

Open Letter to the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

October 21, 2020

President Buhari,

You appealed to Nigerians to give you a mandate in 2003, 2007 and 2011. In 2015, you walked among the people. Nigerians, young and old, walked with you. On May 29, 2015 we swore you in. You pledged to serve Nigeria, to “celebrate her freedom and cherish her democracy”. You said to Nigerians that, “together we cooperate to surprise the world that had come to expect only the worst from Nigeria.” You, saluted Nigerians for waiting long hours in rain and hot sunshine to register and cast their votes and stayed all night if necessary, to protect and ensure their votes count and were counted. You thanked those who tirelessly carried the campaign on social media.

President Buhari, this is an urgent call from those who gave you this mandate: tell the armed forces to stand down and stop shooting at or killing unarmed Nigerians. Undeniably, the lives of young Nigerians are being shed in hopes of a better Nigeria, which you chose to serve.

In the last two weeks, Nigeria has seen an intergenerational call for a better country through better governance. It was led by the youth and it was peaceful. Given your experience running for office, where there is a crowd there are opportunists that seek to infiltrate and cause havoc. This was not the protesters, they remained peaceful. However, Mr. President, the democracy, which you choose to uphold, necessitates that the people speak. The rot in the system is undeniable. Nigerians at home and abroad were expressing their displeasure. That same groundswell that gave you a mandate was speaking to you, but our cries were met with a bloody flag. In spite of the denials, we are in a new age of social media, some of us were on ground while some watched on social media what transpired. The world watched alongside with us.

Mr. President, the armed forces should never be said to harm or kill its own unarmed people. We appeal to your duty as the Commander-in-Chief, your decision to be the democratically elected President of Nigeria and your role as a Father: stay the bullets of the armed forces.

As a democratic nation, Mr. President, we will continue to speak, we will continue to call out the rot in the Nigerian system, we have just one country. The same way you fought for it, we will fight for it.

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The Archbishop Desmond Tutu Leadership Fellows ("Tutu Fellows"), of the African Leadership Institute, are a diverse group of civic, political and business leaders from 40 African countries who are concerned with the governance and development of the African continent.