RELIGION, PEACE AND NATIONAL EVELOPMENT: A LOOK AT INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

DR. SIRAJ B. ABDULKARIM[*]

1.0   PREAMBLE

Nigerian is the most populous Black Country in the world. From the 2006 censure records, the country had one Hundred and Forty Million people. It is a multi ethnic/tribe country with different ethnic/tribe groups predicted to number at lest Two Hundred and Fifty (250) however; three major tribes have dominated the population landscape and hold sway in the respective three regions that make up the country. The Hausa dominate the Northern parts, the Yorobas in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religion in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religious country with the two divine religious, Islamic is also a multi religious with the two divine religious, Islamic and Christianity dominating. The Muslim population accounts for at least sixty percent (60%), the Christians about thirty five percent (35%) and the African Traditional religion about five percent (5%). The Muslims are the majority in the North, about fifty-fifty with Christians in the West, and as minorities in the East. This shows that the Christians are only majority in the East. On the tribal population, there are over Two Hundred groups in the North while the Yoruba are absolute majority in the West, the Ibos have slight majority in the Eastern region. This configuration has made religious and tribal conflicts to be often mixed up in Nigeria.

With this multi dimensional nature of Nigerian, it had its own share of ethnic and religious conflict claimed many lives and property during both military and civilian dispensation.

This paper is to discuss some of these conflicts, their causes and solutions for a peaceful co-existence as proffered by the government and

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non-governmental organizations. The paper further attempts to evaluate these initiatives and make some recommendation.

2.0   AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT/IMPLICATION

In the first place, it needs to be understood that in most Nigerian conflicts, it would be difficult to clearly differentiate whether the conflicts were religious, ethnic or even economically influenced.

What is clear however is that, whatever was the primary cause, religious coloration often takes precedence especially if the conflicts were in the North apparently because of its Muslim domination.

The paper would therefore concentrate on the conflicts that were clearly seen as religiously inspired. We would therefore overlook many of the conflicts that seemed ethnic or economically influenced especially in the Western and Eastern parts of Nigerian.

From the writings of (Abdulkarim: 1996) and (Elaigwu: 2005), Northern Nigeria had witnessed over sixty ethno-religious conflicts between 1977 and 2004, undoubtedly this is an outrageous number that calls for serious concern. These conflicts had created suspicion, destruction and hatred between Muslim and Christian citizens. Many lives and property were destroyed. The required conducive environment for development was not only jeopardized but was really taken many decades back.

Naturally, the causes were not easily known because of a shift or trade of blames and accusations between Muslim and Christian groups. While, in a nutshell Muslims accused Christians of consistently attacking Islam and Muslims, the Christians on the other hand accused Muslims of deliberate Islamisation of Nigeria and denying Christians their rights (Kukah: 2003).

The polarization had reached the extent that both Muslims and Christians watched the activities of governments with great suspicion. Every appointment, every policy, etc of the government was viewed with suspicion by one group or the other, not from its contribution to development but whether it was more in favor of the other religious group which could easily lead raising tension in the polity. That came to a pick, when the government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida made the Nigerian status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), a full member from an observer status. The observer status Nigeria enjoyed for years was made with the approval of a Christian

Head of State from Northern Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, during his tenure (1966-1975).

What appeared a simple matter degenerated into threats of religious war because Christians alleged that this was yet another clandestine move to Islamize Nigeria. Arguments that it was for economic reasons and that many minority Muslim African countries were members only flayed up tensions. The Christians mobilized individuals and organizations especially the press, insisting that by joining the OIC, Nigeria is by implication an Islamic state (Abdulkarim, 1996). In addition to the OIC, there was the issue population by the respective religious followers. To close that controversy the latest census in the country in 2006 had to abolish the columns for religion and tribe.

However, the issue of *Shari'a* has remained a volatile one. While Muslims demanded that *Shari'a* court be recognized by the constitution up to federal level, the Christians countered that Nigerian was a secular state and that having parallel laws is inimical to the country's unity.

The Muslims on the other hand, insisted that the new elites (those of Western education background) have turned Nigeria into a Christian state. They claim that despite their majority and Islamic roots, their country has become secular nay Christian, because they argued, as documented by (Clarke: 1988), that:-

> ----- the symbols and trappings of state, the style of diplomacy, the direction of foreign policy, the political, legal, economic and education systems, the structure of the working week are all seen to be based on a western secular albeit once Christian model.

The polarization did not stop with the religious hierarchy it permeated the students, the civil service and above all the military.

On April 17, 1990, a Christian group of military officers led by Colonel Gideon Orkar tried to topple the regime of General Babangida. Even though the coup was abortive, the leadership transmitted its massage. While military were to protect their country's boarders, this group excised the predominantly Northern Muslim states from the Nigerian federation. The indigenes of the affected states were immediately asked to leave other parts of Nigeria because they were no more Nigerians. The Sultan of Sokoto, officially recognized as the

leader of the Muslims in Nigeria was dethroned by the coup plotters (Abdulkarim: 1996). Were the coup plotters not defeated on time, on the very first day, Nigeria would have been thrown into chaos and turmoil never witnessed in its history. That was because those religious bigots in military uniform had access to the federal radio and broadcasted their message and the country was beginning to be in total confusion as citizens were becoming restless in all parts of the country. The civil war that was fought in the country was only felt in a region but this was nationwide.

This is the danger of religious polarization. It separates close friends, neighbors, colleagues and for Nigeria, it was close to breaking the Nigerian nation at political and military levels. The road to development had been greatly hampered. That was a very tough implication.

3.0   WHAT SOLUTION?

After most of these crises, government would immediately, almost instantly, set up commissions of enquiry to determine causes and proffer solutions. Sometimes tribunals were set up to try the culprits. But here again the polarization comes in. Muslims have consistently maintained that the security agents being Christian dominated only arrested the Muslim even where they were victims and sometimes even deliberately killed. Whatever was the case, government white papers on the commission's investigation hardly saw the light of the day. If made public, hardly were recommendations implemented. Some tribunal judgments against some people sentenced for murder were unjustly pardoned by the government. What would have been a deterrent to others was made a joke. The case of General Zamani Leckwot was still fresh in the minds of some victims.

Recommendations like, the need to make the teachings of religion in post primary institutions compulsory could not be implemented by the government. The alternative it preferred like Moral education or Civil education could not be sustained at any appreciable level. The efforts by the military regime of General Babangida and the civilian Government of Chief Obasanjo to promote inter religious councils did not help matters also.

The regime of Babangida formed the Advisory Council on religious Affairs (ACRA) essentially to see how it could assist government put a stop to religious conflicts. However, not much was achieved by the Council because of suspicion and the wrangling within the members leading to resignations (Kukah: 2003). The Council therefore met an untimely death.

The civilian regime of Obasanjo was also plagued with various religious crises and sought for the cooperation of the leaders of the two major religions just like the other military regime though with some modification. Thus on 29th September, 1999, the government pushed for the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) and it was inaugurated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in person.

The interesting composition of the Council was that there were co-Chairmen and fifty (50) members made of Twenty Five (25) each from adherents of the religious – Islam and Christianity. The government was to appoint the National Coordinator, the initially Revered Professor Yusuf Amed Obaji, who was also the President's pastor in the Presidential chapel. Later a professor of Islamics and also was appointed as secretary on acting capacity when Obaje left for what was widely circulated, to join active politics for the post of the governor of his home state, Kogi in the North.

Despite the Muslims overwhelming majority they were reduced to equal size with Christians in this Council. However, the main function of the Council was to advise government and create harmony between the followers of the two religions. The Council was to open braches in all the state and local government capitals in the country but since 1999 to date that could not be achieved by a government backed council. As also little was heard of the NIREC or its activities. In fact in an interview with one of its members, on writing this paper, the source said that it had been two years that NIREC could not even meet. Let us here state that, of the fifty (50) members of NIREC, we could not see a lady's name, Muslim or Christian, as a member. These are the real victims of religious conflicts who are at least of the country's population but their views were not relevant to NIREC and by extension to government.

What are our other options at the non-government level? Probably here lies the solution. There are now a number of inter faith groups specializing in one area or another like heath and peaceful co-existence,

our area of focus today. These non-governmental organizations are move vibrant initiative, pragmatic and inclusive in their activities.

These NGOs generally engage both leadership and members of the two dominant divine religions in the country. The interesting aspect of the organization is that, while some are independence of both religions, many of such overtures came from major Muslim and Christian organizations themselves. They respectively, realized the need to reach to the other in order to understand one another, cultivate leadership and trust, as a way out of suspicion and destruct.

Abubakr, one of the pioneers of such NGOs, observed that, these conflicts resulted into:-

> Innocent women are compulsory been made widows, innocent children are also made orphans, normal productive people are turned disabled, human progress is been paralyzed, economic advancement being crippled, social living and completely being abused due to wishful things of some few elements….

The NGOs have strove to enlighten the public through workshops, publications, radio programs, etc. these basic activities were not known to be undertaken by the government sponsored councils other than endless meetings in the most comfortable hotel in Nigeria's capital at government expense.

Publications by the NGOs tried to show the true teachings of the religions so that the followings could reflect and abide by them. For example, quoting a verse from the Bible, AbuBakr showed that God required Christian "to do what is just (Among mankind) to show constant LOVE (to all), and live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Islam on the other hand, means: Peace: by its very name and has consistently insisted on justice to all and in all its ramifications. The Qur'an says:-

> O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents or your kin, and whether it be your (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts) least ye swerve, and if you distort (Justice) or

decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (4:135).

It cannot be clearer. Islam equally calls on Muslims to verify information and not jump into action that could be based on false information. No other civilization or religion has made the issue of justice and verification of information such cardinal principles like Islam. Equally no other civilization or religion has sanctified and honored life like the way Islam did. The Qur'an says:-

---- If any one slew a person – unless it be for murder of for spreading mischief in the land – it will be as if he slew whole people : and any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people….(5.32)

4.0 Recommendation

Having seen the failure of government and its agencies to muster the confidence and support of the people towards peaceful co-existence, the NGOs sprang up. This however, is not to be totally or unconditionally accepted without some checks and balances.

The point we are trying to make is that, most NGOs depend on foreign funding and without a government regular agency; the NGOs could, knowingly or unknowingly, dance to the tune of someone else and not meeting the needs of their countries or even at the detriment of their countries. There is a Hausa saying that, *ko wacci ladan kuturu, zai masa aski.* This can be translated as the English saying that, *who pays the piper dictates the tune.*

Secondly, home governments could also be partners with NGOs in initiation and execution of programs and activities to encourage inter-religious peace and co-existence. This might be more productive than where a government creates a forum and wholly sponsors its activities.

Thirdly, the education system must make it compulsory to ensure that the true teachings of Islam and Christianity are taught to the adherents of the respective religions. This could further be tailored to promote morality, fight against corruption and other civic responsibilities in public service and outside. In addition, government must do all that is necessary to eliminate illiteracy among the populace. Needless to say that, ignorance, illiteracy and poverty are tripartite factors that make people easily vulnerable to exploitation by internal or external selfish interests.

Fourthly, the prolonged war between Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. The world is a global village, some would say a global sitting or living room, and thus the killing in Palestine could cause ill feelings and be an obstacle to world peace. The world community is one and the communication revolution makes many things possible.

Fifthly and closely related the American double standard and its apparent posture that the Muslim is the enemy must be positively addressed. Where a country feels it is a super power and skills stateless, barefooted and poverty-stricken people prove nothing super but brutality. It is an acknowledged saying that *great power comes with great responsibility.* Respect for each other's believes and ways of life are pre conditions to peaceful co-existence. But if the arrogant posture of American and its wish to dominate continue, then it only proves that America is not a partner in Global peace and co-existence.

Sixthly and lastly, democracy may be a solution to crises because of its ability to allow voices to be heard, institution for adjudication, the devolution of powers and the independence of legislature and judiciary. But countries can incorporate their values, traditions and cultures while making the democratic institutions sacrosanct.

5.0   CONCLUSION

We have attempted to discuss the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria that have polarized the populace to the extent that a part of the Nigeria territory was excised for being Muslim. We have traced the causes and solutions both by governmental and non-governmental organizations. The paper recommended the need to promote the activities of non-governmental organizations but to be watched by a qualified, just and fully trained government agency. We believe that together they will face the challenge advocated by the State of the World Forum, where it says, as quoted by AbuBakr:-

There is no greater challenge in the world today than that of living in tolerance and respect with ones neighbors. At a time when the entire world is caught up in the process of globalization, it is imperative for us all to learn the wisdom of co-existence and community building.

It is our prayer that leaders and followers of especially the three divine religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – reflect on their divine books, remember history as a guide and respect to respect respective, live in peace and promote development in their respective countries and globally. Conflict not only retards development but given opportunity to other countries to promote their selfish interests by invoking the name of the international community especially in the Middle East and Africa or the so called, Third World, generally.

Endnotes

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5. Kukah M.H. **Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria** (2003, Spectrum Books Limited, Ibadan).
6. Mahdi, Abdullahi et al (Eds) **Nigeria: The State of the Nation and the Way Forward** (1994 Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, Nigeria).
7. Yakubu A.M et al (Eds) **Northern Nigeria: A Century of Transformation, 1903 – 2003** (2005, Baraka Press and Publishers Ltd, Kaduna, Nigeria).
8. Constitution of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).
9. Nigeria: Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire in to the Fears of Minorities and the means of Allying Them (1957)
10. Discussion with some members of NIREC from both faiths

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Siraj B. Abdul Karim   Religion, Peace and National Development

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RELIGION, PEACE AND NATIONAL EVELOPMENT: A LOOK AT INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

DR. SIRAJ B. ABDULKARIM[*]

1.0   PREAMBLE

Nigerian is the most populous Black Country in the world. From the 2006 censure records, the country had one Hundred and Forty Million people. It is a multi ethnic/tribe country with different ethnic/tribe groups predicted to number at lest Two Hundred and Fifty (250) however; three major tribes have dominated the population landscape and hold sway in the respective three regions that make up the country. The Hausa dominate the Northern parts, the Yorobas in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religion in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religious country with the two divine religious, Islamic is also a multi religious with the two divine religious, Islamic and Christianity dominating. The Muslim population accounts for at least sixty percent (60%), the Christians about thirty five percent (35%) and the African Traditional religion about five percent (5%). The Muslims are the majority in the North, about fifty-fifty with Christians in the West, and as minorities in the East. This shows that the Christians are only majority in the East. On the tribal population, there are over Two Hundred groups in the North while the Yoruba are absolute majority in the West, the Ibos have slight majority in the Eastern region. This configuration has made religious and tribal conflicts to be often mixed up in Nigeria.

With this multi dimensional nature of Nigerian, it had its own share of ethnic and religious conflict claimed many lives and property during both military and civilian dispensation.

This paper is to discuss some of these conflicts, their causes and solutions for a peaceful co-existence as proffered by the government and

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non-governmental organizations. The paper further attempts to evaluate these initiatives and make some recommendation.

2.0   AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT/IMPLICATION

In the first place, it needs to be understood that in most Nigerian conflicts, it would be difficult to clearly differentiate whether the conflicts were religious, ethnic or even economically influenced.

What is clear however is that, whatever was the primary cause, religious coloration often takes precedence especially if the conflicts were in the North apparently because of its Muslim domination.

The paper would therefore concentrate on the conflicts that were clearly seen as religiously inspired. We would therefore overlook many of the conflicts that seemed ethnic or economically influenced especially in the Western and Eastern parts of Nigerian.

From the writings of (Abdulkarim: 1996) and (Elaigwu: 2005), Northern Nigeria had witnessed over sixty ethno-religious conflicts between 1977 and 2004, undoubtedly this is an outrageous number that calls for serious concern. These conflicts had created suspicion, destruction and hatred between Muslim and Christian citizens. Many lives and property were destroyed. The required conducive environment for development was not only jeopardized but was really taken many decades back.

Naturally, the causes were not easily known because of a shift or trade of blames and accusations between Muslim and Christian groups. While, in a nutshell Muslims accused Christians of consistently attacking Islam and Muslims, the Christians on the other hand accused Muslims of deliberate Islamisation of Nigeria and denying Christians their rights (Kukah: 2003).

The polarization had reached the extent that both Muslims and Christians watched the activities of governments with great suspicion. Every appointment, every policy, etc of the government was viewed with suspicion by one group or the other, not from its contribution to development but whether it was more in favor of the other religious group which could easily lead raising tension in the polity. That came to a pick, when the government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida made the Nigerian status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), a full member from an observer status. The observer status Nigeria enjoyed for years was made with the approval of a Christian

Head of State from Northern Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, during his tenure (1966-1975).

What appeared a simple matter degenerated into threats of religious war because Christians alleged that this was yet another clandestine move to Islamize Nigeria. Arguments that it was for economic reasons and that many minority Muslim African countries were members only flayed up tensions. The Christians mobilized individuals and organizations especially the press, insisting that by joining the OIC, Nigeria is by implication an Islamic state (Abdulkarim, 1996). In addition to the OIC, there was the issue population by the respective religious followers. To close that controversy the latest census in the country in 2006 had to abolish the columns for religion and tribe.

However, the issue of *Shari'a* has remained a volatile one. While Muslims demanded that *Shari'a* court be recognized by the constitution up to federal level, the Christians countered that Nigerian was a secular state and that having parallel laws is inimical to the country's unity.

The Muslims on the other hand, insisted that the new elites (those of Western education background) have turned Nigeria into a Christian state. They claim that despite their majority and Islamic roots, their country has become secular nay Christian, because they argued, as documented by (Clarke: 1988), that:-

> ----- the symbols and trappings of state, the style of diplomacy, the direction of foreign policy, the political, legal, economic and education systems, the structure of the working week are all seen to be based on a western secular albeit once Christian model.

The polarization did not stop with the religious hierarchy it permeated the students, the civil service and above all the military.

On April 17, 1990, a Christian group of military officers led by Colonel Gideon Orkar tried to topple the regime of General Babangida. Even though the coup was abortive, the leadership transmitted its massage. While military were to protect their country's boarders, this group excised the predominantly Northern Muslim states from the Nigerian federation. The indigenes of the affected states were immediately asked to leave other parts of Nigeria because they were no more Nigerians. The Sultan of Sokoto, officially recognized as the

leader of the Muslims in Nigeria was dethroned by the coup plotters (Abdulkarim: 1996). Were the coup plotters not defeated on time, on the very first day, Nigeria would have been thrown into chaos and turmoil never witnessed in its history. That was because those religious bigots in military uniform had access to the federal radio and broadcasted their message and the country was beginning to be in total confusion as citizens were becoming restless in all parts of the country. The civil war that was fought in the country was only felt in a region but this was nationwide.

This is the danger of religious polarization. It separates close friends, neighbors, colleagues and for Nigeria, it was close to breaking the Nigerian nation at political and military levels. The road to development had been greatly hampered. That was a very tough implication.

3.0   WHAT SOLUTION?

After most of these crises, government would immediately, almost instantly, set up commissions of enquiry to determine causes and proffer solutions. Sometimes tribunals were set up to try the culprits. But here again the polarization comes in. Muslims have consistently maintained that the security agents being Christian dominated only arrested the Muslim even where they were victims and sometimes even deliberately killed. Whatever was the case, government white papers on the commission's investigation hardly saw the light of the day. If made public, hardly were recommendations implemented. Some tribunal judgments against some people sentenced for murder were unjustly pardoned by the government. What would have been a deterrent to others was made a joke. The case of General Zamani Leckwot was still fresh in the minds of some victims.

Recommendations like, the need to make the teachings of religion in post primary institutions compulsory could not be implemented by the government. The alternative it preferred like Moral education or Civil education could not be sustained at any appreciable level. The efforts by the military regime of General Babangida and the civilian Government of Chief Obasanjo to promote inter religious councils did not help matters also.

The regime of Babangida formed the Advisory Council on religious Affairs (ACRA) essentially to see how it could assist government put a stop to religious conflicts. However, not much was achieved by the Council because of suspicion and the wrangling within the members leading to resignations (Kukah: 2003). The Council therefore met an untimely death.

The civilian regime of Obasanjo was also plagued with various religious crises and sought for the cooperation of the leaders of the two major religions just like the other military regime though with some modification. Thus on 29th September, 1999, the government pushed for the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) and it was inaugurated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in person.

The interesting composition of the Council was that there were co-Chairmen and fifty (50) members made of Twenty Five (25) each from adherents of the religious – Islam and Christianity. The government was to appoint the National Coordinator, the initially Revered Professor Yusuf Amed Obaji, who was also the President's pastor in the Presidential chapel. Later a professor of Islamics and also was appointed as secretary on acting capacity when Obaje left for what was widely circulated, to join active politics for the post of the governor of his home state, Kogi in the North.

Despite the Muslims overwhelming majority they were reduced to equal size with Christians in this Council. However, the main function of the Council was to advise government and create harmony between the followers of the two religions. The Council was to open braches in all the state and local government capitals in the country but since 1999 to date that could not be achieved by a government backed council. As also little was heard of the NIREC or its activities. In fact in an interview with one of its members, on writing this paper, the source said that it had been two years that NIREC could not even meet. Let us here state that, of the fifty (50) members of NIREC, we could not see a lady's name, Muslim or Christian, as a member. These are the real victims of religious conflicts who are at least of the country's population but their views were not relevant to NIREC and by extension to government.

What are our other options at the non-government level? Probably here lies the solution. There are now a number of inter faith groups specializing in one area or another like heath and peaceful co-existence,

our area of focus today. These non-governmental organizations are move vibrant initiative, pragmatic and inclusive in their activities.

These NGOs generally engage both leadership and members of the two dominant divine religions in the country. The interesting aspect of the organization is that, while some are independence of both religions, many of such overtures came from major Muslim and Christian organizations themselves. They respectively, realized the need to reach to the other in order to understand one another, cultivate leadership and trust, as a way out of suspicion and destruct.

Abubakr, one of the pioneers of such NGOs, observed that, these conflicts resulted into:-

> Innocent women are compulsory been made widows, innocent children are also made orphans, normal productive people are turned disabled, human progress is been paralyzed, economic advancement being crippled, social living and completely being abused due to wishful things of some few elements….

The NGOs have strove to enlighten the public through workshops, publications, radio programs, etc. these basic activities were not known to be undertaken by the government sponsored councils other than endless meetings in the most comfortable hotel in Nigeria's capital at government expense.

Publications by the NGOs tried to show the true teachings of the religions so that the followings could reflect and abide by them. For example, quoting a verse from the Bible, AbuBakr showed that God required Christian "to do what is just (Among mankind) to show constant LOVE (to all), and live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Islam on the other hand, means: Peace: by its very name and has consistently insisted on justice to all and in all its ramifications. The Qur'an says:-

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decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (4:135).

It cannot be clearer. Islam equally calls on Muslims to verify information and not jump into action that could be based on false information. No other civilization or religion has made the issue of justice and verification of information such cardinal principles like Islam. Equally no other civilization or religion has sanctified and honored life like the way Islam did. The Qur'an says:-

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4.0 Recommendation

Having seen the failure of government and its agencies to muster the confidence and support of the people towards peaceful co-existence, the NGOs sprang up. This however, is not to be totally or unconditionally accepted without some checks and balances.

The point we are trying to make is that, most NGOs depend on foreign funding and without a government regular agency; the NGOs could, knowingly or unknowingly, dance to the tune of someone else and not meeting the needs of their countries or even at the detriment of their countries. There is a Hausa saying that, *ko wacci ladan kuturu, zai masa aski.* This can be translated as the English saying that, *who pays the piper dictates the tune.*

Secondly, home governments could also be partners with NGOs in initiation and execution of programs and activities to encourage inter-religious peace and co-existence. This might be more productive than where a government creates a forum and wholly sponsors its activities.

Thirdly, the education system must make it compulsory to ensure that the true teachings of Islam and Christianity are taught to the adherents of the respective religions. This could further be tailored to promote morality, fight against corruption and other civic responsibilities in public service and outside. In addition, government must do all that is necessary to eliminate illiteracy among the populace. Needless to say that, ignorance, illiteracy and poverty are tripartite factors that make people easily vulnerable to exploitation by internal or external selfish interests.

Fourthly, the prolonged war between Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. The world is a global village, some would say a global sitting or living room, and thus the killing in Palestine could cause ill feelings and be an obstacle to world peace. The world community is one and the communication revolution makes many things possible.

Fifthly and closely related the American double standard and its apparent posture that the Muslim is the enemy must be positively addressed. Where a country feels it is a super power and skills stateless, barefooted and poverty-stricken people prove nothing super but brutality. It is an acknowledged saying that *great power comes with great responsibility.* Respect for each other's believes and ways of life are pre conditions to peaceful co-existence. But if the arrogant posture of American and its wish to dominate continue, then it only proves that America is not a partner in Global peace and co-existence.

Sixthly and lastly, democracy may be a solution to crises because of its ability to allow voices to be heard, institution for adjudication, the devolution of powers and the independence of legislature and judiciary. But countries can incorporate their values, traditions and cultures while making the democratic institutions sacrosanct.

5.0   CONCLUSION

We have attempted to discuss the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria that have polarized the populace to the extent that a part of the Nigeria territory was excised for being Muslim. We have traced the causes and solutions both by governmental and non-governmental organizations. The paper recommended the need to promote the activities of non-governmental organizations but to be watched by a qualified, just and fully trained government agency. We believe that together they will face the challenge advocated by the State of the World Forum, where it says, as quoted by AbuBakr:-

There is no greater challenge in the world today than that of living in tolerance and respect with ones neighbors. At a time when the entire world is caught up in the process of globalization, it is imperative for us all to learn the wisdom of co-existence and community building.

It is our prayer that leaders and followers of especially the three divine religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – reflect on their divine books, remember history as a guide and respect to respect respective, live in peace and promote development in their respective countries and globally. Conflict not only retards development but given opportunity to other countries to promote their selfish interests by invoking the name of the international community especially in the Middle East and Africa or the so called, Third World, generally.

Endnotes

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RELIGION, PEACE AND NATIONAL EVELOPMENT: A LOOK AT INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

DR. SIRAJ B. ABDULKARIM[*]

1.0   PREAMBLE

Nigerian is the most populous Black Country in the world. From the 2006 censure records, the country had one Hundred and Forty Million people. It is a multi ethnic/tribe country with different ethnic/tribe groups predicted to number at lest Two Hundred and Fifty (250) however; three major tribes have dominated the population landscape and hold sway in the respective three regions that make up the country. The Hausa dominate the Northern parts, the Yorobas in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religion in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religious country with the two divine religious, Islamic is also a multi religious with the two divine religious, Islamic and Christianity dominating. The Muslim population accounts for at least sixty percent (60%), the Christians about thirty five percent (35%) and the African Traditional religion about five percent (5%). The Muslims are the majority in the North, about fifty-fifty with Christians in the West, and as minorities in the East. This shows that the Christians are only majority in the East. On the tribal population, there are over Two Hundred groups in the North while the Yoruba are absolute majority in the West, the Ibos have slight majority in the Eastern region. This configuration has made religious and tribal conflicts to be often mixed up in Nigeria.

With this multi dimensional nature of Nigerian, it had its own share of ethnic and religious conflict claimed many lives and property during both military and civilian dispensation.

This paper is to discuss some of these conflicts, their causes and solutions for a peaceful co-existence as proffered by the government and

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non-governmental organizations. The paper further attempts to evaluate these initiatives and make some recommendation.

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In the first place, it needs to be understood that in most Nigerian conflicts, it would be difficult to clearly differentiate whether the conflicts were religious, ethnic or even economically influenced.

What is clear however is that, whatever was the primary cause, religious coloration often takes precedence especially if the conflicts were in the North apparently because of its Muslim domination.

The paper would therefore concentrate on the conflicts that were clearly seen as religiously inspired. We would therefore overlook many of the conflicts that seemed ethnic or economically influenced especially in the Western and Eastern parts of Nigerian.

From the writings of (Abdulkarim: 1996) and (Elaigwu: 2005), Northern Nigeria had witnessed over sixty ethno-religious conflicts between 1977 and 2004, undoubtedly this is an outrageous number that calls for serious concern. These conflicts had created suspicion, destruction and hatred between Muslim and Christian citizens. Many lives and property were destroyed. The required conducive environment for development was not only jeopardized but was really taken many decades back.

Naturally, the causes were not easily known because of a shift or trade of blames and accusations between Muslim and Christian groups. While, in a nutshell Muslims accused Christians of consistently attacking Islam and Muslims, the Christians on the other hand accused Muslims of deliberate Islamisation of Nigeria and denying Christians their rights (Kukah: 2003).

The polarization had reached the extent that both Muslims and Christians watched the activities of governments with great suspicion. Every appointment, every policy, etc of the government was viewed with suspicion by one group or the other, not from its contribution to development but whether it was more in favor of the other religious group which could easily lead raising tension in the polity. That came to a pick, when the government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida made the Nigerian status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), a full member from an observer status. The observer status Nigeria enjoyed for years was made with the approval of a Christian

Head of State from Northern Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, during his tenure (1966-1975).

What appeared a simple matter degenerated into threats of religious war because Christians alleged that this was yet another clandestine move to Islamize Nigeria. Arguments that it was for economic reasons and that many minority Muslim African countries were members only flayed up tensions. The Christians mobilized individuals and organizations especially the press, insisting that by joining the OIC, Nigeria is by implication an Islamic state (Abdulkarim, 1996). In addition to the OIC, there was the issue population by the respective religious followers. To close that controversy the latest census in the country in 2006 had to abolish the columns for religion and tribe.

However, the issue of *Shari'a* has remained a volatile one. While Muslims demanded that *Shari'a* court be recognized by the constitution up to federal level, the Christians countered that Nigerian was a secular state and that having parallel laws is inimical to the country's unity.

The Muslims on the other hand, insisted that the new elites (those of Western education background) have turned Nigeria into a Christian state. They claim that despite their majority and Islamic roots, their country has become secular nay Christian, because they argued, as documented by (Clarke: 1988), that:-

> ----- the symbols and trappings of state, the style of diplomacy, the direction of foreign policy, the political, legal, economic and education systems, the structure of the working week are all seen to be based on a western secular albeit once Christian model.

The polarization did not stop with the religious hierarchy it permeated the students, the civil service and above all the military.

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This is the danger of religious polarization. It separates close friends, neighbors, colleagues and for Nigeria, it was close to breaking the Nigerian nation at political and military levels. The road to development had been greatly hampered. That was a very tough implication.

3.0   WHAT SOLUTION?

After most of these crises, government would immediately, almost instantly, set up commissions of enquiry to determine causes and proffer solutions. Sometimes tribunals were set up to try the culprits. But here again the polarization comes in. Muslims have consistently maintained that the security agents being Christian dominated only arrested the Muslim even where they were victims and sometimes even deliberately killed. Whatever was the case, government white papers on the commission's investigation hardly saw the light of the day. If made public, hardly were recommendations implemented. Some tribunal judgments against some people sentenced for murder were unjustly pardoned by the government. What would have been a deterrent to others was made a joke. The case of General Zamani Leckwot was still fresh in the minds of some victims.

Recommendations like, the need to make the teachings of religion in post primary institutions compulsory could not be implemented by the government. The alternative it preferred like Moral education or Civil education could not be sustained at any appreciable level. The efforts by the military regime of General Babangida and the civilian Government of Chief Obasanjo to promote inter religious councils did not help matters also.

The regime of Babangida formed the Advisory Council on religious Affairs (ACRA) essentially to see how it could assist government put a stop to religious conflicts. However, not much was achieved by the Council because of suspicion and the wrangling within the members leading to resignations (Kukah: 2003). The Council therefore met an untimely death.

The civilian regime of Obasanjo was also plagued with various religious crises and sought for the cooperation of the leaders of the two major religions just like the other military regime though with some modification. Thus on 29th September, 1999, the government pushed for the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) and it was inaugurated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in person.

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Abubakr, one of the pioneers of such NGOs, observed that, these conflicts resulted into:-

> Innocent women are compulsory been made widows, innocent children are also made orphans, normal productive people are turned disabled, human progress is been paralyzed, economic advancement being crippled, social living and completely being abused due to wishful things of some few elements….

The NGOs have strove to enlighten the public through workshops, publications, radio programs, etc. these basic activities were not known to be undertaken by the government sponsored councils other than endless meetings in the most comfortable hotel in Nigeria's capital at government expense.

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Islam on the other hand, means: Peace: by its very name and has consistently insisted on justice to all and in all its ramifications. The Qur'an says:-

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decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (4:135).

It cannot be clearer. Islam equally calls on Muslims to verify information and not jump into action that could be based on false information. No other civilization or religion has made the issue of justice and verification of information such cardinal principles like Islam. Equally no other civilization or religion has sanctified and honored life like the way Islam did. The Qur'an says:-

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4.0 Recommendation

Having seen the failure of government and its agencies to muster the confidence and support of the people towards peaceful co-existence, the NGOs sprang up. This however, is not to be totally or unconditionally accepted without some checks and balances.

The point we are trying to make is that, most NGOs depend on foreign funding and without a government regular agency; the NGOs could, knowingly or unknowingly, dance to the tune of someone else and not meeting the needs of their countries or even at the detriment of their countries. There is a Hausa saying that, *ko wacci ladan kuturu, zai masa aski.* This can be translated as the English saying that, *who pays the piper dictates the tune.*

Secondly, home governments could also be partners with NGOs in initiation and execution of programs and activities to encourage inter-religious peace and co-existence. This might be more productive than where a government creates a forum and wholly sponsors its activities.

Thirdly, the education system must make it compulsory to ensure that the true teachings of Islam and Christianity are taught to the adherents of the respective religions. This could further be tailored to promote morality, fight against corruption and other civic responsibilities in public service and outside. In addition, government must do all that is necessary to eliminate illiteracy among the populace. Needless to say that, ignorance, illiteracy and poverty are tripartite factors that make people easily vulnerable to exploitation by internal or external selfish interests.

Fourthly, the prolonged war between Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. The world is a global village, some would say a global sitting or living room, and thus the killing in Palestine could cause ill feelings and be an obstacle to world peace. The world community is one and the communication revolution makes many things possible.

Fifthly and closely related the American double standard and its apparent posture that the Muslim is the enemy must be positively addressed. Where a country feels it is a super power and skills stateless, barefooted and poverty-stricken people prove nothing super but brutality. It is an acknowledged saying that *great power comes with great responsibility.* Respect for each other's believes and ways of life are pre conditions to peaceful co-existence. But if the arrogant posture of American and its wish to dominate continue, then it only proves that America is not a partner in Global peace and co-existence.

Sixthly and lastly, democracy may be a solution to crises because of its ability to allow voices to be heard, institution for adjudication, the devolution of powers and the independence of legislature and judiciary. But countries can incorporate their values, traditions and cultures while making the democratic institutions sacrosanct.

5.0   CONCLUSION

We have attempted to discuss the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria that have polarized the populace to the extent that a part of the Nigeria territory was excised for being Muslim. We have traced the causes and solutions both by governmental and non-governmental organizations. The paper recommended the need to promote the activities of non-governmental organizations but to be watched by a qualified, just and fully trained government agency. We believe that together they will face the challenge advocated by the State of the World Forum, where it says, as quoted by AbuBakr:-

There is no greater challenge in the world today than that of living in tolerance and respect with ones neighbors. At a time when the entire world is caught up in the process of globalization, it is imperative for us all to learn the wisdom of co-existence and community building.

It is our prayer that leaders and followers of especially the three divine religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – reflect on their divine books, remember history as a guide and respect to respect respective, live in peace and promote development in their respective countries and globally. Conflict not only retards development but given opportunity to other countries to promote their selfish interests by invoking the name of the international community especially in the Middle East and Africa or the so called, Third World, generally.

Endnotes

1. AbuBaakr, G.Y. **Co-existence a Recipe for Globalization** (no date)
2. Abdulkarim, S.B. 'The Challenging Role of Islam in Post independent Nigeria: The Case of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria' (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation submitted to the University of Khartoum, 1996).
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It is our prayer that leaders and followers of especially the three divine religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – reflect on their divine books, remember history as a guide and respect to respect respective, live in peace and promote development in their respective countries and globally. Conflict not only retards development but given opportunity to other countries to promote their selfish interests by invoking the name of the international community especially in the Middle East and Africa or the so called, Third World, generally.

Endnotes

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10. Discussion with some members of NIREC from both faiths

RELIGION, PEACE AND NATIONAL EVELOPMENT: A LOOK AT INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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1.0   PREAMBLE

Nigerian is the most populous Black Country in the world. From the 2006 censure records, the country had one Hundred and Forty Million people. It is a multi ethnic/tribe country with different ethnic/tribe groups predicted to number at lest Two Hundred and Fifty (250) however; three major tribes have dominated the population landscape and hold sway in the respective three regions that make up the country. The Hausa dominate the Northern parts, the Yorobas in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religion in the West and the Ibos in the East. Nigerian is also a multi religious country with the two divine religious, Islamic is also a multi religious with the two divine religious, Islamic and Christianity dominating. The Muslim population accounts for at least sixty percent (60%), the Christians about thirty five percent (35%) and the African Traditional religion about five percent (5%). The Muslims are the majority in the North, about fifty-fifty with Christians in the West, and as minorities in the East. This shows that the Christians are only majority in the East. On the tribal population, there are over Two Hundred groups in the North while the Yoruba are absolute majority in the West, the Ibos have slight majority in the Eastern region. This configuration has made religious and tribal conflicts to be often mixed up in Nigeria.

With this multi dimensional nature of Nigerian, it had its own share of ethnic and religious conflict claimed many lives and property during both military and civilian dispensation.

This paper is to discuss some of these conflicts, their causes and solutions for a peaceful co-existence as proffered by the government and

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non-governmental organizations. The paper further attempts to evaluate these initiatives and make some recommendation.

2.0   AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT/IMPLICATION

In the first place, it needs to be understood that in most Nigerian conflicts, it would be difficult to clearly differentiate whether the conflicts were religious, ethnic or even economically influenced.

What is clear however is that, whatever was the primary cause, religious coloration often takes precedence especially if the conflicts were in the North apparently because of its Muslim domination.

The paper would therefore concentrate on the conflicts that were clearly seen as religiously inspired. We would therefore overlook many of the conflicts that seemed ethnic or economically influenced especially in the Western and Eastern parts of Nigerian.

From the writings of (Abdulkarim: 1996) and (Elaigwu: 2005), Northern Nigeria had witnessed over sixty ethno-religious conflicts between 1977 and 2004, undoubtedly this is an outrageous number that calls for serious concern. These conflicts had created suspicion, destruction and hatred between Muslim and Christian citizens. Many lives and property were destroyed. The required conducive environment for development was not only jeopardized but was really taken many decades back.

Naturally, the causes were not easily known because of a shift or trade of blames and accusations between Muslim and Christian groups. While, in a nutshell Muslims accused Christians of consistently attacking Islam and Muslims, the Christians on the other hand accused Muslims of deliberate Islamisation of Nigeria and denying Christians their rights (Kukah: 2003).

The polarization had reached the extent that both Muslims and Christians watched the activities of governments with great suspicion. Every appointment, every policy, etc of the government was viewed with suspicion by one group or the other, not from its contribution to development but whether it was more in favor of the other religious group which could easily lead raising tension in the polity. That came to a pick, when the government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida made the Nigerian status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), a full member from an observer status. The observer status Nigeria enjoyed for years was made with the approval of a Christian

Head of State from Northern Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, during his tenure (1966-1975).

What appeared a simple matter degenerated into threats of religious war because Christians alleged that this was yet another clandestine move to Islamize Nigeria. Arguments that it was for economic reasons and that many minority Muslim African countries were members only flayed up tensions. The Christians mobilized individuals and organizations especially the press, insisting that by joining the OIC, Nigeria is by implication an Islamic state (Abdulkarim, 1996). In addition to the OIC, there was the issue population by the respective religious followers. To close that controversy the latest census in the country in 2006 had to abolish the columns for religion and tribe.

However, the issue of *Shari'a* has remained a volatile one. While Muslims demanded that *Shari'a* court be recognized by the constitution up to federal level, the Christians countered that Nigerian was a secular state and that having parallel laws is inimical to the country's unity.

The Muslims on the other hand, insisted that the new elites (those of Western education background) have turned Nigeria into a Christian state. They claim that despite their majority and Islamic roots, their country has become secular nay Christian, because they argued, as documented by (Clarke: 1988), that:-

> ----- the symbols and trappings of state, the style of diplomacy, the direction of foreign policy, the political, legal, economic and education systems, the structure of the working week are all seen to be based on a western secular albeit once Christian model.

The polarization did not stop with the religious hierarchy it permeated the students, the civil service and above all the military.

On April 17, 1990, a Christian group of military officers led by Colonel Gideon Orkar tried to topple the regime of General Babangida. Even though the coup was abortive, the leadership transmitted its massage. While military were to protect their country's boarders, this group excised the predominantly Northern Muslim states from the Nigerian federation. The indigenes of the affected states were immediately asked to leave other parts of Nigeria because they were no more Nigerians. The Sultan of Sokoto, officially recognized as the

leader of the Muslims in Nigeria was dethroned by the coup plotters (Abdulkarim: 1996). Were the coup plotters not defeated on time, on the very first day, Nigeria would have been thrown into chaos and turmoil never witnessed in its history. That was because those religious bigots in military uniform had access to the federal radio and broadcasted their message and the country was beginning to be in total confusion as citizens were becoming restless in all parts of the country. The civil war that was fought in the country was only felt in a region but this was nationwide.

This is the danger of religious polarization. It separates close friends, neighbors, colleagues and for Nigeria, it was close to breaking the Nigerian nation at political and military levels. The road to development had been greatly hampered. That was a very tough implication.

3.0   WHAT SOLUTION?

After most of these crises, government would immediately, almost instantly, set up commissions of enquiry to determine causes and proffer solutions. Sometimes tribunals were set up to try the culprits. But here again the polarization comes in. Muslims have consistently maintained that the security agents being Christian dominated only arrested the Muslim even where they were victims and sometimes even deliberately killed. Whatever was the case, government white papers on the commission's investigation hardly saw the light of the day. If made public, hardly were recommendations implemented. Some tribunal judgments against some people sentenced for murder were unjustly pardoned by the government. What would have been a deterrent to others was made a joke. The case of General Zamani Leckwot was still fresh in the minds of some victims.

Recommendations like, the need to make the teachings of religion in post primary institutions compulsory could not be implemented by the government. The alternative it preferred like Moral education or Civil education could not be sustained at any appreciable level. The efforts by the military regime of General Babangida and the civilian Government of Chief Obasanjo to promote inter religious councils did not help matters also.

The regime of Babangida formed the Advisory Council on religious Affairs (ACRA) essentially to see how it could assist government put a stop to religious conflicts. However, not much was achieved by the Council because of suspicion and the wrangling within the members leading to resignations (Kukah: 2003). The Council therefore met an untimely death.

The civilian regime of Obasanjo was also plagued with various religious crises and sought for the cooperation of the leaders of the two major religions just like the other military regime though with some modification. Thus on 29th September, 1999, the government pushed for the establishment of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) and it was inaugurated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in person.

The interesting composition of the Council was that there were co-Chairmen and fifty (50) members made of Twenty Five (25) each from adherents of the religious – Islam and Christianity. The government was to appoint the National Coordinator, the initially Revered Professor Yusuf Amed Obaji, who was also the President's pastor in the Presidential chapel. Later a professor of Islamics and also was appointed as secretary on acting capacity when Obaje left for what was widely circulated, to join active politics for the post of the governor of his home state, Kogi in the North.

Despite the Muslims overwhelming majority they were reduced to equal size with Christians in this Council. However, the main function of the Council was to advise government and create harmony between the followers of the two religions. The Council was to open braches in all the state and local government capitals in the country but since 1999 to date that could not be achieved by a government backed council. As also little was heard of the NIREC or its activities. In fact in an interview with one of its members, on writing this paper, the source said that it had been two years that NIREC could not even meet. Let us here state that, of the fifty (50) members of NIREC, we could not see a lady's name, Muslim or Christian, as a member. These are the real victims of religious conflicts who are at least of the country's population but their views were not relevant to NIREC and by extension to government.

What are our other options at the non-government level? Probably here lies the solution. There are now a number of inter faith groups specializing in one area or another like heath and peaceful co-existence,

our area of focus today. These non-governmental organizations are move vibrant initiative, pragmatic and inclusive in their activities.

These NGOs generally engage both leadership and members of the two dominant divine religions in the country. The interesting aspect of the organization is that, while some are independence of both religions, many of such overtures came from major Muslim and Christian organizations themselves. They respectively, realized the need to reach to the other in order to understand one another, cultivate leadership and trust, as a way out of suspicion and destruct.

Abubakr, one of the pioneers of such NGOs, observed that, these conflicts resulted into:-

> Innocent women are compulsory been made widows, innocent children are also made orphans, normal productive people are turned disabled, human progress is been paralyzed, economic advancement being crippled, social living and completely being abused due to wishful things of some few elements….

The NGOs have strove to enlighten the public through workshops, publications, radio programs, etc. these basic activities were not known to be undertaken by the government sponsored councils other than endless meetings in the most comfortable hotel in Nigeria's capital at government expense.

Publications by the NGOs tried to show the true teachings of the religions so that the followings could reflect and abide by them. For example, quoting a verse from the Bible, AbuBakr showed that God required Christian "to do what is just (Among mankind) to show constant LOVE (to all), and live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Islam on the other hand, means: Peace: by its very name and has consistently insisted on justice to all and in all its ramifications. The Qur'an says:-

> O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents or your kin, and whether it be your (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts) least ye swerve, and if you distort (Justice) or

decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (4:135).

It cannot be clearer. Islam equally calls on Muslims to verify information and not jump into action that could be based on false information. No other civilization or religion has made the issue of justice and verification of information such cardinal principles like Islam. Equally no other civilization or religion has sanctified and honored life like the way Islam did. The Qur'an says:-

> ---- If any one slew a person – unless it be for murder of for spreading mischief in the land – it will be as if he slew whole people : and any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people….(5.32)

4.0 Recommendation

Having seen the failure of government and its agencies to muster the confidence and support of the people towards peaceful co-existence, the NGOs sprang up. This however, is not to be totally or unconditionally accepted without some checks and balances.

The point we are trying to make is that, most NGOs depend on foreign funding and without a government regular agency; the NGOs could, knowingly or unknowingly, dance to the tune of someone else and not meeting the needs of their countries or even at the detriment of their countries. There is a Hausa saying that, *ko wacci ladan kuturu, zai masa aski.* This can be translated as the English saying that, *who pays the piper dictates the tune.*

Secondly, home governments could also be partners with NGOs in initiation and execution of programs and activities to encourage inter-religious peace and co-existence. This might be more productive than where a government creates a forum and wholly sponsors its activities.

Thirdly, the education system must make it compulsory to ensure that the true teachings of Islam and Christianity are taught to the adherents of the respective religions. This could further be tailored to promote morality, fight against corruption and other civic responsibilities in public service and outside. In addition, government must do all that is necessary to eliminate illiteracy among the populace. Needless to say that, ignorance, illiteracy and poverty are tripartite factors that make people easily vulnerable to exploitation by internal or external selfish interests.

Fourthly, the prolonged war between Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. The world is a global village, some would say a global sitting or living room, and thus the killing in Palestine could cause ill feelings and be an obstacle to world peace. The world community is one and the communication revolution makes many things possible.

Fifthly and closely related the American double standard and its apparent posture that the Muslim is the enemy must be positively addressed. Where a country feels it is a super power and skills stateless, barefooted and poverty-stricken people prove nothing super but brutality. It is an acknowledged saying that *great power comes with great responsibility.* Respect for each other's believes and ways of life are pre conditions to peaceful co-existence. But if the arrogant posture of American and its wish to dominate continue, then it only proves that America is not a partner in Global peace and co-existence.

Sixthly and lastly, democracy may be a solution to crises because of its ability to allow voices to be heard, institution for adjudication, the devolution of powers and the independence of legislature and judiciary. But countries can incorporate their values, traditions and cultures while making the democratic institutions sacrosanct.

5.0   CONCLUSION

We have attempted to discuss the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria that have polarized the populace to the extent that a part of the Nigeria territory was excised for being Muslim. We have traced the causes and solutions both by governmental and non-governmental organizations. The paper recommended the need to promote the activities of non-governmental organizations but to be watched by a qualified, just and fully trained government agency. We believe that together they will face the challenge advocated by the State of the World Forum, where it says, as quoted by AbuBakr:-

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