

MESSAGE FROM BISHOP NATALE PAGANELLI

CALLING FOR CALM IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT VIOLENT UNREST IN THE CITY OF MAKENI

25th July 2020

With utter shock and dismay, many of us witnessed through social media the appalling violence that took place in Makeni City on the 17th and 18th July 2020 which resulted in the tragic and unfortunate loss of lives, coupled with many critically-wounded victims. We deeply regret and are concerned about this senseless loss of young lives. We continue to pray for the peaceful repose of their souls. To the wounded currently hospitalised in Makeni and Freetown, we pray for their speedy and complete recovery. Indeed we are a city in mourning!

As a Diocese, we register our deepest and heartfelt sympathy and condolences to their grieving parents, family members and friends. May Almighty God grant them the comfort and consolation they desperately need at this troubling time.

We appreciate the high-powered delegation sent by His Excellency, the President, to examine the issue of the violence and death of some innocent civilians in Makeni. Whilst we applaud this gesture, we support the appeal of the people of Makeni that an immediate, independent and transparent investigation be set up to address the cause of the violence, and that those held in custody be immediately released. This, I believe, will help simmer down tensions and ease the bitterness and anger in many of the sons and daughters of Makeni (both at home and abroad). This is not the time to lose our focus on the fight against our common enemy, Covid-19, and its devastating socio-economic effects on all of us.

As a Church, we condemn all forms of violence which we consider self-destructive and counterproductive. We reaffirm that every human life is sacred and is of inestimable value in the sight of God, the Creator. We, therefore, make this appeal to all: *to respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life (Evangelium Vitae p. 5)*. In this vein, we call on all to pursue always the path of honest and constructive dialogue, mutual respect and fruitful reconciliation. This is the only credible and rational means to lasting peace and stability in our country. Pope Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus* 21 states that *reconciliation overcomes crisis, restores the dignity of individuals and opens up the path to development and lasting peace between peoples at every level*.

Without any shred of doubt, the recent spate of violence in various parts of the country has dented the long-standing image of Sierra Leone as a peaceful, hospitable, unified and reconciled country. Something needs to be done, and done urgently. We all have the responsibility to preserve the peace, stability and cohesion of our country by saying NO to cheap, hateful and divisive politics. At this juncture, I would like to remind all political parties and the political class that politics is about promoting the common good and not only about winning elections and the privileged access to resources.

Meanwhile, I invite all our parishioners and other people of goodwill to continue to pray fervently and work passionately for our country: that the dark clouds of division, hate, mistrust and bad politics which are currently hovering over her head will soon pass away and the radiant stars of goodwill, understanding, unity and reconciliation will shine brightly over this land that we love, Sierra Leone.

+ *Natale Paganelli s.x.*

Bishop Natale Paganelli s.x.
Apostolic Administrator