

COMMUNIQUE OF THE NATIONAL SUMMIT ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA CONVENED AND ORGANIZED BY INTERFAITH ACTIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE (IFAPP) AND HELD AT BENUE HALL OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, ABUJA ON THE 5TH OF NOVEMBER 2013.

1.0 PREAMBLE

1.1 The 102 participants at the National Summit on *Interfaith Dialogue & the Quest for National Security in Nigeria* included Christian and Muslim leaders and clerics from across Nigeria, members of IFAPP, representatives of the Presidency, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Chief of Defence Staff, leaders of civil society organizations and independent think-tanks, top-level media practitioners, business entrepreneurs, professionals, and researchers.

1.2 The Summit was organized by IFAPP, an organization conceived nearly two years ago by Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, a Catholic leadership development-focused organization, and the Islamic Education Trust, an Islamic educational and development charity, as a national platform for a more structured constructive interfaith dialogue between Muslim and Christian clerics, leaders, and advocates towards ensuring peaceful coexistence of religious groups and working for good governance and development in Nigeria.

1.3 The Summit derived its theme from the realization of the great danger that unwholesome relations between Muslims and Christians pose to national security and the potential of interfaith dialogue as an antidote to this threat. It sought to foster improved understanding of and greater interest in the potentials and limits of interfaith dialogue as a response to insecurity fueled by tensions, mutual suspicion and conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It therefore did not follow the typical conference format of a series of papers followed by questions and answers. Rather, it entailed a robust conversation among all participants, utilizing the depth and breadth of their knowledge and experience to generate sound actionable suggestions on how to improve inter-faith relations for the advancement of national security and development.

2.0 CONTEXT SETTING

2.1 The opening plenary session comprised mainly the opening prayers by Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna and Prof. Moibi Opeloye, the Representative of Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs; welcome remarks by Rev. Fr. George Ehusani, co-convenor of IFAPP; chairperson's remarks by Prof. Pat Utomi, Director, Lagos Business School, Pan-Atlantic University; presentation on the vision, mission, and programs of IFAPP; goodwill messages by Summit co-sponsors, Open Society Initiative for West Africa and the Ford Foundation represented respectively by Mr. Jude Ilo and Prof. Friday Okonofua; a keynote address by His Eminence, Cardinal John Onaiyekan on the imperative of interfaith dialogue; address by the Special Guest of Honour, Mr. Reno Omokri, Special Assistant

to the President (New Media); and the Keynote Lecture by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto which was followed by discussant's remarks by Mallam Nuruddeen Lemu, co-convener of IFAPP.

2.2 The opening plenary session set the tone for the three simultaneous dialogue sessions that formed the core of the Summit by highlighting the following issues and themes as key to understanding and responding effectively to the question of interfaith dialogue and the quest for national security in Nigeria.

2.3 The increasingly tense and acrimonious relations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is historically a relatively recent phenomenon and must be understood in the context of worsening levels of poverty, socio-economic and regional inequalities, degraded infrastructures and social amenities, youth underemployment and unemployment, injustice, poor governance, grand-scale corruption, and rapid deterioration in state capacity to meet the basic needs of the citizenry and ensure law and order.

2.4 Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians would easily prevail and persist if the overwhelming majority of adherents of both faiths truly practiced the teachings of their religions like the early Christians and Muslims, as both Christianity and Islam teach belief in one Supreme God to whom all human beings are ultimately accountable and both theologically encourage harmonious interfaith relations, abhor violence, and place strong emphasis on the inherent dignity, equality and inviolability of all human beings.

2.5 Fostering intra-faith understanding and consensus on the imperative of interfaith relations is central to improving interfaith relations in Nigeria given that there are strands within each faith that proactively oppose interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

2.6 Recognizing that religion is not the primary cause of conflicts and worsening insecurity in Nigeria, the interfaith movement must refocus its attention on issues of good governance and state accountability for people-oriented and pro-poor policies, programs and services.

2.7 Interfaith dialogue must also be deployed to counter the machinations of self-serving politicians and failed leaders at all levels who try to appropriate and mobilize religion and religious identities, sentiments and organizations for such non-religious ends as vote-seeking and intra-elite squabbles over resources and positions.

2.8 The central preoccupation of efforts at improving interfaith relations must be to catalyze sustained state and non-state action for raising the overall level of human security in Nigeria which would in turn lead to lower prevalence and incidence of social chaos, extreme poverty, breakdown of law and order, and inter-group conflicts, and thus, enhance national security.

2.9 To be more effective as a vehicle for advocating and working for good governance and human security, interfaith dialogue must be taken to the community and street level as opposed

to the prevailing practice of dialoguing among religious authorities at the elite or leadership level. It must also more centrally engage with young and female adherents of both faiths.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main conclusions and recommendations arising from the simultaneous thematic dialogue sessions around conflict prevention and peace building, the mass media, and governance and development as well as the final deliberations in the plenary were as follows:

3.1 The central preoccupation of interfaith dialogue in the context of the quest for national security in Nigeria must be conflict prevention and peace-building rather than conflict resolution.

3.2 National security is primarily a subset and consequence of improving human security through reduction in levels of extreme poverty and social exclusion and through increasingly responsive and accountable governance.

3.3 Interfaith dialogue is potentially a strong force for mobilizing the larger society to demand for greater accountability on the part of public officeholders in combatting extreme poverty, social injustice, and high levels of unemployment, and enabling the rule of law and expansion of access to high quality education for the mass of Nigerian children and youth. This is likely to contribute much more to peaceful coexistence between the faith communities and the absence of violent intergroup conflicts than merely pursuing increased interactions and information-sharing across faith divides.

3.4 More attention needs to be paid to the content of religious education provided through both formal and informal religious platforms and in conventional schools to ensure that they promote respect for religious diversities, abhor violence in all its forms, and provide the trainees with critical life management skills and competencies relevant to the needs and realities of modern society.

3.5 In the context of the deep and long-running crises of values, spirituality, leadership and governance confronting Nigeria, the interfaith movement should galvanize Nigeria's faith communities to work towards a future that would liberate the country from a culture of mis-governance, widespread ignorance and fatalism, and acceptance of extreme poverty and collapsed infrastructures as normal.

3.6 Given the increasing proliferation of interfaith mediation initiatives and projects, there is need for more robust issue-based networking, collaboration and coordination among these efforts in order to consolidate them for increased impact.

3.7 For conflict-impacted or conflict-prone communities in particular, it is recommended that interfaith relations forums be formed which bring together Christians and Muslims within each community for regular information-sharing, bond-building, and forging of strategies for

preventing and better managing inter-religious tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts at the community level. Such forums should also be replicated at the local government and state level.

3.8 From the community to the local government area, state, and national level, there is need for preventive diplomacy around interfaith relations by establishing early warning detection and response mechanisms.

3.9 It is strongly recommended that peace and diversity education be incorporated into the curriculum of schools across all levels of the education system through appropriate integration of relevant peace and diversity topics into selected carrier subjects. This will help the development of tolerance and mutual respect as a way of life among Nigerians right from childhood.

3.10 There is need for legal reform and better enforcement of existing laws to deal more effectively with hate crimes.

3.11 Given the mass media's significant influence on public opinions, community perceptions and public policy agendas, the interfaith constituency should more intentionally forge sustained rather than ad hoc linkages with the media at all levels to enable it play a more salutary role in reporting and treating issues relevant to interfaith relations, conflict prevention and peace building.

3.12 In particular, interfaith groups and other civil society organizations should work with media owners and senior managers to build the capacity of media practitioners in investigative and routine reporting on interfaith relations in ways that promote rather than jeopardize peaceful co-existence and national security. Their competencies should be developed around objective and balanced presentation of facts and perspectives on interfaith relations and related developments so that news items and features on interfaith issues do not aggravate an already tense situation, but instead promote peaceful co-existence. Special attention therefore needs to be paid to developing expertise in reporting of religion among appropriately dedicated journalists as with sports, business and health journalism as well as the development of a code of ethics on interfaith relations reporting.

This Summit Communique is adopted this day, Tuesday 5th November, 2013



Rev. Fr. George Ehusani
Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Abuja
Co-convener



Mallam Nuruddeen Lemu
Islamic Education Trust, Minna
Co-convener