

**BAMENDA PROVINCIAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE [BAPEC]
THE SECRETARIAT
ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE
P.O. BOX 82, BAMENDA
NORTH WEST REGION
CAMEROON**

**MESSAGE OF THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE
OF BAMENDA TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

“Console, console my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. We, your Bishops, gathered at our annual Meeting of the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference in Bamenda from Thursday, 16th to Thursday, 23rd August 2018, wish you all *“grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Christ Jesus our Lord”* (1Timothy 1:2).
2. After having listened to reports from our different dioceses on the life of the Church in the context of the current socio-political crisis, we bring you a message of consolation and encouragement, like the message of consolation God gave to his people while they were in exile (Cf. Isaiah 40:1). We thank you for the Masses which you have offered in your different parishes and institutions for those who are suffering in one way or another because of the current socio-political crisis. You have been praying for those who are suffering on account of the destruction of their homes or property; you have been praying for the eternal repose of those who have been wantonly and senselessly killed. You have been praying for all of them without any discrimination with regard to creed, ethnic origin or political persuasion. Any deliberate discrimination in such a matter would automatically discredit your prayer, because for that reason it would not be Christian prayer. You have been praying for the very many innocent people who have been arrested and detained, those who have been displaced and those who live in bushes and forests because of the socio-political crisis. Every one of those who are suffering or have died irrespective of tribe, creed or political persuasion is a child of God and subsequently our brother or sister. We want to thank you for the admirable material and financial assistance which you have offered and will continue to offer to all the victims of the socio-political crisis, especially those who have been displaced. We wish to thank you for the heroic hospitality you have manifested to those who have been internally displaced by the crisis.

3. Our hearts are saddened by the reports we continue to receive, which show that the situation in all our dioceses is getting worse. We have been forced to suspend pastoral activities in some of our parishes and where parishes are still functioning, activities are at their lowest level. The number of displaced persons, many of whom have fled and are hiding in the bushes or are with relatives and friends outside the affected areas or even outside the country, continues to increase by the day.

4. We have noted with utter dismay and pain in our hearts the frightening number of people who are being summarily and extrajudicially executed both by the forces of law and order and by the “Amba boys”. In all honesty, no one can say with certainty how many people have been killed, since many are killed and disposed of immediately in bushes, in water, or simply buried in mass graves. There continues to be unjustifiable use of firearms, arrests and detention of innocent civilians, destruction of property, burning down of homes and public utility buildings, extortion and suppression. It has been a reign of terror and horror and we are living permanently in fear.

5. Even the Church has not been spared. There has been the brutal and calculated assassination of Rev. Father Alexander Nougé Sob, Priest of the Diocese of Buea, molestation and violent attacks on Priests, Religious and other Church personnel, even when these were clearly vested in clerical and religious attire, talk less of the destruction of Church property. We are also victims of people who are exploiting the situation for their personal interests. There is total disrespect of human life and human dignity. In this difficult situation, our local Church is sandwiched between the warring parties. Even in full blown wars, there are laws, conventions and protocols that should be respected; and Church institutions, particularly church buildings and hospitals, are considered as sanctuaries of safety for all without discrimination or distinction. We remain convinced of the role of the Church to be neutral in partisan politics and to be an instrument of truth and reconciliation, and of justice and peace in the world.

6. In this crisis, the Lord addresses to the perpetrators of atrocities on both sides the same question he addressed to Cain: “*What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground*” (Genesis 4:10). God’s Command, “*Thou shall not kill!*” (Exodus 2:13), remains valid even today in this situation. Violence generates violence. As Pope Pius XII points out, “*Violence has always achieved only destruction, not construction; the kindling of passions, not their pacification; the accumulation of hate and ruin, not the reconciliation of the contending parties. And it has reduced men and parties to the difficult task of rebuilding, after sad experience on the ruins of discord.*” (Cf. *Pacem in Terris*, n. 162).

We, therefore, call for an immediate cessation of violence and we call on the contending parties to put down their arms.

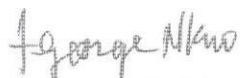
7. The school boycott for the last two years, with a threat now of a third year, has had a deep negative impact on children and families. Schooling has been irregular in the two regions. Some, who can afford, have sent their children to English schools in other regions of the country or out of the country. So, it is the children of the poor who are left to wander in the bushes and forests or simply stay “safe” at home. Many parents in these two regions would actually like to send their children to school; but they are afraid of the soldiers who flood our streets and of the ‘Amba boys’ who threaten to burn and destroy the schools. We reiterate the mission of the Church to give quality and holistic education to all our children. We sincerely think that the ongoing crisis has gone beyond school boycott. That is why, without wanting to compromise or jeopardise the deep aspirations of the people, we continue to keep our schools open for parents to send their children. We ardently appeal that the schools should continue to function.

8. In this situation of distress, we should not forget that our God is a God of consolation and mercy, and he invites us to console those who are suffering. We, your Bishops, are deeply united with you in this moment of trial, distress and pain. Do not lose hope. The Risen Lord is in our midst. We urge all, particularly women who are mothers and co-operators with God in bringing forth life, not to despair but to stand up more resolutely for the dignity and sacredness of human life.

9. Once more, we thank you for all the prayers you have offered since the beginning of the crisis. Jesus Christ exhorts us to pray continuously and not to lose heart (Cf. Luke 18:1). We, therefore, invite you, the people of God, to continue to raise up your hearts and minds in supplication to God our loving and merciful Father, that his will may be done and that we may find a lasting solution to the present crisis. Therefore, besides the prayers that we have been offering, we call on all parishes to organise themselves and observe Friday, 14th September 2018, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, as a day of prayer and fasting in solidarity with the suffering. We also ask that we continue to dedicate every Thursday to the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We have decided that henceforth every Friday be observed as a day of prayer and fasting; and we call on all Priests to celebrate on the same day **Mass in Time of War or Civil Disturbance** (*Roman Missal*, pp. 1115-1116). We do all this in solidarity with the suffering and for the eternal repose of those who have lost their lives in this crisis.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, Help of Christians and Comforter of the afflicted intercede for us.

Given in Bamenda,
This Thursday, 23rd August 2018,
Optional Memorial of Saint Rose of Lima.



+ George NKUO

Bishop of Kumbo and President of BAPEC



+ Cornelius FONTEM ESUA

Archbishop of Bamenda



+ Andrew FUANYA NKEA

Bishop of Mamfe and Vice-President of BAPEC



+ Immanuel BUSHU

Bishop of Buea



+ Agapitus NFON

Bishop of Kumba



+ Michael MIABESUE BIBI

Auxiliary Bishop of Bamenda