**OPENING CEREMONY**

**2ND RECOWA-CEROA PLENARY ASSEMBLY, ACCRA-GHANA**

**WELCOME ADDRESS**

**BY MOST REV. JOSEPH OSEI-BONSU, BISHOP OF KONKONGO-MANPONG**

**AND PRESIDENT OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOP’S CONFERENCE**

Acknowledgment

Prof. Gilbert D.D., Kuupole for this occasion,

Your Excellency, John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana,

Your Eminences,

Your Excellency, Most Rev. Jean-Marie Speich, POSTOLIC Nuncio to Ghana,

Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament,

Hon. Ministers of States and Members of Parliament,

Representatives of our Cherished Partners from USA and Europe,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Rev. Frs., Brothers and Sisters, Our hardworking lay faithful,

Nananom, Nii Mei Naa Mei,

Friends from the Media,

All other protocol observed, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings

I bring you warm greeting from the Ghana Catholic Bishop’s Conference, the Host of this 2nd RECOWA-CERAO Plenary Assembly, the first Plenary Meeting having taken place in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast in 2012.

On behalf of the members of the Ghana Bishop’s conference and, indeed, the entire membership of the Catholic Church in Ghana, I wish to welcome you all to Accra, Ghana, the home of peace, hospitability and opportunity.

*Brief Historical Notes*

A RECOWA-CERAO Plenary brings together all Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of the Catholic Church in West Africa to deliberate n matters relevant to Bishops of the Catholic Church in West to deliberate on matters relevant to both the Church and the West African Subregion. RECOWA-CERAO is an amalgamation in West Africa (CERAO) and the French-speaking Episcopal Conferences in West Africa (CEROA) and the English-speaking Episcopal Conference in West Africa (AECAWA).

In 1996, our eminent forebears recognized the need for the Church in West Africa to transcend linguistic barriers inherited from colonization in order to speak with one voice on state and church matters and put resources together for a consolidated pastoral programme in the Sub-region. Against this background, they began a process a form one single Episcopal Association that will bring all bishops of West Africa on one platform.

In 2007, at a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria the Bishops took a firm decision to form the *Regional Episcopal conference of West Africa* (RECOWA); in French, *Conference Episcopale Régionale de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (*CERAO). With this new arrangement which transcends the linguistic barriers imposed by English, French and Portugese, the Catholic Church has become more and more a centre of integration for West Africa just as the dream of the founding fathers of RECOWA-CERAO had envisaged.

*Brief Reflection on the Theme*

While thanking God for the grace and blessings bestowed on RECOWA-CERAO in the past years and what the Lord will use this Conference to achieve in the future, we gather together to pray together at this Plenary and to reflect on the theme, ‘*’The New Evangelisation and the Specific Challenges of the Church-Family of God in West Africa: Reconciliation, Development and Family Life’’*.

In the course of this week, we, the Catholics Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals from across West Africa, will reflect on how we can work together as one united family and in concert with our West African Governments to advance the issues of reconciliation, holistic development and authentic family life within our Sub-region in the light of the church’s New Evangelisation, which invites the church to employ new and dynamic ways of spreading the Gospel message. Our hope and prayer is that the outcome of our deliberations and reflections, which we will make public through a communique to be issued at the end of our meeting, will be of our meeting, will be of benefit to the people, particularly in the Church and Society in West Africa.

Recognizing that the church does not have the technical solutions to all the problems that our people face but being mindful of our God-given mission to bring the good news to all people, we hope to continue to work in close collaboration with news to all people, we hope to continue to work in close collaboration with Governments in West Africa and other stakeholders to bring the needed support to the people we are called to serve, particularly in the church and society in West Africa.

Recognizing that the Church does not have the technical solutions to all the problems that our people face but being mindful of our God-given mission to bring the good news to all people, we hope to continue to work in close collaboration with Governments in West Africa and other stakeholders to bring the needed support to the people we are called to serve. In doing this, we are guided by the words of our retired Holy Father, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, that *“The Church in Africa must help to build up society in Cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good’’ (Africae Munus, 81).* It is the hope of the Ghana Catholic Church that this Plenary Assembly will be a great success.

Conclusion

On this note, I would like to assure you, our august visitors, that we, the Bishops of Ghana, together with our Priests, Religious Men and Women as well as the Laity, are privileged and honoured to host this Plenary Assembly. We will ensure that you enjoy your stay here as much as you can and we are hopeful that you will pardon us in the spirit of the *year of Mercy* for any shortfalls that may occur in the course of this meeting.

We thank you all for coming and pray for a successful meeting. Once again, you are warmly welcome. akwaaba! Mia Woezor! Soyez les bienvenus! Thank you and God bless you.

M Plaza – Accra

(February 23, 2016)