

In the Name of God

**REPORT ON THE INTER-RELIGIOUS TENSIONS AND CRISIS
IN NIGERIA**

**of the International Joint Delegation of
The World Council of Churches and The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for
Islamic Thought, May 2012**



(The International Joint Delegation in Kaduna with its Governor May 23rd, 2012)

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A. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Between 22nd–26th May 2012 (1st-5th *Rajab*, 1433 AH) an international delegation of Muslims and Christians, sponsored jointly by the Royal Jordanian Aal Al Bayt Institute (RABIIT) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), visited Nigeria.

The visit was proposed in reaction to the numerous incidents of fierce inter-communal strife which have affected the lives of Nigerians during 2000-2012, and the awareness that—at least since the Bosnian war of 1993-1995—Nigeria is the country in the world where the most severe inter-communal violence between Christians and Muslims has been experienced.

The delegation sought to understand the reasons behind this violence. The objectives of the visit were as follows:

- 1. To fact-find and investigate first-hand, impartially and credibly, the situation on the ground in Nigeria, and the various factors that have led to the present tensions.**
- 2. To express clearly to both the political and religious leadership in Nigeria the concern and anxiety of the international community about the current situation.**
- 3. To demonstrate an international model of Muslims and Christians working together in an inter-religious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions.**
- 4. To identify areas or projects where religious institutes, persons, texts, or messages can help ameliorate the situation in Nigeria.**

The establishment of the joint Christian/Muslim delegation in response to situations of violence involving both religious groups emerged initially from the *A Common Word* global Muslim-Christian Initiative of October 2007 and then from a proposal made in November 2010 when a group of some 60 Christian and Muslim leaders met in Geneva, Switzerland at the WCC Headquarters and forged an agreement to work more cooperatively in situations of conflict.

Both organisations sponsoring the delegation have a considerable history in, and commitment to, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

The ***Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT)*** is an international Islamic non-governmental, independent Institute headquartered in Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought aims to serve Islam and humanity at large. Among its objectives are: promoting awareness of Islam and Islamic thought, rectifying unsound ideas and misconceptions about Islam and highlighting Islamic intellectual contribution and its impact on human civilization.

In recent years **RABIIT** (or its Chairman, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi of Jordan) has been instrumental in organizing various Jordanian international intra- and inter-faith peace initiatives including:

(I) **The Amman Message (2004-5):** The Amman Message was a declaration by Jordanian Muslim Scholars that sought to declare what Islam is and what it is not; what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam.¹

(II) **A Common Word (2007):** The *A Common Word* Initiative started as an Open Letter from 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals to the leaders of the Christian faith as an irenic response to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg address in September 2006. It called for peace between Muslims and Christians by acknowledging some essential common ground and understanding among both faiths based on the Two Great Commandments of love of God and love of the neighbour. It became the leading Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue initiative in history (see: www.acommonword.com).²

(III) **The World Interfaith Harmony Week (2010):** the *World Interfaith Harmony Week* was a resolution unanimously adopted on October 20th, 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly (A/Res/65/5). It established the first week of February every year as an officially observed World Interfaith Harmony Week. The resolution itself reads as follows (see: www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com):

The General Assembly,

1. *Reaffirms* that mutual understanding and inter-religious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;
2. *Proclaims* the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;
3. *Encourages* all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples and other places of Worship during that week based on Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or

¹ **The Amman Message** was then distilled into three essential questions that would address and safeguard the fundamentals of Islamic thought and judgment: 'What constitutes a Muslim?'; 'Who has the right to issue a *fatwa* (juridical ruling) and under what conditions?'; 'Does anyone have the right to pronounce *takfir* (declare a person to be an apostate) and under what conditions?' These 'Three Points' of the Amman Message were, over the course of one year, endorsed by over 500 leading Muslim scholars all over the world in a unique, historic and unanimous international Islamic consensus (see: www.ammannmessage.com). This was the first time in modern history that Muslim scholars of all denominations have agreed on a doctrinal essence of Islam. The late *Grand Imam* and *Sheikh Al-Azhar* Professor Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi called it:

'The best resource for all those who wish to travel along the straight path in their words and in their actions, and in their spiritual and religious life'.

² The following summarizes **the A Common Word** Initiative:

'The appearance of the A Common Word [Open Letter] of 2007 was a landmark in Muslim-Christian relations and it has a unique role in stimulating a discussion at the deepest level across the world.'

— H.G. Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, 2010.

'[T]he more recent A Common Word letter echoed a theme consonant with my first encyclical: the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God (cf. Deus Caritas Est, 16).'

— H.H. Pope Benedict XVI, May 9th 2009, at the King Hussein Mosque in Amman, Jordan.

based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly informed of the implementation of the present resolution.³

The **World Council of Churches** is a fellowship of more than 350 Christian churches. Since the establishment of its Sub-Unit of Dialogue with Other Living Faiths and Ideologies in 1971, it has had a significant and respected 40 year history of encouraging and assisting much of the Christian world in engagement with other faiths. Its 1979 document ‘Guidelines on Dialogue’ has widely influenced thinking in many churches about the scope and purpose of inter-religious dialogue. Based on the experience gained since 1979, in 2003 the WCC produced a further short guide; ‘Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions’. This specifically refers to the imperative for partners in dialogue to be ‘empowered to join in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people.’ Since its Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006, a particular focus of the inter-religious work of the WCC has been in the area of peace and reconciliation.

Both RABIIT and the WCC are committed to inter-religious engagement which takes seriously and holds together substantial theological reflection and practical outworking of such reflection. Both believe that theology and praxis must mutually inform each other. In the case of RABIIT, the core principle of *A Common Word* is that Love of God and Love of the Neighbour cannot be separated. RABIIT’s involvement with this joint delegation to Nigeria was a tangible manifestation of this commitment. For the WCC, the delegation was a visible expression of the prayer it has dedicated itself to in the approach to its 2013 Assembly, ‘God of life, lead us to justice and peace’. Members of the WCC team also noted that the visit coincided closely with the season of Western Christian Pentecost, fortuitous in view of the substantial link in Christian theology between the Holy Spirit and power to overcome strife.

Commendation:

The joint delegation wishes to acknowledge and applaud the endeavours of local and national groups of Nigerian Christians and Muslims working together for

³ It will be noted that the diplomatically unprecedented central phrase of the **World Interfaith Harmony Week** resolution—‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions’—excludes no one, of any religion or of no faith at all: every person of good will, with or without faith can and should commit to ‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour’ *or* ‘Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour’. Loving the Good and the neighbour is, after all, the essence of good will as such. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said of it:

‘I lend my full support to this call and we, at the UN, are proud to be the platform for its launch. ... Finally, while recognizing the Assembly’s call to be entirely voluntary, my hope is that it will, nonetheless, find the broadest possible observance among the member states of the UN’.

— United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, 20th January, 2011, NY, NY.

reconciliation. During the brief visit to Nigeria the Joint Delegation managed to meet with remarkable religious leaders working and participating for many years in such efforts. Without these efforts the visit would not even have been possible, and without the continuation of these efforts there will never be interfaith harmony in Nigeria, and nothing non-Nigerians do will meet with success.

B. COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATIONS

The following were participants in the delegation:

Christian participants (organised by the World Council of Churches)

1. Revd Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches
(Christian Co-ordinator)
2. Most Revd Dr. Michael Jackson, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin
3. Bishop Dr. Alex Gehaz Malasusa, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Vice-President of the Lutheran World Federation
4. Revd Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson, WCC President, USA
5. Most Revd Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah, formerly Presiding Bishop Methodist Church of Ghana; and Vice-President of AACC for West Africa; currently Director of Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Zambia
6. Mrs Cecile Tshibanda, Chairperson of Catholic Women Association and Coordinator of African Women of Faith Network

Muslim participants (organised by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute)

1. Dr. H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Chairman of the Board of the *Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought*; also: Chief Advisor to H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein for Religious and Cultural Affairs, and Personal Envoy of H.M. King Abdullah II
(Muslim Co-ordinator)
2. H.E. the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Dr. Mustafa Ceric
3. H.E. Sheikh Dr. Hussein Hasan Abakar, Imam of the Muslims, Chad; President, Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, Chad
4. H.E. Professor Dr. Din Syamsudin, President of Muhammadiyah Party, Indonesia
5. Professor Dr. Abdul Ghaffur El-Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
6. Dr. Mustafa Ali, Secretary-General, African Council for Religious Leaders

In addition, a number of Nigerian Christians and Muslim religious leaders graciously accompanied the delegation during at least some of its work. These included:

1. Most Revd Dr. John O. Onaiyekan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Co-Chair African Council of Religious Leaders
2. H.E. Prince Judge Bola Ajibola; Founder and Chairman, Crescent University
3. H.E. Archbishop and Primate Dr. Rufus Okikiolaolu Olubiyi Ositelu; The Church of the Lord (Aladura)
4. Revd Dr. Israel Akanji.

The delegation was staffed by Mrs. Clare Amos and Dr. Nigussu Legesse (WCC); Revd Yusuf Wushishi (Christian Council of Nigeria); Mr. Nabil Al-Saheb (RABIIT); Mr. Lotfi Asfour (Prince Ghazi's Office Director); Barr. Zak Ajibola (Prince Ghazi's Office); Barr. Akin Ajibola (Prince Ghazi's Office) and a security team organised by RABIIT.

C. PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

The **outline programme** of the visit was as follows:

Tuesday 22 May

Arrivals and discussion over opening dinner.

Wednesday 23 May

Visit to Kaduna. Meetings with Governor of Kaduna State; state officials; H.R.H. the Emir of Kano; the local representatives of the Christian Association of Nigeria and Jama'atu Nasr Al-Islam; Muslim and Christian victims who had been affected by the violence.

There was a joint dinner and 'wrap-up' session in the evening.

Thursday 24 May

Visit to Jos / Plateau State. Meetings with Governor of Plateau State; state officials; H.R.H. the Gbom Gwom of Jos; the local representatives of the Christian Association of Nigeria and Jama'atu Nasr Al-Islam; Muslim and Christian victims who had been affected by the violence.

His Royal Eminence the Sultan of Sokoto, Leader of the Muslims in Nigeria, graciously met with and spoke to both delegations over dinner in Abuja.

Friday 25 May

Visits in Abuja:

- The National Mosque – hosted by H.H. Ona of Abaji, Alhaji Adamu Yunusa, Chair of Abuja FCT Council of Chiefs
- The National Christian Centre – hosted by Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, President of the Christian Association of Nigeria

The Most Revd Emmanuel Josiah Udofia, President of the Christian Council of Nigeria, was an invited guest of the joint delegation and spoke at supper.

Saturday 26 May

Departures

D. THE CAUSES AND KEY FACTORS BEHIND THE CURRENT INTER-RELIGIOUS TENSIONS AND CRISIS IN NIGERIA

The Joint Delegation identified a number of causes and key factors behind the inter-religious tensions and crisis in Nigeria. They acknowledged that these in no way constitute all the exacerbating factors. Nevertheless, they sub-divided these into five areas: Religious, Political, Economic, Social / Ethnic and Legal, stressing that the primary area of expertise of the delegation was religious.

At the same time the Joint Delegation acknowledged that it is difficult or impossible to totally separate these five areas from each other; for large problems invariably consist of many entangled smaller problems. However, identifying, separating and resolving the smaller problems can lead to the resolution of the larger problems.

One of the participants wisely remarked:

'In Nigeria, three things are intertwined; religion, politics and ethnicity and the three are beclouded with corruption, poverty and insecurity. It is therefore difficult to solve one without considering all other underpinning factors'. —H.E. Judge Prince Bola Ajibola

a) Religious

- Inadequate depth of understanding of both Christianity and Islam within and without these two religions
- Lack of knowledge and information on a popular level, particularly in local languages, of the scriptural-based condemnations of violence and terrorism in both Christianity and Islam
- Statements and actions of a number of religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, which could be understood as condoning or encouraging violence
- Tensions arising from well-funded and organised foreign Christian missionary activity, and well-funded and organised foreign Muslim missionary activity
- The actions and influence of Boko Haram and Takfiris, and the ideological influences upon the genesis of Boko Haram. Revenge killings by some Christians for the deaths caused by Boko Haram.
- The actions and influence of gangs of Muslim youths carrying out organised killings of innocent Christians.
- The actions and influence of gangs of Christian youths carrying out organised killings of innocent Muslims
- The geographic polarisations of Muslims and Christians along an imaginary North-South 'fault line' in the middle of the country, aggravated by demographic shifts and refugee movements in the period since independence.
- Further geographic polarisation of Muslims and Christians particularly within the Northern states where Christian residential areas (and in some cases local markets) and Muslim areas are now segregated.
- Ineffective co-operation within NIREC (Nigerian Inter-religious Council) relative to two years ago

b) Political

- Rampant corruption at every level among politicians

- The long term and residual effect of the different ways that different parts of the country were administered during the colonial period particularly between the North and the South.
- Tensions between the respective roles of the Federal government and State governments
- Problems arising from President Goodluck Jonathan continuing as President during the Northern unofficial 'quota' of office (in the PDP ruling party's 'agreement') after the premature death of President Umaru, and the disputed question as to whether he is constitutionally allowed to seek a further term in elections in 2015.
- Tensions created by the statements and actions of political leaders pandering to religious sentiment
- Geographical and political interactions between Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger and Cameroon
- The lack of ability or willingness on the part of government to consistently acknowledge all incidences of violence and to assist all victims
- The lack of a clear documented central and local record of all instances of social violence and their causes
- The lack of ability or willingness to follow up on and carry out recommendations made by government appointed commissions which have investigated communal crises
- Tension and competition between the traditional tribal and ethnic leaderships and governmental and local leaderships and structures
- Government and police neglect of violence and crime leading to a pervasive sense of insecurity
- Lack of timely response by government forces (police and military) to distress calls during times of violent conflict
- The roles of some external powers and intelligence agencies within Nigeria

c) Economic

- Rampant neglect and mismanagement in various economic sectors even at the highest levels of government
- The vast disparity between wealth, education, healthcare and employment levels in the 'Muslim North' versus the 'Christian South'.
- Tensions arising from Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta State wanting bigger shares of oil and gas production; leading to disparity in the quantum of funds allocated to the states in the oil producing areas versus the states in the North, where no Northern states produce any oil or gas, and there is an overreliance on federal allocation derived from oil revenue because of negligible internal revenue generation in states.
- The underdevelopment of a number of natural resources and sectors, e.g. agriculture, mining due to the focus since independence on Nigeria's oil wealth
- Poverty
- Unemployment and underemployment
- Land disputes, and lack of clearly demarcated grazing grounds for the nomadic Fulani cattle herders
- Lack of assistance of the part of government to victims of violence housed in refugee camps to enable them to re-establish normal life

d) Social and Ethnic

- A pervading sense of fear due to insecurity and instability
- The undermining and underfunding of traditional social tribal and ethnic leaderships by the state and federal government
- Residual tensions from the Biafra war particularly between the Hausas and the Igbos
- Tribal and ethnic disputes and cultural tensions
- Illiteracy and poor education
- Drug abuse among sectors of the young
- The undervaluing of the role of women, particularly in conflict resolution

e) Legal

- Perhaps the biggest problem of all (in Plateau State at least): legal tensions between the rights of ‘indigenes’ and those of ‘settlers’. The current Nigerian constitution refers in passing to ‘indigenes’ of states. This has been used to exclude ‘settlers’ of the state from free healthcare, education, land and jobs and other benefits. Moreover, some ‘settlers’ have been officially documented in that state for over one hundred years (such as the Hausa in Plateau State)—well before Nigeria’s independence in 1960—and yet are still defined by the older, majority ‘indigenes’ (which usually dominate leadership and control of local governments in the states) as ‘settlers’, in order to monopolize the benefits of the state. Each state has its own different and arbitrary definition of who is an ‘indigene’ and who is a settler’, and each state sets its own arbitrary policies for favouring its indigenes in healthcare, public education, land distribution, jobs and other benefits. All this flies against other parts of the Nigerian Constitution which guarantee all citizens equal rights. It is an enormous problem that needs to be solved or resolved at the Federal and Constitution levels, perhaps with a Constitutional clarification or amendment.
- The lack of universal rule of law
- Wide-spread injustice by Judiciary, the executive, the police and military
- Extra-judicial killings, suppression and torture by police and military, and lack of accountability and punishment for that
- ‘Impunity’: the lack of willingness or ability to punish those directly or indirectly responsible for incidents of violence especially when these are powerful personalities in society (‘Big man’ / ‘Little man’ syndrome: the little man gets punished, the big man is unscathed)

The joint delegation did not see direct first hand evidence of all the issues listed above. Therefore these comments are based on a mixture of personal observation, conversations with individuals and groups while in the country, and research done before, during and shortly after the visit.

Summary

In summary, the joint delegation believes that the primary causes of the current tension and conflict in Nigeria are not inherently based in religion but rather, rooted in a complex matrix of political, social, ethnic, economic, and legal problems, among which the issue of justice—or the lack of it—looms large as a common factor.

Nevertheless, the joint delegation acknowledges that there is a possibility that the current tension and conflict might become subsumed by its religious dimension (especially along geographical ‘religious fault-lines’) and so particularly warns against letting this idea—through misperception and simplification— become a self-fulfilling prediction.

NO Recommendations:

The WCC and RABIIT will not, as international fact-finding reports often do, presume to advise the Nigerian people or Government institutes how to resolve their own problems—it suffices to identify them from a neutral, external perspective—because obviously Nigerians know best how to deal with them. In what follows, however, the WCC and RABIIT will say what *they* intend to do to help; bearing in mind that resolving some smaller problems—especially problems that seem theologically-driven—can help make the larger problems of which they are a part, less intractable and more easily manageable.

E. CONCLUSION: THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE WCC AND RABIIT TO NIGERIA, AS A RESULT OF THIS VISIT

The WCC and RABIIT want to offer—by the grace of God—an ongoing commitment to the situation in Nigeria. The following specific projects have been agreed upon (the first three being specifically formulated to combat the purely religious aspects of the problems in Nigeria):

- a. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to publish, separately, substantial volumes on the theology of peace in their respective religions and to publish them in Nigeria with Nigerian participation and, if possible, translate them into languages. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that these texts make their way into Nigerian school and university religious curricula.
- b. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to work together to encourage publication by a group of Nigerian Christians and Muslims a booklet in popular format distilling the understanding of peace and harmony in both Christian and Muslim Scriptures and, if possible, translate them into languages. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that this text makes its way into Nigerian school and university religious and civic curricula.
- c. WCC and RABIIT plan, God willing, to work with individuals and institutions in Nigeria to develop a common statement for people to sign, based on both their religious traditions, pledging themselves to work for the peace and wellbeing of Nigeria. WCC and RABIIT also plan, God willing, to try to ensure that this common statement makes its way into Nigerian school and university religious and civic curricula.
- d. WCC and RABIIT will, God willing, seek partners to enable the opening of a neutral information-collection and archive centre, ideally both virtually and on the ground in Nigeria, which will facilitate the sharing of stories, allow the voices of those who feel themselves voiceless to be heard and recorded, and assist with the collecting of accurate data about incidents of violence, online and through hotlines. The aim of this will be to make an accurate, impartial and indelible record of injustices, violence and atrocities which can serve not only as a deterrent but also as an honest starting point for future solutions.
- e. WCC and RABIIT will, God willing, stand ready for other projects, within their capacities, that Nigeria may need or request in the future.
- f. WCC and RABIIT *may*—if funds and interested and suitable partners are found—also help to raise international awareness on the Nigeria issue, by organising a conference or by including the topic in major international conferences or forums on religious discourse. This could help raise the profile for the need for assistance from all quarters, before the problem explodes even further.

The crisis in Nigeria must no longer be seen as a localised issue.

APPENDIX

Joint press release issued at a press conference in Abuja on the evening of 25th May, 2012

‘We are a delegation of Muslims and Christians from a number of countries around the world, with senior roles in our respective religious communities. We have come on this working visit to Nigeria, under the auspices of the Jordanian Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute and the World Council of Churches, to express to the people of Nigeria, and to their religious and political leadership, the concerns and anxieties of the international community about the current situation in this country. We also come here to express our solidarity and our prayers for all the people of Nigeria and in particular those who have been the victims of violence in any form.

We have been told that we are the first high-level international inter-religious delegation of Christians and Muslims to visit Nigeria, certainly in recent years. We have valued being accompanied also in our visit by a number of Nigerian Christian and Muslim religious leaders. We hope by our visit to demonstrate an international model of Muslims and Christians working together in inter-religious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions. We bear witness that we believe that both Christianity and Islam are religions which long for peace, and that in both our faiths love of God and love of our neighbour must belong together.

Before coming to your country, in preparation for our visit, we met with the ambassadors of Nigeria in a number of our own lands. One ambassador, in commending the visit, challenged the group to ‘Seek out the truth and share it’. This we have sought to do, and will seek to follow up, in spite of the inevitable constraints on our work due to the length of our visit. As well as meeting members of the Muslim and Christian communities here in Abuja, we have visited Kaduna and Jos and met with community representatives in both places.

In hearing the pain of those who have spoken to us we also caught a glimmer of their dreams, and the hopes of many, both religious leaders and ordinary people, that a transformed reality is possible. We express our admiration of all those who spoke to us in a way that made it clear that they did not want their faith to be used as a pretext to propagate violence. We look forward to the day when the Christians and Muslims of Nigeria may offer an example of working together to the international community.

We now need to digest what we have seen, heard and experienced, and we are committed to writing a detailed report of our experiences within the coming month. In this we will make some recommendations as well as specific suggestions relating to our own continued commitment to the welfare of Nigeria and Nigeria’s people.

We have been very grateful for the welcome and hospitality we have received during our visit. We give particular thanks for the preparatory work and support of the Christian Council of Nigeria and H.R.E. the Sultan of Sokoto and his staff, without which our work here would not have been possible.’