ITCABIC COMMUNIQUE

1. PREAMBLE

We the Bishops of the Inter-Territorial Catholic Bishops’ Conference of The Gambia and Sierra Leone, gathered at our plenary meeting, hosted by the Catholic Diocese of Bo at the Kobeibu Village Hotel in the southern city of Bo, from Sunday 20th to Sunday, 27th January 2019, send our fraternal greetings and prayerful best wishes to our priests, men and women religious, catholic lay faithful, people of other Christian confessions, Muslim brothers and sisters, and all the men and women of good will in the dioceses of our Episcopal Conference.

2. RETREAT AND STUDY

It was providential that we started the 2019 plenary assembly on the third day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an annual spiritual exercise intended to create awareness among all Christians of the need to overcome the obstacle and scandal of our disunity and discord in order to collaborate more fully in the missionary mandate Christ gave to his disciples to proclaim his Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:18-20).

As usual, the meeting began with a one-day spiritual retreat and a study session. The retreat, facilitated by Fr Joseph Momoh, C.S.Sp., focused mainly on the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XV, Maximum Illud, published on 30th November 1919, “On the Activity of Missionaries in the World”. We chose to reflect prayerfully on this missionary document in anticipation of the Extraordinary Mission Month October 2019, which His Holiness Pope Francis invited the whole Church to undertake in order to engender missionary renewal and zeal among all Christians. We were reminded of the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all creation (cf. Mk 16:15).

The second day was dedicated to a deep reflection on the pastoral care of the youth in the dioceses of ITCABIC in light of the recent Synod of Bishops on the Youth. This was facilitated by Bishop Henry Aruna and Rev. Fr. Moses Kawa. The youth constitute a very large majority in our dioceses and in the nations of our Conference. They are an invaluable asset for the Church’s work of evangelization and for national development. Unfortunately, for various reasons, they have not yet been given proper pastoral care in our dioceses and their needs have not yet been adequately attended to by our Governments, as clearly indicated by the high
percentage of early school leavers and the scandalously high rate of youth unemployment in our two countries.

Considering our youths’ predicament and the gifts and potentials they can offer the Church and society, the Synod on the Youth strongly recommends that the Church through its pastoral agents should accompany and form them based on Christ’s dialogue with his disciples on the road to Emmaus in Lk. 24:13-35. The Pope invites our youth, on their part, to view their lives within the horizon of mission like the disciples who set out without delay after their eyes were opened. He encouraged them to discover not just who they are but who they want or intend to serve or work for in their lives. This will enable them to make a fundamental option to either follow Jesus and be enlightened about the meaning and purpose of life or not. For our youth to overcome their deficiencies in their spiritual formation and psycho-social developments, our pastoral agents need to acquire good counselling and communication skills. They should be good listeners, raise relevant and open ended questions, and also engage them in a Socratic style conversation.

3. SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS

In the course of our plenary meeting, we considered and discussed with concern the socio-political and pastoral situations of our countries and dioceses. We are deeply grateful to God for the relative peace and stability in both The Gambia and Sierra Leone following peaceful elections and transition of power. Some of our governments’ initiative programs and reforms are laudable and we commend their resolve towards development. In spite of this, both countries remain fragile democracies with weak political institutions, economies, and misused resources. Both governments now have the responsibility and obligation to promote good governance, accountability, equality of all its citizens before the law, good quality education, economic growth, and job opportunities for all, especially our unemployed youth. Our respective governments also need to conduct nationwide sensitization on the purpose and objectives of the Commissions of Inquiry, Anti-Corruption Commissions, The Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commissions, and the Human Rights Commission that have been established in The Gambia and Sierra Leone. This will restore credibility and confidence among the populace and ensure that there are no political tensions along ethnic and regional lines. The Conference of Bishops of The Gambia and Sierra Leone would continue to advocate
and defend justice, peace, reconciliation, and socio-political unity in its territories and speak against corruption, religious intolerance and tribalism whenever it is appropriate.

4. CHURCH EVENTS AND PASTORAL CONCERNS

Concerning the ecclesial and pastoral situations of our dioceses in the past year, we recalled and discussed some of the sorrowful, as well as, positive developments that are of common interest to all members of the Conference. As brothers in the Episcopate, we express our deep sorrow at the death of the Bishop of Kenema Diocese, Most Rev. Patrick Daniel Koroma, who passed on to eternal life on 14th December 2018 and was buried on 4th January 2019. We commend his soul into the hands of God that he may grant him the fullness of eternal life and comfort all who mourn his death. As a result of his death, Bishop Henry Aruna was appointed the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Kenema to provide pastoral leadership and care and we are extremely grateful to the Holy See for promptly responding to the needs of the priests, religious, and faithful of the diocese. We assure him of our prayers, support, and fraternal solidarity as he assumes this noble but challenging task of providing pastoral leadership for all who are under his charge.

At this time when the youth from all over the world are participating in the World Youth Day in Panama, we are disappointed that our youth representatives from The Gambia and Sierra Leone could not be part of this special celebration due to immigration and communication constraints. The World Youth Day forum enables the Pope to affirm the faith of the youths from around the world and encourage them to respond to the demands of the Gospel in their lives. They also have the opportunity to encounter other youths from different parts of the world and be inspired by their experiences.

As an Episcopal Conference, we are extremely grateful and hopeful with the appointment of His Excellency Most Rev. Dagoberto Campos Salas as the new Apostolic Nuncio in The Gambia and Sierra Leone. He addressed us in our plenary meeting and his presence, ministry, and service will greatly foster communion between our Conference and the Holy See, and also enable us to coordinate our official and pastoral duties in our various dioceses. We heartily wish him success, fulfillment, and good health during his term of office.
As part of our efforts to reestablish closer and stronger cooperation between the two Episcopal Conferences, namely, ITCABIC and CABICOL, we discussed issues concerning the formation structures, formation staff and affiliation that should be finalized within a three-year period, from 2019 to 2022. The proposed merger of our Seminaries situates the Philosophy and Theology Campus of St. Paul’s Major Seminary in Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively. It is our hope that the Pre-Major Seminary would be established in The Gambia. This is intended to enable the seminarians to acquire cross-cultural formation and ministry that disposes them to experience the unity and catholicity of the Church within these countries. At the same time, the merger enables the two Conferences to share their resources.

We are conscious of the challenges and implications of this merger in terms of finance, academic resources, and personnel so it will require sacrifice, commitment, and generosity from all concerned. While vocations to the priesthood and religious life in all our dioceses are inadequate compared to other countries in the sub-region, we are still committed to promoting vocations and holistic formation for our seminarians and students in accordance with the directives of the revised *Ratio Fundamentalis.* Each and every one of us is deeply grateful to the formators and staff of our Seminaries for their sacrifice, commitment, and availability. We assure them of our prayers and support in this delicate and demanding task of accompanying and forming our Seminarians according to the mind of Christ.

During the meeting elections were conducted and Most Rev. Charles A. M. Campbell was re-elected as President and Most Rev. Gabriel Mendy was elected Vice President. Rev. Fr. Paul Morana Sandi was reappointed to finish his second term as Secretary General of the Conference.

**5. EXTRAORDINARY MISSION MONTH OCTOBER 2019**

In view of the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019 that marks the centenary celebration of Pope Benedict XV’s Apostolic Letter, *Maximum Illud,* “On the Activity of Missionaries in the World,” we the Bishops of The Gambia and Sierra Leone have proposed some activities and events throughout the month of October that can be celebrated in our various dioceses. These include intensifying animation sessions on the Church’s mission, sensitizing the faithful to donate more to Mission Sunday Collection, motivate our youth to undertake missionary tasks in pairs following the example of the disciples in Lk. 10:1, to issue
a Pastoral Letter on Mission, enable our children to animate Sunday Mass, promote vocations in religious missionary congregations for mission Ad Gentes, encourage our adults to visit those who have abandoned the Catholic Church, and to invite our local missionaries who have served in other countries to share their experiences.

6. GRATITUDE

We express our immense gratitude and appreciation to Most Rev. Charles A. M. Campbell, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Bo and President of ITCABIC Conference, the priests, religious, and lay faithful of his diocese for their hospitality, prayers, generosity, and sacrifice in support of our plenary meeting. We equally extend our gratitude and commendation to Mr. Sam Toko-McCarthy and his family, Proprietors of the Kobeibu Village Hotel, for making available to the Conference their hotel facilities free of charge. May God richly bless and reward all those who contributed to the success of our meeting.

It was agreed that our next plenary meeting be held in the Diocese of Kenema, from the 19th to 26th January 2020.

This communiqué was issued at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Cathedral in Bo, Sierra Leone on Sunday, 27th January, 2019.

Signed:

[Signature]

Most Reverend Charles A.M. Campbell
Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Bo and President of Conference

President of Conference
ITCABIC