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Gen. Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno -- president of the Transitional Military Council in Chad and son of late Chadian President Idriss Déby -- attends his father's state funeral in N'Djamena, Chad, April 23, 2021. The bishops' conference of Chad announced in September 2022 it has withdrawn from the Inclusive National Dialogue organized by the military government, saying it was "controlled by group interests" and failed to ensure genuine discussion. (CNS photo/Christophe Petit Tesson, pool via Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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N'djamena, Chad — September 23, 2022

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The bishops' conference of Chad has withdrawn from the Inclusive National Dialogue organized by the military government, saying it was "controlled by group interests" and failed to ensure genuine discussion.

"As ministers accredited by God, we firmly believe dialogue is the way to reconciliation, provided it represents a sincere and common search for truth, involving all parties," the conference said in a statement.

"From the outset, we realized this sovereign dialogue, in both form and management, had got off to a bad start, leaving many participants frustrated. One group sought to control the process, whereas it was meant to be an exercise in mutual listening and respect."

In their statement, the bishops said their delegation was not "minimizing the importance of the issues" by withdrawing. However, they added that "totally bizarre methods" had been used to appoint the dialogue's presidium.

"With other religious leaders and certain wise people, we took the initiative to offer our mediation services," the bishops said.

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"We had the impression, however, that we were attending an electoral campaign -- with those supporting change and a renewal of the political class on the one hand, and those blocking everything on the other ... putting in place a skillfully orchestrated machine."

Gen. Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, president of the Transitional Military Council, announced the dialogue in April to debate institutional reform and a new constitution. He took over the country a year earlier when his father, in power for 31 years, died in a battle with rebels.

The bishops said they were obliged as pastors to "keep an equal distance between parties," but added that Catholic priests and laity could continue to participate in the dialogue, in order to "defend and promote human and Christian values in the new institutions to be set up."

The church complained of being intimidated after a 2018 constitution reintroduced "traditional practices," including blood-money, for settling legal disputes and prioritized Islam by requiring office-holders to take a religious oath.

"We will continue to hold all participants in this dialogue in our prayers, so that inclusiveness remains not just a title, but something lived every day by practicing justice and respect for diversity," the bishops said.