

[A] Sultan: Muslims, Christians must work together

Muideen Olaniyi, in Religions for Peace Newsletter, July 2010



The Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Saad Abubakar, has said Muslims and Christians must work together to establish an inter-faith regime that shall serve as a true model to the rest of the world.

Abubakar, who is also the President-General of Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Co-Chairman, Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), said this at the quarterly meeting of NIREC in Owerri, Imo State.

He said, Nothing is impossible with Gods assistance and with the hard work, sincerity, perseverance and sacrifice of the nations stakeholders.

Sultan Abubakar said NIREC must not relent in its efforts to contribute its quota to the emergence of a peaceful, vibrant and prosperous Nigeria, stating that all Nigerians must toy with the need for peace, stability and mutual co-existence.

We must take the bull by the horn and move forward with courage and determination, to build on the achievements we have recorded in the last few years and to continue to strengthen the bases of our collective existence.

We must also endeavour to put the skeptics to shame and work together to establish an inter-faith regime, he said.

The Sultan, who used the occasion to hail the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for conducting its national elections in an atmosphere of peace, amity and cordiality, congratulated the new CAN President and Co-Chairman of NIREC Pastor Ayodele Joseph Oritsejafor.

He expressed hope that the new CAN President will marshal his irrepressible energy, his incisive knowledge and his vast organizational experiences to sustain the current vigour and momentum in the inter-religious relations in Nigeria and to move NIREC to even greater heights.

The Sultan also expressed gratitude to the former CAN President Archbishop John Onaiyekan for being a leader of great honor and dignity, who is forthright in his views, honest and sincere in his commitment and who always stood on the side of truth and justice.

He said the inter-religious group is looking forward to enjoying his wise counsels, invaluable contribution and active participation in NIREC, as it faces the challenges of peace, understanding and development for Nigerians.

The NSCIA President praised Imo State Governor Ikedi Ohakim for his efforts to engender peace and progress and safeguard the lives and property of Nigerians wherever they may decide to reside in the legitimate pursuit of their socio-economic activities.

[B] Church delegation says Nigeria's religious communities must work for peace

Jenna Lyle, *Christian Today*, 27 May 2010

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.delegation.says.nigerias.religious.communities.must.work.for.peace/25987.htm>

A delegation from the World Council of Churches has called upon religious leaders in Nigeria to encourage people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds to work together for lasting peace and harmony in communities afflicted by violence.

Following their four-day visit to the country earlier in the month, the WCC's Living Letters team said there was an urgent need for security to be strengthened in the most volatile regions in Nigeria, namely those in the Central Plateau State, where sectarian clashes have claimed the lives of hundreds of Christians and Muslims in recent months.

The team noted a lack of trust among ethnic groups and warned that the authorities were failing to protect people in the conflict-hit areas.

It recommended that religious communities come together to appeal to the government and the security agencies to be "even-handed" in their efforts to bring peace to the Central Plateau State and neighbouring states, and to take measures to ensure that the upcoming elections were free and fair.

The visit included a meeting with the Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC), which was set up by Christian and Muslim leaders three years ago in a bid to quell communal violence.

The council is headed up jointly by the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Onayekan, and spiritual leader of Muslims in Nigeria, the Sultan of Sokoto, Haji Saad Abubakar.

Archbishop Onayekan said Muslims and Christians in Nigeria were "in the same boat", where neither felt like they were in the majority or minority.

Onayekan admitted that NIREC's vision was not shared by many Christian and Muslim leaders at the local level.

"There are many of my priests who don't consider my optimism for dialogue and this also applies to the other side," he said.

“My conviction is that people living in the grassroots don't have problems living together but the imams and pastors leading them sometimes send wrong signals by the kind of messages they preach.”

Hajia Bilikisu Yusuf, of NIREC, criticised the Nigerian government for failing to bring adequate security to troubled areas.

“The problem we are having is failure of security and failure of leadership,” she said.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission on International Affairs, added: "As law and order collapse, the security of people is often threatened. Overt and covert alliances between political and religious organizations often lead to conflicts in communities.

“It is in this context that legal measures to separate politics from religion should be pursued as a matter of state policy through appropriate structural changes or statutory instruments in the country.”