News



Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari attends a campaign rally in Taraba Feb. 7, 2019, ahead of the presidential elections. Nigerian bishops are urging voters to reflect, and pray ahead of the country's Feb. 16 elections. (CNS/Reuters)

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Nigeria's Catholic bishops called on voters to prepare to cast their ballots in upcoming elections by reflecting, fasting and praying on how best the country's future can be served.

Recalling that Nigeria had remained united despite numerous difficult political challenges, the bishops said prayer was still needed for a new era to dawn in Africa's largest democracy.

"These elections should, therefore, be for us a time for sober reflection on our future as a people, as well as on how to keep our country and our people united and peaceful. With the resources available to us as a country, we can achieve this," said a Feb. 7 statement from Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria.

The statement was signed by Archbishop Augustine Akubeze of Benin City and Bishop Camillus Umoh of Ikot Ekpene, the conference president and secretary, respectively.

Nigerians will vote Feb. 16 for president and members of the National Assembly. A second round of voting for local governors and state legislatures is set for March 2.

The bishops urged voters to consider which candidates would best meet the moral obligations and responsibilities of holding public office.

"We wish to appeal to our fellow citizens to please put cynicism aside and go out to cast their votes on election day, guided by their conscience," the statement said.

The bishops also appealed to Nigeria security agencies and the country's Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure that both rounds of elections are peaceful, free, fair and credible.

"Let us continue in prayer for our brothers and sisters who are in politics, especially, those of them who are seeking elective positions. And to those our brothers and

sisters either already in office or seeking to be elected, we say, be effective witnesses to truth and light for the common good. Otherwise, we invite you to bow out," the bishops said.

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In a separate statement, the bishops from Ibadan ecclesiastical province said Feb. 5 that the international community held high expectations for the elections.

The province includes the dioceses of Ondo, Ekiti, Ilorin, Oyo and Osogbo in southwestern Nigeria.

The regional bishops advised the national and state governments, voters and the electoral commission to ensure that the elections would be executed fairly and safely for all participants. They recalled that most other countries improve from election to election while reaping tangible benefits, economic growth and integral human development.

They said Nigerians must "learn from and improve on our past mistakes and hold elections that are not only truly free and fair, but also that are seen to be so,"

The provincial bishops also advised the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari to deliver on its promise not to influence the work of the electoral commission.

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