



AFRICA/NIGERIA - The Archbishop of Abuja denounces threats against Christians and calls for the protection of the State

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - His Excellency John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja (Federal Capital of Nigeria), denounced the sending of text messages (SMS) "that threaten the existence of plans by some Muslim groups to massacre Christians in the North on a specific night. Many people have been seriously shaken by such utterances. Given the experience of the past, it is understandable that one would not dismiss such texts as empty threats. We cannot take chances with what has become a matter of life or death".

The complaint is contained in a pastoral Message sent to the faithful, which was also sent to Fides, where Archbishop Onaiyekan urged Christians to have faith in the salvation of God. "This does not mean, however, that we fold our hands", warns the Archbishop of Abuja.

Among the measures to be taken, Archbishop Onaiyekan invites the faithful to ensure security: "We should continue to be vigilant and security conscious all around us: in our homes, places of work and above all in our places of worship". "In particular, as regards securing our places of worship and other church premises, we expect that members of our Church who have experience and skills in matters of security will continue to gladly make their services available for the setting up and maintaining of an appropriate and effective security outfit for the Church. This will be done within the ambit of the law".

"At the same time - continues the Archbishop - we appreciate the services offered by state security forces. We expect them to continue to cover us even more effectively, in cooperation with our safety devices. The fact that we can count on the forces of the State to ensure our security, especially in places of worship, is our right as law-abiding citizens and it is the duty of the State".

Archbishop Onaiyekan also accuses "those who want to pitch Christians against Muslims and are trying to foment war between the two groups, causing great damage to the nation". "We must resist all attempts to turn us into enemies of one another. On the contrary, this is the time to promote and maintain good relations with our Muslim friends" says the Archbishop.

Archbishop Onaiyekan finally invites all the faithful to pray for Nigeria. This is why the Archbishop gave orders that at the end of each Mass, before the final blessing, two prayers are to be said: the "Prayer for Nigeria in Distress" ("composed many years ago and still valid for the present situation"), followed by the prayer "Memorare", "the traditional prayer of the Church, to implore the powerful intercession of our Most Holy Mother Mary, to protect us, our communities, and to convert the hearts of the evil people who go around sowing death and terror in the nation".(LM) (Agenzia Fides 19/01/2012)