


AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK-NIGERIA

“WHEN SPIDER WEBS UNITE THEY CAN TIE UP A LION” *African Proverb*



**Africa
Faith &
Justice
Network
Nigeria**

ABSTRACT
The Cry of a Child touches the Heart of a Mother. The Sorrow of a Child pierces the Heart of a Mother. Solidarity against Trafficking in persons is a sure Stand that AFJNN has promised to Take.

WHY AFRICA FAITH & JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA? WHY THE FORUM? WHY THE LEGAL REGISTRATION?



By Rev. Sr. Juliet Ifediba, OLA
(Barrister & Solicitor)

Pope Francis on the 30th of November, 2014 issued a letter for the year of Consecrated life.

In his message, the Pope underscored the aims for the year of Consecrated life thus:

- To look to the past with gratitude
- To live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope.

Photo Left - Sisters take their advocacy to the National Assembly Abuja

The Pope expressed his expectations for

the year's observation thus; *“That Consecrated men and women would be witnesses of communion, of joy and of the Gospel and that they are to go evermore to the peripheries to proclaim the Good news”*. In his own words he said *“I am counting on you to wake up the world since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy, and this is the priority that is needed right now”*. The Pope also said that he expected consecrated men and women to examine their presence in church's life and to respond to the *“new demands constantly being made on us by the cry of the poor”*.

The above expressions of the Holy Father is indeed in tandem with the beliefs of other church fathers as expressed in the various documents of the church; ‘that the consecrated life is a precious and necessary gift in the church because it belongs intimately to the life and sanctity of the church and her mission (**Vita Consecrate 3**)¹, thus it is not an isolated entity but rather a reality that affects the whole life of the church.’² Every religious institute therefore is founded for the church and is meant to enrich the church with her spirituality and charism, since as identified by **Lumen Gentium(no 43)**, that the Evangelical Counsels of the consecrated life is a **Divine Gift** which the Church receives from her Lord (**Lumen Gentium no. 43**)³, as such members of the Consecrated Life from the moment of their dedication to the service of the church, deriving from their very consecration have an **OBLIGATION (NOT AN OPTION)** to play a zealous and special part in

¹ Vita Consecrata no 3

² Ibid

³ Lumen Gentium 43

the missionary activities in a manner appropriate to their Institute(**Canon 783**).⁴ This statement equally is affirmed in **Vita Consecrata no 72** when it said that “the consecrated person is on mission by virtue of her consecration to which she bears witness in accordance with the ideal of her Institute”. Hence the beginning and end of all of the above submissions is captured in **Pastore Dabo Vobis no 24** which says that “*the Consecrated Person is consecrated for the mission of Christ in the church*”

The big question then is what the mission of Christ is; the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2, foretold it thus “*the Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring Good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from Yahweh and a day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn.*”

Jesus himself while in the synagogue at Nazareth where he was brought up affirmed the above mission spoken of him by the prophet Isaiah in Luke 4: 18-19 and most particularly when he said in verse 21 after reading the text/scroll that, “*this text has been fulfilled today even as you are listening*”.

Thus, the above affirmations both from Jesus himself, the Holy Father, Pope Francis and from the documents of the church simply connote by way of implications and expressions that the *Consecrated Persons are the consciences of the nations, the vanguards of justice, equity and truth*. Simply put, they are *the Sacraments and Testaments of Divine Love in the world and in particular to the poor, the marginalized and to those at the peripherals*.

It was therefore this Divine Call and Mandate that propelled Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) Washington DC to come to the continent of Africa where millions of people are dying before their God destined time as a result of injustices and unjust governance of both human and material resources that has created untold suffering and poverty among the people. So, in answer to the call of Christ and his Church and to liberate through acts of justice which includes advocacy, empowerment, activism, truth etc. AFJN is in Nigeria; hence the reason for putting up this platform (AFJN-Nigeria) which in addition to our good and divine motivated apostolates will enable us to come together as Religious women in order to articulate and advocate on issues of injustices, marginalization, empowerment, capacity building, unjust governance which in one way or the other have enabled violence and injustice to thrive in our country Nigeria.

⁴ Canon 783

WHY REGISTRATION



Taking cognizance of how tough and “dangerous” it could be in dealing with issues of injustice especially when it addresses and questions unjust powers, unjust structures, unjust wealth, unjust governance, violence etc., it was agreed by the sisters at the first meeting held in November 2016, that there shall be need for the registration of AFJN-N so as to give it the legality and the validity

that will enable it fulfill its Mission and most importantly shield the sisters from unwarranted attacks from either the government, corporations or private individuals.

For instance, some of the aims and objectives of AFJN-N include advocacy, quest for transparency and accountability in leadership, building of structures of peace, dialogue and justice etc., looking at these aims you will agree with me that the sisters may be stifled by the powers that be, be it the government, corporations, private persons or even some religious bodies that may like Herod feel disturbed and hide under the guise of maintaining public order to proscribe the Divine activities of the sisters as unlawful, terrorizing, sedating of public etc. as provided in **Section 69 of Criminal Code Act** which defines unlawful assembly to mean *“gathering of three or more persons with the intent to carry out some common purpose, assemble in such a manner or being assembled or conduct themselves in such a manner as to cause persons in the neighborhood to fear on reasonable grounds that the persons so assembled will tumultuously disturb the peace or will by such assembly needlessly and without any reasonable occasion provoke other persons to tumultuously disturb the peace”*.

Section 70 of the same Act prescribes the punishment for deviants when it said *“any person who takes part in an unlawful assembly is guilty of a misdemeanor and is liable to imprisonment for one (1) year”*.

Though Section 40 of the 1999 Constitutions of Nigeria provides that *'every person shall be entitled to assembly freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interest(s); provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this constitution...'* and Section 41 states that *'every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereto or exit there from'*.

However section 45 of the same Constitution provides that *"nothing in section 37(right to private & family life), 38 (freedom of thought, conscience & religion), 39 (Right to freedom of expression at the press), 40 (right to peaceful assembly & association) and 41(right to freedom of movement) of this constitution shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society; (a) in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health or (b)for the purpose of protecting the right or freedom of other persons."*

To avoid been declared or proscribed as illegal Association as provided in section 69 of Criminal Code and Section 11 and 12 of Terrorism Act 2013, AFJNN was registered to give all the legality that it deserves in the face of any form of dangerous storm and equally to enable the sisters carry out their work of justice without fear or favor in all circumstances.

It was indeed this legality that made it possible for AFJNN in November 2016 and 2017 to march to the relevant authorities in Edo State to demand that the men of the police including the executive officers in the said state should at all times rise to the defense of the Masses especially in the cases of sexual abuses of women and children, child and women molestation, domestic violence, trafficking in persons and other social vices. AFJNN was able to engage the relevant stakeholders such as the State Governor/Deputy Governor, Police Commissioner and his men, the Zaikis and then village to village campaign, education and awareness as regards the above-mentioned vices. Had it been that AFJNN is not properly registered as provided under the Nigerian law; it would have been handicapped in pursuing and proclaiming justice, equity and truth among the populace.

I, therefore wish to join my voice in pleading with you dearest **Rev. Sisters, Major Superiors, Provincial Superiors and Mother Generals** to embrace and identify with this Divine Mission by delegating a sister from your noble congregation to AFJNN cause; so that through you, the Divine Love and the Divine Justice of God will reach those in the peripherals, the marginalized, the have-nots and indeed the down trodden of our society. Indeed, through you, dear **Rev. Sisters, Superiors**

and Rev. Mothers, the name of God will be hallowed in the lives of the poor and our solidarity with and for them will be felt by them the more. Thank you and May God continue to bless you. Amen.



AFRICA FAITH & JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA (AFJN-N)

By Sr. Gladys Chikere, OLA

From November 3-8, 2019, the Africa Faith & Justice Network Nigeria (AFJN-N), met in Benin City and other Local Government Areas in Edo State to continue its fight against human trafficking. At this advocacy convergence were Rev. Fr. Aniedi Okure, OP the Executive Director of AFJN Washington DC and Rev. Sr. Eucharia Madueke, SNDdeN

Coordinator of AFJN Women Empowerment Project, AFJN-N legal adviser Sr. Juliet Ifediba, OLA and fourteen (14) other Rev. Sisters from ten (10) Congregations who fully participated in the advocacy programme.

This body works to combat all forms of social ills in Nigeria, particularly violence against women and children, contemporary slavery and abuse against women, young girls/men, children and vulnerable persons. Among other States in Nigeria, Edo State has been labeled the site of this plague. This a major reason for AFJN-N's choice for multi-facet advocacy in the State.

The aim of the advocacy was to create awareness of the truth that Africa and Africans right through ages till our days have been "*Objectified, Demeaned and Exploited*" in the words of Fr Aniedi. Thus, the need to sensitize and awaken and even provoke positive nonviolent actions, reactions and rejection of those persons and occasions consequent on creating such occasions that rob Africans of their dignity and resources.

These dehumanizing acts were identified by the different presenters to range from **organ harvesting, sex slavery, abuse of all types, human trafficking and all demeaning** acts against women, young ladies/men, children as well as vulnerable persons. Ladies form a greater percentage of the victims of sex slavery and abuse. Having solicited the blessings and support of the Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze; of the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City and Police protection, the group first met with some Knights of the Catholic Church, Laity Council, Catholic Women

Organisation, Top State Government Officials, Attorney General, Local Government Chairpersons etc, on the 5th. The 6th and 7th respectively. AFJN-N visited two Local Government Areas (LGA) in Edo State; Ovia North East and Oredo LGAs.



Sr. Maria Coronata Osuagwu, DMMM, President of AFJN-Nigeria addresses the audience at Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State.

In pursuit of the fight against human trafficking, we encountered some challenges. Some of the groups invited demanded “mobilization fee” before they would come and listen to what AFJN-N had to say. They said if the money wasn’t provided, they won’t come. It was a shock to AFJN-N. The

issue was addressed especially at Oredo Local Government, the market women group that eventually turned up flared up and left the gathering when challenged about this practice, but came back afterwards. Meanwhile a representative of the women whom AFJN-N met prior to the gathering had told our representative that they needed to be paid to come for the event. AFJNN was glad tell them that such was a crime and will never pay anyone to COME and TAKE A STAND for the fight against Human Trafficking in any form.

Our interaction with the different groups and the LGAs were an occasion for us to drive home the fact that there is a need to: Identify the menace and the reality of the Evils of Human Trafficking, be in Solidarity Against Trafficking in persons, Team up with One VOICE and with EACH other to fight the evil of human trafficking, human abuse, EXPLOITATION and DEHUMANIZATION of our DAUGHTERS, SONS and CHILDREN in any way. For “*When spider webs unit, they can tie up a Lion*”. All hands must be on deck for trafficking in persons to stop.

It was explained further that presenting a defeatist attitude in the face of such evil is a lending force to the perpetrators. The people were encouraged through various to take up the task of spreading the message from the advocacy far and wide, be quick to inform the Police or members of AFJN-N of suspicious movements or brothels in their vicinity.

Salient questions such as these were posed to all present:

- Why has trafficking in persons not stopped despite effort from the church, government, etc?
- Who is responsible for its continuation and what make it thrive?
- How can we / I contribute to stop it?

Most of the people blamed it on bad governance, unemployment and poor parenting. One could see the anger on their faces. Some accused the government and said that it knows the perpetrators of human trafficking and are doing little or nothing to bring them to justice.

Some said that they will make effort to talk with their children and those who have plans of traveling through Libya that have been enticed with fake promises.

AFJN-N was very glad that the media were there so that the people's reaction could be communicated to the appropriate authorities and further collaborate with the government to Edo State to put an end to this monster called Human Trafficking.



Sisters at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Center, Benin City for an Advocacy drive – Take a Stand.

AFRICAN FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK-NIGERIA (AFJN-N) ADVOCACY DRIVE

Sr. Teresa Anyabuike, SNDdeN

The African Faith and Justice Network-Nigeria (**AFJNN**) an Advocacy which helped to see that the human trafficking law was passed in Edo State, Nigeria met in Benin City, Edo State from 3-8 November 2019 to engage the stakeholders and the people of the State on the implementation of the recent human trafficking law passed. The theme of the gathering was **'Solidarity against trafficking in persons'**

The gathering started with the collaboration of women religious from different Congregations present brain storming to see the best way to involve and engage the stakeholders, and checkout with the populace if they are aware of the law passed by State Lawmakers, and how best to combat the crime so as to achieve the set goals:

- To make Nigeria safe for all
- To minimize trafficking in person
- To partner with **AFJN-N** for a better future for our children

It was on this note that these stakeholders were invited; - the Governor and other government ministries, some NGOs in the State, the Police, the Immigration, Customs, leaders of different groups in the Church, the knights, Catholic Women Organization, market women association, and the youth to get involved in fighting against human trafficking which is a heinous crime.

The Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Edo State, Prof. Yinka Omoregbe was invited to give a breakdown of the law and to see that the law is explained to the ordinary person on the street and judiciously implemented.

Fr Aniedi Okure, OP delivered a keynote with a focus on the image of an ordinary Nigerian and how (we) Nigerians have **degraded** and **belittled** ourselves in the eyes of our foreign counterparts

and embrace everything that comes from them.

Some participants pose in front of the bus given by the Archbishop of Benin City for use during the advocacy events

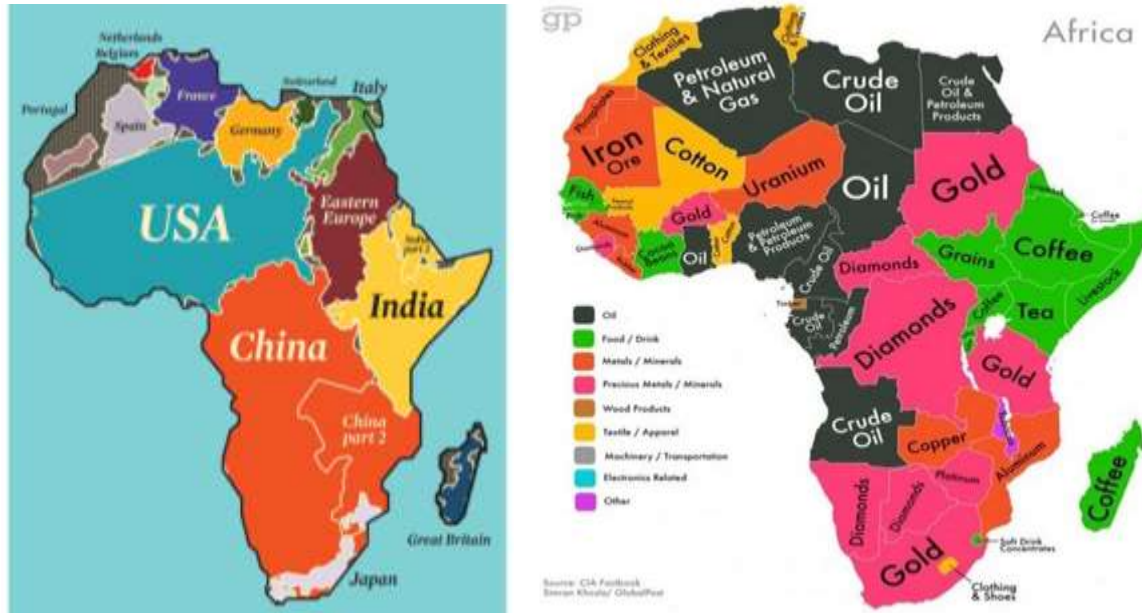


The event kicked off on Tuesday at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Center Benin City, Edo State. Rev. Fr. Aniedi Okure, OP, stressed the need for Nigerians to see ourselves as dignified beings with all the endowed capacities to

make positive difference. In other to make us understand how bad it is, he said that we have sold ourselves and our dignity for pieces of paper engraved with the image of dead people (money), and those whom we sell ourselves to see us as **slaves** and **senseless** people. He quoted an Arab woman who said *“I cannot help it, but when I see and Africa, I see a slave.”*

According to Fr. Okure, the notion that Africa is over populated is propaganda mostly by people who are interested in what is under the ground in Africa – mineral and natural resources and other resources they get from Africa. **Africa is the richest continent on earth**, he said, so other countries come in disguise to help poor Africa. He noted that when you fix the map of countries of the world that contain about half the world’s population into the map of Africa, you will discover that the map will contain them and still have room. How do you reconcile the saying that **‘Africa is overpopulated’**, he asked?

The maps below illustrate the geographic size of the African Continent and the resources: Left shows countries of the world that can fit into Africa (China, India, United States of America, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal Great Britain, Japan, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe). Map on the right shows the major resources of the African Continent



No one comes to hurt you without the knowledge of someone within. There is always an insider. We are our chief oppressors and slave owners. We see ourselves as inferiors and point an accusing finger on others, he stressed. Who are the ones who sell our girls all in the name of making money? Who introduces our children to those who traffic them? We agreed to market our children who are the future of our nation. Where do our priority lies?

Human trafficking is a complex ring of agents - recruiters, transporters, airport and embassy officials with false promises, enticing images of life abroad with the aim of forced labor, sex slave and organs sale; which impact is damaging for life – lost humanity, permanent damage, suffering and death. Are these what we want for our lives? He asked.

According to a recent released data from International Labour Organisation, human trafficking generates more income than most lucrative business in the world - 32 billion dollars a year. This money is got at the expense of our beloved brothers, sisters and children whose blood and human dignity have been sold for money.

We are all called to **TAKE A STAND!** According to Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen “The tragedy of our time is that those who still believe in honesty lack fire and conviction, while those who believe in dishonesty are full of passionate conviction”

The reaction of all present was overwhelming. One could see the anger on their faces as they blame the government for all the ills in the society. They said that the government has the power to put an end to the epidemic called trafficking in whatever form. According to some of the participants, the government knows the perpetrators of this heinous crime and keeps quiet because of what it benefits



from it. In other words, they said that bad governance is the root cause of human trafficking. When youth have no work and no source of livelihood to turn to crime

A cross section of sisters and some members of Oredo Local Government, Edo State

AFJN-N was asked by the participants to meet with the government to discuss the issue and a way forward. On the part of AFJN-N, a lot of

discussions have been going on with the government. It was as a result of the engagement of state officials that the trafficking law was passed in Edo State, and has come back to speak with those who can make a change in the home. We can make a difference no matter how small.

Part of the blame some said, is from the home. Most parents don't have time for their children and know nothing of what their children are doing, and when they know they have no power to stop them because they have lost control of them, and then it would be late. While some parents support their children in crime for the sake of money, family and value system have been destroyed. And poverty is blamed at the end.

Prof. Yinka Omoregbe, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Edo State, promised that she would work towards simplifying the recently passed law against Human Trafficking so that the ordinary person in the street would understand it. She encouraged AFJN-N to continue in her advocacy drive that she will also continue to partner with her for a better Edo State and Nigeria.

Her promise came as a result of AFJN-N request of the letter inviting her to come and give input. The attorney urged parents to watch out for their children and endeavor not to push them away.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AT AFJN-N ADVOCACY EVENTS

By Sr. Lucy Etim, SSND

Photo: Sisters with some of the participants at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Center Benin City

The experience of advocacy against human trafficking held in Benin City, Edo State remains a memorable one for me. When I saw the zeal in the sisters who were ready for action even in the face of danger, I was inspired to follow suit.

I felt fulfilled that we were able to pass the message across to all concerned that "human trafficking is a crime and violence against the dignity of persons" which must stop

It was really the message of Christ, being the voice of the voiceless and following through to the appropriate persons to see that this evil is ended or at least minimized.

- Prayer, commitment, dedication and passion are necessary for advocacy. One cannot do it alone, but together we can make more impact.
- Therefore, dear women religious, sisters and Consecrated Persons, let us join together to fight this common evil in our society.
- Let us collaborate to stop human trafficking in all its forms!!!



AFJN-N with the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Edo State Prof. Yinka Omoregbe (center gray suit) with other government officials, security agencies and some participants at the advocacy drive at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Center, Benin City, Edo State



Above: AFJN-N with the Chairman and staff of Ovia North East Local Government Area in Edo State during its advocacy outreach.

Below left: A cross section of participants during the event at the Oredo Local Government Area. Right: Sr. Gloria Ozuluke, RSC addresses participants at Oredo L.G.A

