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AFRICA/NIGERIA - "A return to savagery": Bishops condemn the new executions

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - "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 4 convicted persons in Benin City Edo State," says a statement sent to Fides, signed by His Exc. Mgr. Ignatous Ayu Kaigama, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria.
The Bishops criticize the interruption of the moratorium on death penalties that had been in force in Nigeria since 2006, after which on 24 June 4 people were executed by hanging in the prison in Benin City (southern Nigeria). A fifth person was to be executed by firing squad instead but the sentence was postponed because the prison where he is held is not equipped for this type of execution. The application of capital punishment was heavily criticized around the world by organizations in defense of human rights.
The authorities reacted to criticism pointing out that the death penalty is still provided for in the Nigerian Constitution. "Using the Constitution to justify this act is a clear departure from modernity to savagery," said the Bishops' statement. "We renew all calls for an amendment of the Constitution to proscribe all law that infringe on the rights of individuals especially the right to life."
The document also points out that the 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 believe that the actions aimed at reforming criminals will do better good to the society than capital punishment," the statement concludes. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 01/07/2013)

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