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Nigerian Bishop Lays Ground Rules for Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Says Terrorism Must Be Countered With Understanding, Education, Knowledge

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria, JUNE 10, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Northern Nigeria has suffered a string of attacks by Islamic extremists in recent weeks, and an explosion Tuesday seriously damaged the Catholic Cathedral of Maiduguri, killing seven people. At the same time, a bishop from southern Nigeria is advocating improvements in dialogue method to break the cycle of violence.

Bishop Callistus Onaga of Enugu in the southeastern region of Nigeria laid out the qualities of effective dialogue as a means to prevent violent conflict in a recent visit to the headquarters of the charity Aid to the Church in Need in Frankfurt, Germany.

"The precondition is that life must be seen as a gift of God and the other person respected, as the image of God, the image of Allah, and not as an enemy or an unbeliever," Bishop Onaga said. The principle of violence, according to which anyone who kills, or is killed by, an unbeliever goes to Paradise, must be broken through, he insisted.

The cause of the most recent unrest in central-northern Nigeria, which has followed the presidential elections in April 2011, goes back according to Bishop Onaga to unresolved ethnic and political differences.

Access to education is essential, he believes, for there are a number of tribal peoples who have almost no education other than a knowledge of the Koran. "Nigeria is an immense country, with hundreds of different languages, a real melting pot, like the United States," he added. Yet, if the other person is not excluded but rather acknowledged, then peaceful coexistence is still possible, he believes.

In 2012 the diocese of Enugu in southeast Nigeria, which has over 1.3 million Catholics, will celebrate its Golden Jubilee.

Education and culture are a central focus of activities, and most of the 148 parishes in the diocese have their own primary and secondary schools, whose quality, Bishop Onaga says, is widely acknowledged.

The Catholic Church is growing here: Currently there are over 400 priests active in the pastoral field, while in the seminary no fewer than 265 young men are training for the priesthood. There are 376 religious sisters also active in the diocese.

Terrorism must be countered with understanding, education, and knowledge Nigerian bishop lays ground rules for Muslim-Christian dialogue

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