ways. His influence extends beyond individual faith to touch the social, cultural, and national aspects of life in Ghana. Having reflected on our theme, we note that since an estimated 71% of Ghana's population professes faith in Christ, our hope in Him must be seen to be directing all aspects of our collective realities, including care for the environment, election of our leaders, conflict management and the proper nurturing and use of the gift of human sexuality.

## 9. Ecological Citizenship

9.1 In his “Canticle of the Creatures”, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home – the created order, is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us (cf. *Laudato Si*, 1). This relationship places a duty of care and stewardship upon all of humanity towards the environment. It is precisely in the intentional and loving care for creation that we take up our identity and mission as co-creators. Yet, the vision transcends stewardship to a vocation of ecological citizenship.

9.2 Ecological citizenship is a way of life characterised by the conscious decision to relate responsibly to the environment through the concrete daily choices which express care for the earth. Such a relational identity is, in the end, a wise management of what has been entrusted by God to humanity and therefore, a show of our functioning in concomitance with the divine will and design (cf. *Laudato Si*, 13).

9.3 Sadly, however, our care for our common home has been woefully and dismally short of expectation, with the indiscriminate felling of trees, poor management of plastic waste, illegal and irresponsible mining of our mineral resources (e.g. galamsey). For instance, in the Diocese of Obuasi where this plenary assembly has been held, the menace of galamsey seems to run amok with illegal and irresponsible mining activities in all thirteen Administrative Districts; the worst hit being the four Amansie Districts – Amansie Central, Amansie East, Amansie West and Amansie South.

9.4 As a Conference and as individual Bishops, we have, over the years, been consistently vocal about the environmental degradation caused by illegal and irresponsible mining which has unleashed devastating consequences on our country's ecosystems, water bodies, communities, etc. Going forward, we call on:

1. **Government** to take immediate and decisive action by employing all available means to halt illegal and irresponsible mining activities. This includes enforcing appropriate laws, holding perpetrators accountable, and ensuring that those involved in illegal and irresponsible mining face the full force of the law without fear or favour. It would be extremely beneficial to this national cause if any form of government interference with the legitimate operations of the various relevant commissions and regulatory bodies ceased.

2. **All Politicians** to demonstrate commitment to protecting our environment by desisting from either benefiting from illegal and irresponsible mining or engaging in it themselves. We strongly urge all Presidential and Parliamentary Candidates to make public commitments against galamsey in their ongoing political campaigns and call on their followers to follow suit. Say NO to galamsey!
3. **Regulatory Bodies** to be more vigilant and honest about their duties and operations. This call for integrity demands their ability to resist all attempts by corrupt members of society to compromise their ethical responsibility towards the nation.
4. **Chiefs and Queens** to demonstrate their leadership by outlawing illegal and irresponsible mining within their territorial jurisdiction. Chiefs and Queen who fail to act to protect their traditional territories from illegal and irresponsible mining actually shirk their responsibility and break their sacred oath to the people.
5. **Local Communities** to rise up to their God-given right and responsibility to protect their forests, lands, river bodies and indeed, their very lives. Destroying our environment is not an acceptable answer to unemployment. All communities must wake up to the reality that the destruction of their environment is self-destruction (cf. *Laudate Deum*, 3).
6. **All Catholic Clergy** - Deacons, Priests and Bishops and **Faithful** to live out their baptismal promises and identity by standing up both publicly against illegal and irresponsible mining wherever and whenever it rears its diabolical head. Let all the clergy endeavour to question the sources of wealth of those who may be suspected of dubious dealings. If it is obvious that the source of wealth of a donor is illegal and irresponsible mining, their donations must be rejected. We vehemently admonish any Catholic involved in this activity to STOP with immediate effect! Any Catholic who is found out to persist in this crime will be liable for appropriate ecclesiastical sanctions pursuant to the norms of Canon Law.
7. **All other Religious Leaders**, especially Christians and Muslims to show fidelity to the dictates of the Bible and Quran respectively, which enjoin on them to care for God's creation. Let us take up our divinely given leadership of our people with seriousness, sincerity and courage. Let us live above reproach in these matters.
8. **All Citizens** to embrace conscientisation on this environmental tragedy. Let our minds and consciousness reawaken to the truth that Ghana is the only earthly home we have as a people. We must therefore manage our environment with care and together fight against the perpetrators of illegal and irresponsible mining.

## **10. General Elections 2024**

10.1 We have consistently made appeals for peaceful elections in the country through our Communiqués, Pastoral Letters and Press Statements, emphasizing the need for non-violence, respect for democratic processes, and the promotion of unity and national cohesion. We have often made such appeals in the lead-up to general elections, calling on political parties, candidates, and citizens to exercise restraint, avoid hate speech, and respect the rule of law.

10.2 We have had the occasion of encountering a cross section of the leadership of the various political parties: some during the **Sahel Peace Initiative** National Forum on peaceful co-existence, security and peaceful elections (30-31 July, 2024), others at the **Ghana Speaks Series** organised in collaboration with IDEG-CFI (10 October, 2024) and still others during this **Plenary Assembly** (8-16 November, 2024). From all these leaders, we received assurances of their commitment to a peaceful election. We therefore, urge duty bearers to ensure the strict enforcement of the law and strengthen state institutions to signal their credibility to the citizenry.

10.3 We wish to reiterate our firm resolve to do whatever is within our power to foster and maintain the peace and stability of Mother Ghana, in the unswerving-conviction that it is both our civic and God-mandated duty for the integral development of our people. We also urge you all, our brothers and sisters, to work together to ensure that our elections are conducted in an atmosphere of peace, fairness, and mutual respect. May our actions and words reflect our commitment to the values of **Freedom, Justice, Probity and Accountability**. We remind you all of the exhortation of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

## **11. Strained Relationship Among Arm of Government**

11.1 As we have all observed with great concern the strain in the relations among the arms of government, i.e. Executive, Legislature and Judiciary, we strongly call for institutional forbearance.

## **12. The Protracted Conflict in Bawku**

12.1 The ongoing conflict in Bawku is a deep concern for the Catholic Church and all peace-loving Ghanaians. The violence, rising loss of life, and displacement of people in Bawku have caused untold suffering. The town has become a pale shadow of itself as education, health, social and judiciary services delivery is adversely affected by the exodus of teachers, nurses and business people from the town.

We are worried that there is a looming humanitarian crisis at Bawku due to the increasing inability of large portions of the population to access basic services. This situation requires urgent attention by Government, other stakeholders and all humanitarian agencies.

12.2 We believe that the key to resolving this conflict lies in dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. We call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and passionately appeal to the factions involved in the conflict to help the process of peace-building for the sake of the future of Bawku and the peace of Ghana. We condemn in no uncertain terms all political interferences in this unfortunate situation and call for the depoliticization of the conflict in order to find a lasting solution to it.

### **13. Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill**

13.1 The Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill has ignited passionate discussions across the country. As shepherds of the Church, we support the bill as it reflects our commitment to the sanctity of the family and the upholding of traditional values rooted in our cultural and Christian heritage.

13.2 We urge the President to give his assent to this Bill, which we believe aligns with the moral convictions of almost all Ghanaians. We see no justification for the President's delayed action on the matter. In fact, we consider the reasons proffered for the delay as mere excuses. This is not a call for discrimination, but for the preservation of our moral fabric and the protection of the traditional marriage and family as the foundation of our society.

### **14. CONCLUSION**

As we journey through this Jubilee Year, may its significance as a time for reflection, renewal, and reaffirmation of our commitment to Christ, the eternal hope of the Church and our beloved nation, Ghana not elude us.

In this sacred time, we must remember that the Church's mission is rooted in Christ, the cornerstone of our faith. He is the source of hope that sustains us in times of trial, the light that guides us through moments of uncertainty, and the love that binds us together as one body.

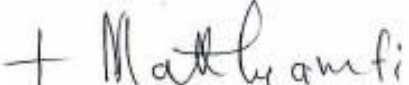
Ghana, our dear nation, is at a critical point in its history. It is only through the grace and truth found in Christ that we can overcome the challenges we face and build a future of unity, justice, and prosperity.

Our challenges as Church and nation notwithstanding, let us look forward with hope and confidence to Christ, our hope which does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (cf. Romans 5:5).

*“And so, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).*

*May St. Thomas the Apostle and Patron Saint  
of Obuasi Diocese continue to intercede for us, Amen.*

*Issued on Friday, November 15, 2024 in the St. Thomas Cathedral in the Diocese of Obuasi.*

  
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