



STATEMENT ON NIGERIA, IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT OF AFRICA

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
(Micah 6:8)*

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, on 8-14 November 2023, has been inspired by its encounters with the churches and people of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and the continent's largest economy. Nigeria has given many rich gifts to the global community, of literature, music and culture, and Nigerians are increasingly represented in leadership roles in the international community. Nigeria's astonishing diversity of cultures, languages and religions, and its youthful demographic (with more than 60% of the population under 24), produces a vibrant mix of tradition and creative energy. Moreover, the resilience and humour of Nigerian people in facing their many challenges inspire hope in the midst of the crises and difficulties of the world.

The churches of Nigeria reflect this diversity, vibrancy and resilience in their range of expressions and ministries, and the executive committee has been blessed to join in worship and fellowship with a spectrum of church families in Nigeria.

The WCC executive committee:

- **celebrates** the quality of ecumenical relations in Nigeria, especially through the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and
- **affirms** the Nigerian churches' strong commitment to interreligious dialogue and cooperation with the Nigerian Muslim community and institutions.

Meeting in Nigeria nine months after the presidential elections on 25 February 2023, the executive committee:

- **welcomes** all efforts by the government to address the concerns of Christians and Muslims alike, and
- **encourages** the government to pursue the path of inclusion, seeking peace, security, prosperity, dignity and justice for all Nigerians, regardless of religion, ethnicity, language, social status or any other characteristic.

As great as its many assets and strengths, are Nigeria's challenges and the obstacles to inclusion and dignity for all its people. Moreover, in Nigeria's regional context, many neighbouring or nearby countries are experiencing crises which impact on the region as a whole. In the last three years the region has seen a significant increase in military coups, with military figures seizing power in Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Guinea, Chad and Mali. Moreover, violence and insecurity has become endemic across large swathes of the Sahel region due to attacks by armed extremist groups.

Displacement and instability in the region is being exacerbated by increasing environmental degradation and desertification due to climate change. Continuing conflicts and tensions in Ethiopia, and especially the humanitarian catastrophe resulting from the internal conflict in Sudan demands the international community's attention and engagement. After seven months of war, more than half of Sudan's population is in need of humanitarian aid, and violence against civilians in Sudan – including sexual and gender-based violence, forced disappearance, arbitrary detentions and grave violations of human and children's rights – has been described by the UN as “verging on pure evil”.

The executive committee:

- **appeals** for the international community, including the churches of the world, not to forget Sudan and the African continent, but to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of the region, to support and accompany the search for justice and sustainable peace in conflict-affected countries, and to work for democratic governance throughout the region.
- **Further appeals** to all African Union heads of state to commit to delivering on their pledge of silencing all guns in Africa by 2030 as promised in the AU Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

Here in Nigeria, the WCC executive committee has received painful testimonies from the churches of the insecurity, violence, displacement and persecution faced by Christians in northern Nigeria as well as in other parts of the country. The brutal attacks and kidnappings perpetrated by those who call themselves Islamists (extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)) especially target Christians for their faith, while Christians and Muslims alike suffer from the violent depredations of criminal 'bandits'. In addition to northern Nigeria, severe insecurity also affects parts of the south-east of the country. Children and women suffer especially in these contexts of generalized endemic violence and insecurity.

The executive committee:

- **appeals** to the Nigerian government and authorities to exert maximum effort to bring security and stability to the affected communities, to prosecute perpetrators, to cooperate with the authorities of neighbouring countries to address cross-border issues, to support people displaced by violence and fear of violence and to restore them to their homes in conditions of safety and dignity, and to ensure freedom of religion or belief to all Nigerians equally in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- **encourages** all ecumenical and inter-religious initiatives for peace and social cohesion in Nigeria, underlining the special importance in this context of the International Centre for Interfaith Peace & Harmony (ICIPH), Kaduna, and of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).

The executive committee is also acutely aware of the extreme economic inequality in Nigeria, and of the increasing daily struggle for subsistence faced by many Nigerians, while wealth and privilege accumulate in the hands of elite sectors of society. Meanwhile, recent [reports](#) indicate that a significant proportion of Nigeria's population is undernourished, representing a major hunger crisis for the nation.

The executive committee:

- **urges** the government of Nigeria to do more to address this economic injustice, and to ease the hardships of the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities in Nigeria, especially following the withdrawal of the fuel subsidy – a necessary reform, but which has acutely increased the hardships of the poor.

It is a particularly bitter irony that the people of Ogoniland and other parts of the Niger Delta – from whose lands so much of Nigeria’s oil wealth was extracted – remain among its poorest and most vulnerable communities, living in an environment devastated by oil spills and pollution from the oil industry, still waiting after decades for remediation and redress. Recalling the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa 28 years ago for leading protests against oil spills and the marginalization of his people, the executive committee:

- **calls** upon the government and authorities of Nigeria to implement the recommendations of the [2011 UNEP Ogoniland environmental assessment report](#) fully and without further delay;
- **demands** that Shell – the company whose operations resulted in this devastation – make full restitution for the environmental, economic and social harms caused to the affected communities of Ogoniland and throughout the Niger Delta.

Nigeria remains an oil-producing nation. However, its people and communities are also heavily affected by accelerating climate change resulting from the burning of fossil fuels globally. Northern Nigeria is experiencing more severe and lengthier heatwaves and more erratic rainfall, resulting in increasing desertification. Extreme droughts, floods, deforestation and desertification, food shortages and competition for resources are affecting many parts of the country. Due to rising sea levels resulting from global warming, many coastal areas of Nigeria - especially the Niger Delta - are increasingly vulnerable to more frequent and more destructive flooding.

The executive committee:

- **lifts up** the plight of the poorer and more vulnerable people and communities of Nigeria, who have not been responsible for the exponential increase in CO2 emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, nor have they benefited from the wealth generated by the fossil fuel industry, but are among those suffering the sharpest impacts of the global climate crisis;
- **calls** for those investing in and supporting the oil industry in Nigeria to take their responsibility for the many harms caused to the people and communities of the country.

As Nigeria prepares to host the 12th General Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), also marking the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the AACC as the African continent’s ecumenical council, the WCC executive committee:

- **celebrates** the Nigerian contribution to the search for Christian unity in the region and around the world, and
- **prays** for all delegates who will attend the forthcoming AACC General Assembly, that they may continue to pursue justice, reconciliation and unity among the churches as well as the people and nations of the continent.

The WCC executive committee concludes its meeting in Nigeria strengthened and empowered by the love, joy, creativity, energy and resilience of this nation. We **pray** for the churches, people and authorities of Nigeria, that its vast potential may be liberated from the manifold yoke of violence, insecurity, persecution, injustice, poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, and unhealed memories. We **invite and commit** to accompanying all Nigerians on the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation and unity, on which the ecumenical movement is itself embarked. And we **ask** all WCC member churches and partners around the world to actively support and join in praying for the churches and people of Nigeria on their journey.

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