



National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS)

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Office of NANTS President

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PRESS RELEASE

ENDING FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

The Federal Government has commenced nationwide consultations with community, traditional, religious and opinion leaders (led by the Vice President, Prof Yemi Osinbajo (SAN)) towards ending the incessant farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria.

NANTS notes that violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary farming communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security and stability. With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. As these conflicts increase in frequency, intensity and geographical scope, so do their humanitarian and economic toll exacerbate.

It is therefore on this backdrop that the National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS) commends the federal government over the current initiative of open nationwide consultations to address the needless conflicts. NANTS asserts that although government's assertive action is long overdue, the consultation is a way of extending an olive branch to the perpetrators of such crimes across the country. The Government should however bear in mind that those who are killer herdsmen may require more than consultation; therefore, they should be properly identified and consequently prosecuted with the long arm of the law so that others who are planning or intending to do same will be able to learn their lessons. Such prosecutorial/legal actions would further strengthen the resolve of government's recognition of the sanctity of human rights of citizens and particularly the right to life. To this end, government and well-meaning Nigerians must be ready to condemn in the most unequivocal and sturdy terms the acts

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of violence perpetrated by any person and more particularly, the killing and maiming of women and their children in the farms. These despicable and nefarious activities today instill fears in small scale farmers and often prevent them from going to the farms, resulting in shrinking agricultural productivity and constantly reducing the nation to the status of food import dependence.

In addition to the foregoing, the consultations must also weigh strongly towards government's recognition of the agricultural sector's capacity/impact on food and livelihoods security, employment generation, GDP and overall economic diversification and growth which are fundamental pursuits and focus of the present administration. We therefore add that in the course of the consultations, farmers who have grievances that are legitimate must be listened to and assuaged appropriately given that many of them have lost all they have to the crises.

NANTS further appeals to State Governments to show adequate commitment to the course of resolving these conflicts by strongly collaborating with the officials of federal government in these consultations. Such collaboration would send a strong warning signal to citizens, particularly those involved or their cohorts, on the seriousness of government's resolve and actions.

Similarly, as the consultation continues, NANTS strongly recommends that the law enforcement agencies must wake up and be prepared to perform their constitutional roles, namely; the protection of lives and property of the population and especially, the helpless and armless farmers who are feeding the nation. The laxity and/or negligence on the part of the law enforcement agencies with regard to fishing out criminals involved in the farmers-herdsmen crises can no longer be comprehended. Government must rise up to the challenge of awakening law enforcement apparatus for the entrenchment of lasting peace in the rural communities across the nation.

There is also the need to strengthen security arrangements around herders and farming communities especially in the North-Central zone. This will require that governments, security agencies, NGOs and the general public sustain campaigns against cattle rustling and rural banditry. Such campaigns should be well extended to the improvement of early-warning systems; maintenance of operational readiness of rural-based policing; the encouragement of communication and collaboration with local authorities; and the tightening of control of production, circulation and possession of illicit firearms and ammunition, including the strengthening of cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries' security forces.

Furthermore, NANTS recommends that conflict mediation, resolution, reconciliation and peace-building mechanisms be established and strengthened within the State and Local Government

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levels, and also within rural communities particularly in areas that have been most affected by these conflicts/crisis. More so, the establishment and operationalization of contemporary grazing reserves should intensified by consenting States to improve in-house livestock production and management in order to minimize contacts and friction between herders and farmers. Government should further address environmental factors that are driving herders' migration to the south, and this will require stepping up implementation of programs under the Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara and the Sahel, a trans-African project designed to restore drought-and-desert degraded environments and livelihoods including in Nigeria's far Northern belt; and developing strategies for mitigating climate change impact in the far Northern states.

In conclusion, while internal consultations are necessary, there is the need for ECOWAS to propel intelligence sharing among member countries and to stem cross-border movement of armed herders in the region. Government of Nigeria should equally work with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (the Lake Chad basin countries) to regulate movements across borders, particularly of cattle rustlers, armed herders and others that have been identified as aggravating internal tension and insecurity in Nigeria.

The outcomes of Nigeria's consultations should be shared with the population and most importantly, members of Parliament so that awareness would be widely created among citizens while ensuring that recommendations which ought to translate in stronger legislations for effective interventions are critically taken up by the law makers.

NANTS believes that if the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen are addressed, Nigeria would in a short-time become a net exporter of food commodities.

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