

## Editorial

These are trying times, times of trouble! We live in dismal times, in total absence of consolation. There is danger in the city, danger in the village. There is danger in the street, danger in the home. Violence and bloodshed have become household words. Living becomes precarious and uncertain. Today one is a victim of armed robbery, tomorrow one may become the target of politically or economically motivated assassinations. Bloody clashes between villages, violent clashes at the borders of various states, clashes between ethnic groups! Ethnic pogroms, religious pogroms! This is the type of life we endure in Nigeria.

But the situation is not only a Nigerian phenomenon. We hear similar stories of violence and bloodshed all over Africa, and all over the world. The gory image of ethnic massacres in Rwanda may remain etched in our memory as the limit experience of barbarism at this end of the twentieth century. The killings continue. Sudan lives in a state of war because of religious intolerance. Islamic fundamentalists in Egypt and Algeria wage war with government. "Ethnic cleansing" has become an expression associated with the bloody brutality of the various communities that make up the former Yugoslavia. All these evils may not be found in their totality in Nigeria, but our country has a good share of the violence.

The Nigerian state which arrogates to itself the monopoly of the legitimate use of violent means to impose its authority, like states elsewhere in our world, applies this violent force to curb armed robbery, settle conflicts between villages, and conflicts between ethnic groups which live in the many borders of the 30 states of Nigeria. But today, the behaviour of government and its law enforcement agencies leads many to wonder how far the Nigerian state may legitimately go to apply this use of violence.

Many in Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, question the legality of a military non-elected government. Its seizure of power is often violent, and, as is the case with Nigeria, generates a spiral of violence - the endless coups and counter-coups. This has made such countries that live under the torture of military dictatorship regress daily into barbarism. The first instinct of the military dictator is to

secure a monopoly of all powers. Insulated by draconian decrees with ouster clauses - not subject to question by any court in the land - the gun-totting military becomes legislator, judge and executor. Every manner of state violence becomes legitimate in the name of national security. When peaceful means are adopted by civil society to resist the tyrant, the reaction of the state is brutal repression. Under the ideology of national security rights of citizens are infringed upon as a matter of course.

In Nigeria, the repressive regime has practically imprisoned all of its political opponents. Trade union leaders, leaders of civil liberties organisations have either been incarcerated or forced into exile. Unjust detention, trial by secret tribunals, inexplicable murder or assassination of critics of government, have become a regular phenomenon. Constructive criticism by the press is interpreted as opposition. Media houses in Nigeria are closed at the slightest provocation and editors or columnists are detained or imprisoned.

Our situation of un-freedom is compounded by a hypocritical and unfriendly world community, more concerned with what may be carted away from Africa than with the emergence of humane living in the continent. Western governments and their finance houses, especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, pay lip-service to human rights. Their interest is in their investment and profit. Meanwhile our Government operates with no constitution. Little thought is given to honouring a social contract. The basic requirements for a humane social life are a luxury in Nigeria. In many rural and urban centres there is neither regular supply of potable water, nor is there electricity; government owned health institutions have moved from consulting clinics to desolate and abandoned empty buildings with no doctors to consult; our children and youths may no longer count on good education because of disruptions caused by teachers/professors strikes and inadequate facilities. Lack of maintenance gnaws at our infrastructures - to ply any of our roads is a whole nightmare. If the life of citizens are so precarious, how may one imagine the condition of detainees, prisoners and those condemned to death. The situation beggars imagination.

This issue of our *BULLETIN* addresses the question of *Violence and State Security*. Its aim is to raise awareness, among the men and women of our society, to the many ways we contribute to this spiral of violence. One must say an unqualified no to this kind of evil. Citizens of this country are challenged to create the conditions favourable for humane living in our nation. As christian theologians, we consider it important to emphasise that the social, political and economic principles proposed in this issue are to be controlled by the prophetic life of Jesus and the witness of his church for the emergence of an alternative way of life. This makes the combat against criminal and state violence an evangelical imperative.

The lead article by Ebuley Afful is a sociological overview of the phenomenon of violence in Africa and the world. This is followed by concrete examples of the many ways in which we live this situation in Nigeria. The Zangon-Kataf crisis is a test case of the manipulation of the powers of the state by a majority ethnic group and the use of state violence to persecute a minority ethnic group (Duniya). The state of our prisons and police detention rooms, according to a superintendent of prisons (Orakwe), is an indictment of the type of society we are constructing. We do indeed live in an uncaring society.

The litany of evils and the magnitude of our distress are a challenge to action. Government and governed, civil society and the military, Hausa-Fulani and Zangon-Kataf, rich and poor alike, are all convoked to adopt concrete action programmes in order to arrest the present drift of our society towards self destruction. As the Catholic Prison Chaplains insist in their *Communiqué*, published in this issue, government and its law enforcement agencies must abide by justice and fair-play. The provisions of the law have to be applied in favour of those unjustly detained or those awaiting trial beyond the duration foreseen by the law. The scandal of our prisons and police cells call for immediate reform of these institutions and of the penal code. Justice in Nigeria should cease to be "a matter of cash and carry" (Kukah). This is why Nigerians are challenged, in this issue, to courageously deal with corruption at all levels and entrench merit and transparency in public life. But to truly realise these

reform programmes, the boundaries of the military in Nigerian politics have to be redefined.

These reforms are nevertheless imperative if we are to set aside the violent circumstances in which we live in order to embrace more humane conditions of life. This implies, for the Church and other caring agencies, a committed social practice sharpened by a liberating social analysis and theology. The rural and urban poor need care; but they also need to be educated to overcome the root causes of their impoverishment. The little achievements of the Enugu-based Development Education Centre (DEC), which undertakes women education and rural development programmes, is narrated by Asogwa in this issue. Its self-help projects have advanced the economic, health, and living conditions of families of rural poor women East of the Niger. Christian churches care for the poor and disadvantaged in our society. But they need to adopt a sharper and more critical approach to their analysis of our social situation. Our Churches must assume a stronger prophetic role in our society (Ehusani). We must dare to live fully for others and risk getting hurt like Christ, the wounded healer. Our commitment to change the degrading conditions of life in our society, especially in favour of the disadvantaged, demonstrates a clear choice of an alternative society. Our witness to the Gospel clearly involves concrete action programmes to redesign the society. This is the way towards integral human development. We believe it is the credible manner of confronting the violent structures of our society and challenging the sons and daughters of our continent to embrace humane conditions of life.

Elochukwu Uzukwu and Obiora Ike