

JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE CHAIRS OF THE TEN (10) COMMUNITIES REPRESENTED AT THE MEDIATION PROCESS FACILITATED BY THE CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN DIALOGUE (HD) TO RESOLVE THE FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT IN BENUE STATE ON UPHOLDING PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE DURING AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT BENUE HOTELS AND RESORT ON THURSDAY, 26TH MARCH, 2020

We, the Chairs of Agatu, Etulo, Fulani, Hausa, Idoma, Igbo, Igede, Jukun, Tiv and Yoruba ethnic groups - the Representatives of Communities at the ongoing Dialogue Process facilitated by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) to resolve the farmer-herder conflict in Benue State, upon the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO), that the Corona Disease (COVID-19) is a global pandemic affecting over 160 countries across the globe, and having infected several Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic, religious or professional affiliation, hereby affirm thus:

Recognize that amidst the intra and inter-communal conflicts that range from clashes over fishponds; farmer-herder clashes; witchcraft; cultism; drug abuse/consumption of illicit substances; extortion by youth and livestock guards; cattle rustling and theft, view a period of distress like this to unite and defeat a common enemy far beyond the limited differences within and outside our communities. We believe that a pandemic that respects no primordial differences in that it affects everyone irrespective of location, status or views, calls for our shared humanity;

Take cognizance of the disturbing misleading information on the COVID-19 (mainly abuse of liquor as a means of prevention to the COVID-19); poor sensitization of the pandemic at the grass roots and the social distancing affecting the cultural norms and beliefs;

That we, support the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's 23rd March 2020 call for an immediate global ceasefire on all hostilities in all conflicts of the world, in order to collectively fight against COVID-19;

In our determination and collective resolve to restate our deep concern for peace, security and safety of all persons, and our belief as partners of HD in its **COVID-19 Response Initiative**, which focuses on the promotion and sharing lifesaving information with hard-to-reach populations, facilitate access to medical care and promote cessation of hostilities in our shared communities;

We hereby resolve and affirm as follows;

1. That communities with shared human community shall, during the period of COVID-19 pandemic, and even beyond, seek to maintain peaceful coexistence by observing and disseminating basic health knowledge that prevents the spread of corona virus within and beyond our communities;
2. To utilize this period of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to restate our combined resolve to shun issues that may cause conflict and undertake to assist each other to overcome the fears and anxieties that come with apprehensions of

the Corona virus. Such assistance includes sharing of vital and necessary information for preventive and curative measures against the corona virus in our shared communities and the adherence to healthy practices;

3. That we shall individually and collectively, deliver life-saving information and materials, where available, to hard-to-reach populations within our communities and fully comply with government directives and restrictions aimed at safeguarding our communities against the pandemic;
4. To use this occasion in declaring that none of us shall do or say anything, during the period of COVID-19 and beyond, that will endanger the health of Benue communities and those of other communities in Nigeria, and will continue to ensure access to our communities by HD, other peacebuilding organizations and medical organizations;
5. That we will at this period, where humanity shares the risks and agony of the outbreak of the pandemic, collectively reflect on how to maintain peaceful coexistence and seek peaceful means of resolving our differences, while bearing in mind our shared humanity;
6. Improve on the evolving issues to expose criminal members of our communities for the peace of the general society;
7. That the Government, political parties and the members of our communities should always ensure fair and equitable representation during the political process which follows the principles and guidelines of the Electoral Act;
8. That the Federal and Benue State Governments should urgently assuage the situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.