



## **Pax Christi International Peace Award 2012**

**Most Reverend John Onaiyekan**

**Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

Pax Christi International, the worldwide peace movement, awarded His Grace Archbishop Dr John Onaiyekan with its Annual Peace Award for his efforts in promoting understanding between people of different faiths through dialogue in Africa.

Archbishop John Onaiyekan has tirelessly advocated for peace, justice, inter-religious dialogue, and action in Nigeria and other African countries. Since 1994, he has been the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, and he co-chairs the African Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace (ACRL – RfP). He is a former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, and a former Co-Chair of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). On 24 October 2012, Pope Benedict XVI named the Archbishop of Abuja one of six new cardinals.

John Onaiyekan has been an ardent promoter of dialogue among Christians and other religions and a vocal advocate for peace and cooperation especially in Nigeria. At the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Faith, the Archbishop stressed that "Christians in Nigeria do not see themselves as being under any massive persecution by Muslims. Our population of about 160 million is made up of Christians and Muslims in equal number and influence. We have not done too badly in living peacefully together in the same nation. We believe we have learnt some lessons which may be useful for the rest of the world."

At the Synod, the Archbishop underlined that Muslims and Christians "have a shared responsibility to work for peace and harmony with ourselves and in our world of today." He also stated that in both religious traditions "there are broad areas of common grounds about which Vatican II reminds us. The new

evangelization will entail working together for the promotion of commonly shared values, in a world that is very much in need”.

The Co-Presidents of Pax Christi International, Ms Marie Dennis (USA) and Msgr. Kevin Dowling (South Africa) stated that “the notion of reconciliation lies at the heart of the peace work of Pax Christi International.” Reconciliation is sorely needed in many parts of our world today. At the heart of all major religions is the message of peace, right relationship and just dealings with one's neighbour. “It is certainly in the interest of all Nigerians to remain united in their resolve to rid their country of all extremist violence that threatens to divide them” Bishop Dowling stated.

Pax Christi International is grateful for the strong leadership of Archbishop Onaiyekan on behalf of peace, not only in his own country but also throughout Africa and indeed in many countries throughout the world. His commitment to the gospel of peace and non-violence has been costly to the Archbishop personally. Pax Christi International thanks Msgr. Onaiyekan for his resolve that violence will not have the final word.

Mechelen, 31 October 2012

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