

# **INTER-FAITH ACTION FOR PEACE:**

## ***Report of an Inaugural Meeting***

*17 April 2012*

*Abuja, Nigeria*

Convened by

**Lux Terra Leadership Foundation & Islamic Education Trust**

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### INTRODUCTION

Recent activities of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria have heightened sectarian tension and created an environment of fear and suspicion amongst the various religious groups. This has given rise to a great need to stem the rapid deterioration in inter-religious relations in ways that would help to reposition these relations as channels for mobilizing faith communities for the greater challenge of responding to the country's quest for development and good

governance. But existing platforms for communication between religious groups often lack ownership by ordinary Nigerians and the requisite credibility and legitimacy. Consequently, with support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Lux Terra Leadership Foundation (LTLF) and the Islamic Education Trust (IET) planned and convened a high-level interfaith dialogue between Islamic and Christian clerics, leaders, and advocates as a prelude to a more structured constructive engagement towards ensuring peaceful coexistence of religious groups in the country.

## THE MEETING

The meeting was a partnership between the Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Abuja and Islamic Education Trust, Minna, and each brings complementary strengths to the national-level interfaith dialogue initiative kick-started with this meeting. The LTLF is an indigenous non-profit Nigerian leadership training outfit established in 2008 to respond to the challenge of leadership in Nigeria. The vision of Lux Terra is to see Nigeria transformed into a nation of integrity, peace and progress through the emergence of effective, purpose-driven servant leaders at all levels and in all sectors. Lux Terra is committed to the transformation of the character and conduct of leaders through interventions aimed at equipping Nigerians to lead effectively in their own individual spheres of activity and influence. It has recently become actively engaged with advocacy and education efforts towards peaceful coexistence among Nigerians of different faiths.

IET is a national charitable organization established in 1969 and is devoted to promoting the growth of quality education and ensuring that the perspectives of Islam are successfully combined with modern school curriculum. It has in the last two decades expanded its operations into development programmes targeted at the most vulnerable members of society covering such areas as water, health care, poverty alleviation, education and orphan support. Through the Da'wah Institute it provides training and facilitation in inter-faith dialogue to improve peaceful coexistence among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians across Nigeria.

LTLF and IET jointly planned and hosted this inaugural meeting of the Inter-faith Action for Peace (IFAP), which brought together 27 well-respected Islamic and Christian clerics, advocates and leaders from across all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria for a full day of intensive discussion and action-planning. The mutual commitment of the two organizations to broad consultation and participatory engagement made for an impressive turnout and engendered frank, open, and productive discussions about how the group could best foster interfaith dialogue and action for sustainable peace across Nigeria. The latter outcome was particularly engendered by the strong stage-setting keynote address given at the start of the meeting by its co-convenor, Mr. Nuruddeen Lemu.

## OBJECTIVES

The meeting was convened to provide a forum for consultations among leading Islamic and Christian clerics, advocates and opinion leaders dedicated to peaceful coexistence among

Nigerians about how to systematically address and reverse the worsening state of interfaith relations in Nigeria. Thus the meeting had three related objectives:

- To discuss and formulate a common vision and agenda for engendering peaceful coexistence among Muslims and Christians in Nigeria
- To identify key strategies, programmes and projects for actualizing the agreed agenda
- To develop an overall framework for the governance and management of IFAP

## PARTICIPANTS

Due to their reputations within and beyond their respective faith communities, LTLF and IET successfully elicited the participation of a wide range of credible Islamic and Christian clerics and leaders who could contribute to and learn from the dialogue, help shape the direction, structures and programmes of the initiative, and provide clear guidelines about next steps. The meeting included individuals of high repute with different skills, competencies and perspectives (see the Appendix for the list of participants), from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds including senior clerics, community leaders, youth leaders, academics, conciliators, media practitioners and mediators from across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. This diversity enriched the discussions and the kinds of suggestions that emerged.

## OUTCOMES

The extensive deliberations at the meeting yielded consensus on the following issues:

Name: Following the proposal of various possible names by several participants, the group unanimously adopted – INTER-FAITH ACTION FOR PEACE (IFAP) as its name.

Membership: Invited participants to the inaugural meeting would constitute the founding members of IFAP and new members shall be admitted on the basis of nomination and approval by existing members following a process to be outlined in the group's Articles of Association.

Core Mission: IFAP will work at both national and sub-national levels for the peaceful coexistence of religious groups in Nigeria through an integrated set of educational and advocacy programmes, projects and initiatives that will enlighten adherents of both faiths, diffuse tension, and promote peace.

The challenge: The relations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria today have degenerated beyond what used to be just fear and suspicion, to actual hatred in some areas of the country. This is being driven by, amongst other causes, poor education or widespread ignorance about the religious and ethnic complexities of the country, misunderstanding of the doctrines of the different faiths by many of their adherents, poor adjustment to the social demands of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, widespread poverty and youth

unemployment, failed leadership, politicization of religion, and bad governance. Religion being a powerful source of identity has become the rallying factor for some radicalized young people to react to the circumstances and vent their anger on society. The Boko Haram phenomenon is so far the worst manifestation of this reality.

The opportunity: We acknowledge that several interfaith dialogue and peace-building initiatives are ongoing across Nigeria, including the work done so far by NIREC, the Kaduna State Interfaith Mediation Center, and the work of other organizations and individual religious and community leaders in both Muslim and Christian communities, sometimes at great costs to the initiators. IFAP will function at the national level, to among other things increase the impact of these efforts across Nigeria through strengthening, supporting, networking and adding value to such efforts.

Revision of working document: The concept note setting out the case for, direction, modalities and proposed programmes of IFAP is to be revised to take account of – (i) the religious dimension of the crisis in interfaith relations, (ii) the positive role of NIREC and other initiatives to date, (iii) more comprehensive definition of the problem beyond Boko Haram, (iv) adequate attention to the youth question, and (v) the role of the mass media (including social media).

Programmatic focus: Broad consensus was reached about the programmatic priorities that will enable IFAP achieve impact:

- *Religious education* around the theological basis for peaceful living among adherents of both religions
- Fostering, capacitating and supporting *early warning and mediation mechanisms* (including centers and networks)
- *Engagement of government via advocacy* to demand for better policies and programmes to be put in place to address widespread poverty, poor educational access and youth unemployment which are conducive to the expression of violent extremism
- Innovative peace education and communication using various *social media platforms to reach young people*.

Governance and management: Mr. Nuruddeen Lemu and Rev. Fr. George Ehusani are to serve as the co-conveners of IFAP supported by two part-time co-coordinators, Babatunde Ahonsi, and a soon-to-be appointed Muslim professional. This interim management structure would be in place until the Article of Association has been developed and ratified which would spell out the governance structure of IFAP and how it would be constituted.

## NEXT STEPS

The following activities are to be undertaken by IFAP before its next meeting:

- a. Three peace education materials produced by IET are to be reviewed by a 3-person committee (made up of Dr. Salisu Shehu, Hajia Aisha Umaru and Imam Ashaffa) over the next 3 weeks and recommend to the group whether they should be adopted or modified by IFAP for wider dissemination in the Muslim communities across Nigeria.
- b. A 10-page paper abstracted from the recent African Synod (Catholic Church) publication on 'Public Apology and Reconciliation', a paper by Dr. Olufemi Oluniyi on 'The Imperative of Public Apology and Public Forgiveness for Reconciliation and Peace', and a 10-page paper abstracted from the recent publication in a book of lectures, talks and homilies by Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos relevant to interfaith relations and peace-building would be similarly reviewed over the next 3 weeks by a 3-person committee (made up of Archbishop Onayeikan, Dr. Ahonsi and Dr. Njoku) with a view to publishing and widely disseminating them as IFAP publications within the Christian community across Nigeria.
- c. Identification of certain texts of the Quran and Hadith, which could be used by extremists to promote violence and the burning of churches for thorough study and interpretation by highly respected Islamic scholars, towards the promotion of peaceful co-existence of Christians, Muslims and Jews. Their reports would then be widely disseminated among both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. This project is to be realised within the next 4 weeks.
- d. Plan a major National Conference on Inter-faith dialogue for peaceful co-existence that is aimed at arriving at concrete steps towards easing the tension in the land. It is necessitated by paucity of action-oriented dialogues among credible Christian and Muslim groups at the national level.
- e. Contracting of a lawyer to work with the interim Steering Committee to draw up an Article of Association for IFAP incorporating key sections of the revised Concept Note.

## Appendix

### Agenda:

1. Opening Prayer – Muslim Youth Leader
2. Keynote Address – Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu
3. Introduction of Participants & OSIWA
4. Reading of Concept Note
5. Tea Break
6. “Name Game”
7. Discussion of the Name, Membership, Scope, Programme & Strategies of the Group (towards achieving a consensus)
8. Brainstorming on realisable projects & programmes followed by prioritization
9. Role and Nominations for Steering Committee
10. Date of Next Meeting
11. Closing Prayer – Christian Cleric

### Participants

<b>SN</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>OFFICE</b>
1	Babatunde A. Ahonsi	Population Council, Abuja
2	Abiodun Fijabi	Lord Pricely Asso. Abeokuta
3	Engr. Muhammad Lawal Maidoki	Da’wah Coordination Council of Nigeria (DCCN), National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO), Hqtrs Sokoto
4	Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso	Catholic Archbishop, Kaduna
5	Prof. Yusuf Turaki	ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos
6	Dr. Olufemi Oluniyi	Centre for Values and Social Change, Lagos
7	Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama	Catholic Archbishop of Jos
8	Fr. Vincent Ogunoro	Church of the Assumption, Asokoro, Abuja
9	Rev. Shola Olalunbosun	Chairman, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Kaduna State Branch, CAN Office, Kaduna
10	Rev. Canon Joshua Mallam	CAN Office, Kaduna State
11	Dr. Salisu Shehu	Bayero University Kano, Muslim Students’

		Society of Nigeria (MSSN)
12	Dr. P. K. Njoku	Chartered Institute of Mediators and Conciliators, Abuja
13	Rev. Fr. George Ehusani	Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, Abuja
14	Ibrahim Balogun (Rep- Abubakar S. Muhammed)	Muslim Consultative Forum, Abuja
15	Hajia Aisha Umar Yusuf	Media Trust, Abuja
16	Dr. Sani Abubakar Lugga	The Waziri of Katsina
17	Imam M.Onike Abdul-Azeez	Deputy Chief Imam, NASFAT Headquarters
18	Imam Dr. M. N. Ashafa	Inter-Faith Mediation Centre, No. 4 Waff Road, Kaduna
19	Asunogie Nurudeen	Dep. President, DCCN.
20	Pst. Joshua Kurmin Pyeng	Interfaith Mediation Centre, Kaduna
21	Emmanuel Ojeifo	C/o Fr. George Ehusani
22	Bishop. Josiah Idowu-Fearson	Diocese of Kaduna (Anglican Communion)
23	Archbishop John Onaiyekan	Catholic Archbishop of Abuja
24	Ishaq Kunle Sanni	National Adviser, NACOMYO
26	Nuruddeen Lemu	Islamic Education Trust, Minna
27	Jude Ilo	Advocacy Officer, Open Society Initiative of West Africa