AFRICAN NOTES

Contents

Inter-faith Conflict Mediation Mechanisms and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religious conflicts have been prevalent in Nigeria in the last couple of decades. Currently, the country is experiencing a scourge of violent Islamic fundamentalism which is threatening its cohesion. Several violent religious conflicts in different parts of the country have pushed citizens to, sometimes, query the modalities of the very existence of the country within the context of the uneasy co-habitation of diverse people of over 250 cultures – in a country which had hitherto witnessed harmonious inter-cultural relationships for over a century. Several strategies, ranging from policy instruments, national dialogues (one was concluded in 2014), compulsory national youth service, civil and communal initiatives have been evolved to manage ethno-religious relationship among the diverse groups, but these seem to have failed in stopping religious conflicts in certain parts of Nigeria. Inter-faith mechanisms, which involve deliberate facilitation and management of interaction among the leaders and followers of dominant religious groups at the national, state and community levels have, therefore, been adopted by governments and community based organisations to directly address religious frictions and prevent such frictions from degenerating into violence. Inter-faith dialogues, education and enlightenments remain major features of inter-faith mediation, but these are also combined with the economic capacity building of religious adherents to distract them from the frustrations pushing them into religious violence. This paper aims at reviewing some of the interfaith peacebuilding efforts for reducing and managing religious conflicts in Nigeria and assessing how these efforts have been facilitating peaceful relationships among diverse religious groups in the country. Consequently, the paper will suggest ways of strengthening and improving such mechanisms to curtail the dangerous trend of Islamic radicalisation and proliferation of terrorism activities making the Northeastern part of the country ungovernable and spawning distrust, insecurity and uncertainty for the people.

Geography of Religion and Ethnicity in Nigeria

Religion, ethnicity and politics are so intertwined in Nigeria that very thin lines often separate them. In Northern Nigeria, Islam is the predominant religion as majority of the Hausa-Fulani people are Muslims. However, there are Christian minorities in many communities and this number is buoyed by settlers who regularly come from other parts of the country. Religious conflict is one of the post-colonial problems that have been confronting Nigeria. Many lives have been lost in the course of this problem and economic activities have been paralysed in some parts of the country. Many communities and groups that had been living harmoniously in the past have become estranged following bloody clashes occasioned by religious violence, while developmental efforts have been paralysed because of hatred, distrusts and clashes rooted in religious differences. Incidentally, the two dominant religions causing conflict are foreign religions. The indigenous religious adherents that had lived peacefully in their varieties, even before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, have been co-existing with the two dominant religions, except when one of the dominant religions attempts imposing its tenets on them, or deploy force to convert them.

The spate of religious crises in Nigeria has increased over the past two decades and especially since the inception of the third republic. Some Northern states have introduced and started implementing the Shar'ia form of justice system, causing frictions in states and communities having mixed population of the predominant religions (See Richardson, 2010).

While the Muslims claim the right to practice and live within the legal precincts of their belief, the Christians resist the imposition of Shar'ia legal system on them, citing the secularity of the Nigerian constitution as the basis of resistance. Incidents of religious frictions remain very low in predominantly Muslim populated states such as Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Jigawa, whereas in states such as Kaduna, Plateau, Adamawa, Taraba and Nassarawa, having a fair mix of Christians and Muslims or where there are predominantly Christians, there have been relatively more frictions and sectarian violence. Many of the residential parts of the metropolis in these states have been unwittingly and literally divided into two, each part exclusively inhabited by Christians and Muslims. This trend has become a serious threat to national cohesion and human development. Many communities that had enjoyed peaceful, harmonious co-existence have redirected communal resources and efforts to prosecute religious wars. Its immediate outcome is government's inability to execute developmental projects in such communities to enhance human development and building infrastructure for growth in Northern Nigeria.

On the contrary, the Western part of Nigeria has almost equal number of Muslims and Christians co-existing along with a minority of traditional religious worshippers. With a population that is predominantly Yoruba, the people appear to have resolved that religious diversity is a reality and they have learnt to live with it because incidents of religious conflicts remain very low and almost non-existent in most communities in this part of

Nigeria. In addition to accommodating the Arabic culture which brought Islam from the Northern part of the African continent, the inhabitants of the western part of Nigeria also embrace the Western culture and civilisation, and Christianity. They have evolved a culture of tolerance for accommodating religious diversity and discouraging extremism in whatever form. This has been adduced for the low level of ethno-religious crises in this part.

The population of the eastern and southern parts of Nigeria is predominantly Christian, with small minorities of Muslims and traditional religion adherents. There is virtually no incidence of religious conflicts in these parts except for rare reprisal attacks on Hausa-Fulani Muslims residing in the east following major ethno-religious violence and attacks on Igbo Christian settlers in the Northern part of Nigeria. Such incidence often happens whenever the victims of such attacks are brought back for burial in eastern communities.

The Maitasine riot of 1980 was the first major religious riot which occurred in Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria and signalled the beginning of the negative trend of religious intolerance and violence in Nigeria. The riot was inspired by the Islamic revolution which earlier occurred in Iran in 1978 and the rising wave of Islamic fundamentalism which swept through Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Wright, 2006). Even though this riot was successfully put under control, it established the emergence of Islamic fundamentalists and extremist groups holding various extremist ideologies. Subsequently several other religious riots took place in Jimeta, Kafanchan, Kaduna,

Jos and other towns and cities in Northern Nigeria where Muslim fundamentalists attempted to eradicate the activities of other religious adherents but met stiff resistance which led to massive killings and destruction of properties.

The second wave of religious violence erupted after the inception of the fourth democratic republic in Nigeria because some Northern state governments insisted on implementing the Shar'ia legal code citing a predominantly Muslim population as justification. This led to widespread controversies over Nigeria's constitution, but since the constitution also recognises the rights of the different constituent groups, the willing states were allowed to begin the implementation of the Shar'ia law (Richardson, 2010). Its operation and implementation however, met with resistance from the minority groups in other states, especially in states having heavy presence of Christians, such as Kaduna and others as earlier enumerated. Since 1999, there had been about four serious violent religious conflicts in Kaduna state, where about two thousand citizens have died.

In the last decade, government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have taken steps to address religious crises. Some of such initiatives include the establishment of policies that could ensure equity among the adherents of the various religions at the national level and projects that could guaranty the fundamental human rights of citizens irrespective of their religious belief. Part of such efforts is the sponsorship of adherents on religious pilgrimage, a situation that has provoked serious controversy among citizens.

Some citizens believe that government resources should not be expended on religious matters in view of the secularity of the Nigerian constitution, while others hold a contrary opinion. However, the most important structural effort at addressing religious crises in Nigeria is the emergence of inter-faith mediation organisations which has initiated various programmes for uniting the leaders and followers of the two dominant religions for dialogues, peaceful co-existence and deeper understanding of the doctrines and views of the other religions. The bodies are facilitated by governments and the civil society and have made constructive impacts in facilitating inter-religious understanding in communities across Nigeria. Even though the efforts of such organisations have been constrained in Northeastern Nigeria where the activities of the Boko Haram extremists have led to the collapse of governance, economic and social activities, they continue to render humanitarian services effectively.

The focus of this essay is to explore the activities and impacts of inter-faith mediation organisations in Nigeria and how their activities have impacted peacebuilding efforts across the country. Also, it is to explore the problems confronting inter-faith organisations and how they could be strengthened to effectively curtail religious crises, especially in volatile communities across Nigeria. In order to achieve the foregoing objectives, this paper will engage the following questions in exploring the subject matter: What are the fundamental objectives underscoring the emergence and activities of inter-faith mediation bodies in Nigeria? What are the specific strategies adopted by inter-faith

mediation bodies to achieve their objectives? What are the specific achievements of inter-faith mediation bodies in encouraging peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the dominant religions in Nigeria? What are the problems confronting the inter-faith mediation agencies in carrying out their functions? How can the inter-faith mediation agencies improve their performances to ensure peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the various religions in Nigeria?

Inter-faith Mediation: A Historical and Theoretical Discourse

Inter-faith mediation is a common feature in post-conflict environments especially in communities that have hitherto witnessed religious crises. Such initiatives are not novel and are common in countries that have witnessed protracted religious violence in communities where people hold matters of faith and beliefs very strongly. As a value-based form of conflict, religious conflicts are usually vociferous and extremely violent as adherents often remain under heavy indoctrination in worship arenas and having been attuned to be prepared to lay down their lives in order to advance their religious beliefs and precepts. The history of the crusaders and the exploits of the jihadists in the middle ages is an attestation to the extent people could go in defending their religious beliefs.

Inter-faith dialogues and mediation is as old as the history of inter-relations among major religious groups across the world, which has often bred violence. Ayantayo (2010) outlines examples of inter-faith dialogues among Muslims, Hindus, Sikhists and Christians in

India initiated by Emperor Akbar the Great. Under the Ottoman Turks from 15th to 19th century, there were dialogues among Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews and Sufis in the Balkans. In the contemporary times, King Juan Carlos of Spain hosted, in 2008, an inter-religious dialogue among Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hinduists and Taoists in Madrid. In 2009, the Hindu preacher, Morari Bapu convened a World Religions Dialogue and Symphony in Gujarat, where he brought together the leaders of the major world religions in an effort to initiate peaceful interaction and facilitate peace building among them in the face of imminent major violent conflicts among the prominent religions across the world. Various efforts are initiated by international non-governmental organisations and community-based inter-faith agencies to facilitate dialogues among the various religions. The World Vision International, for instance, has initiated several projects across the world to encourage and facilitate religious understanding among diverse religious groups across the world. One of such projects is the collaboration with the Davao Ministerial Inter-faith (DMI) in Mindanao, Philippines, which brought together about fifty religious leaders including Roman Catholics, Protestants and Muslims for community based social actions to foster understanding and build confidence across faiths (Garred and Castro, 2011). Such initiatives have tempered volatile multi-faith environments and reduced tension in potentially combustible environments where poor inter-faith interaction exists among populations.

The key objective of inter-faith dialogue is to emphasis the similarities inherent in the religious doctrines of the various belief systems. Practically, most of the major world religions basically preach the same central doctrine – peaceful living among wo(men) and obedience to the commands of a superior being. They emphasis holy living and charity to all living beings through accounts of prophets and emissaries that mediate between men and the superior beings in the various religious books and literatures. However, contradictions come in to religious teachings as a result of the activities of religious leaders and entrepreneurs, who determine and prescribe to followers, the extent to which they must attach dogmas to their religious beliefs and insisting on their readiness to make supreme sacrifices in pursuit of such religious beliefs based on instructions they received from the superior being, which are often diversions from the original tenets. Such often breed fundamentalism and extremism and eventually antagonism and violence against the adherents of other religions.

Mediation is a critical word when it comes into the activities of inter-faith organisations. In the classic sense, mediation involves intervention of a third party in bringing together two opposites for mutual interaction in order to facilitate better understanding of each other's position and to jointly chart the way for co-existence in an environment of mutual understanding and respect. The success of this effort is, however, predicated on a number of principles which the mediator must adhere to in order to gain the confidence of the parties he's trying to mediate. Neutrality and sincerity are critical factors in the mediation process. Both parties must have a strong confidence in

the intention of the mediator to assist them to arrive at a peaceful resolution of their problems for their own good and not for some selfish ulterior purposes of the mediator. This factor often determines the extent that conflicting parties would be ready to open up and express their feelings about the kind of interactions they are expected to establish with the opposite parties. It explains why successful inter-faith mediation is usually conducted by individuals who often do not have any emotional attachment to any of the groups involved in mediation. They never attempt to encourage conversion of the groups to the other faith but rather emphasis the common factors among the groups and the need for them to understand the right of the other groups to co-exist. In order to achieve this end, educating the parties must be the first assignment to be emphasised by mediators at the initial stage of any inter-faith mediation process.

The most important objective of inter-faith mediation is for peacebuilding purposes. The classic explanation of peacebuilding as offered by International Alert (1995), is the employment of measures to consolidate peaceful relations and deter the emergence or escalation of tensions, which may lead to conflict. The concept also refers to post-hostility actions taken to forestall future eruptions by strengthening structures capable of consolidating a settlement already achieved. It involves establishing structures, programs, economic and social initiatives which could help in restoring stability and enhance reconstruction in an already devastated environment or in restoring broken relationship. Peacebuilding can occur in two stages. There

is pre-conflict peacebuilding and there is post-conflict peacebuilding. Pre-conflict peacebuilding are efforts and initiatives put in place to ensure that an anticipated conflict does not manifest and bloom. It involves discovering and pre-empting a potential conflict either through an early warning system or through some other mechanisms, and ensuring that such conflict does not manifest or when it does, does not escalate into violence. Therefore, all mediation efforts at this stage are geared towards reconciliation of differences among opposing parties and establishing mutual understanding of the positions of each other to prevent further degeneration of their relationships. Postconflict peacebuilding involves efforts geared at restoring broken and already devastated relationship as a result of violence or physical actions among opposing parties. This involves confidence building to ensure that conflicting parties will be willing to come together to re-build their relationship and continue on the path of peace. More efforts are required at this stage because of the wounds parties have already inflicted upon themselves as a result of conflicts among them and genuine peacebuilding might require more time and resources to take place.

Inter-faith mediation peacebuilding in Nigeria takes place both at the pre-conflict stage and at the post-conflict stage in different locations and communities. Even though post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives were the initial dominant features of inter-faith activities, many communities, especially those hosting the adherents of the two dominant religions, have embraced pre-conflict inter-faith activities because of the experiences of other

communities that have witnessed religious violence. In essence, preventative peacebuilding is seen to be more useful than remedial peacebuilding, and that is being encouraged by government. The people of the western part of Nigeria seem to have perfected the art of balancing the interests of the adherents of the two dominant religions in community affairs to the extent that even when equal representation of interests are not possible, communities ensure that adequate recognitions are accorded to the interests of the rival religions in such affairs.

Activities of Inter-faith Mediation Bodies in Nigeria

Inter-faith mediation organisations emerged in Nigeria as part of measures to manage and reduce the wave of religious violence in the country. According to Omotosho (2013), the aim of inter-faith mediation, dialogue and co-operation is to "create harmony (not unity) among religious and spiritual communities, with the goal of creating a more just, peaceful and sustainable world". Since religious matters are often value-laden, emotional and very often non-negotiable, the unity of the dominant religions is neither realistic nor desirable. Therefore, the focus of most of the inter-faith bodies in Nigeria is on how to facilitate understanding and maintain peaceful co-existence among the adherents of the various faiths in the country. There are basically two variants of such bodies: there are those that were inspired and sustained by the government and there are those which emerged as a result of the initiatives of the civil society and citizens who felt concerned enough to engage in

mediation and advocacy work to reduce religious conflicts among the civil population. Such civil society bodies are sustained by the local resources they mobilise from communities within which they work and from local and international funding agencies. However, the most inspiring factor among such bodies is the experience of losses among individuals who established such organisations after the violence resulting from various religious conflicts. Some of them lost family members, friends or neighbours during previous religious violence incidents, while others had been rendered invalid due to loss of a part of their bodies or loss of functions of other parts. Such losses had led to their convictions to say 'never again' would they allow such incidents to continue to happen in the society. A typical example of such bodies is the Inter-faith Mediation Centre (IMC) established by Imam Muhammed Ashafa, a Muslim cleric, and Pastor James Wuye, a Pentecostal Christian Pastor. The establishment of the organisations was inspired by the experiences of the two individuals, after Ashafa lost members of his very close family and Wuye lost his right arm during the violent religious conflict in Kaduna State in 1995. The mission of their organisation is to "create a peaceful society in Nigeria and beyond through non violence and strategic engagement" (IMC Pamphlet). Other organisations that belong to the league of civil society-initiated inter-faith bodies include Inter-faith Action for Peace (IFAP), Conference of Religious Educators and Leaders (COREL), International Peace League (IPL), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Women's Wing of the Christian

Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN).

Among its major achievements, the IMC has facilitated peace agreements among key religious leaders in volatile locations in Northern Nigeria. Such agreements include the Kaduna Peace Declaration signed by Christian and Muslim leaders after the Sharia crisis and Miss World riot in 2002; the Yelwan/Shendam peace affirmation signed in Plateau State after the 2005 religious riots, among others. The organisation constantly organises workshops and conferences to facilitate dialogue among the people of different faiths across Nigeria and has even extended its operations to Kenya to assist in dousing the violence that followed the 2007 disputed elections. The IMC and other inter-faith organisations also provide counselling and resettlement services to people who have been affected by religious violence. They have established projects to rehabilitate ex-comba-tants and militia men and boys who have participated in religious violence. They run programmes in resettlement camps to educate and re-programme such individuals who have experienced trauma to interact with others who have had similar combat experiences from the other faith and facilitate dialogue among them. The organisation employs professional counsellors who direct the attention of participants in such camps to the similarities in the two major books of faith – the Koran and the Bible- and the fact that some individuals may be exploiting their ignorance for political motives and to enrich themselves. After such training, the inter-faith bodies provide economic opportunities to participants by equipping them with skills and providing financial assistance for them to establish businesses. This effort tends to prevent participants from being recruited into violent purposes and turning them into peace advocates in volatile communities. Such projects are supported by funds mobilised from international funding agencies.

Inter-faith organisations, including the IMC also engage in trauma work with women who have been victims of religious violence. As is usual, women and children come out worse during such violence, either by experiencing physical trauma or by losing husbands, fathers and heads of families. The organisations provide rehabilitation camps, relief materials and counselling services for these categories of citizens. After coming out of the traumatic experiences, the organisations assist in re-integrating women back into the economic environment by providing micro funds to start businesses and machines that could assist the women in agricultural product processing, for creative activities and for trading. Ultimately, some of the women who would have suddenly become heads of their families could be able to cater for their families and contribute to the economies of their communities.

In the Northeastern part of Nigeria, which is still experiencing violent attacks by Boko Haram insurgents, inter-faith organisations have provided relief materials for victims of the violence. They have also embarked on media advocacies on behalf of the victims and have initiated programs to mobilise relief materials for the victims of the violence. Such efforts have, to a large extent, provided succour for families and individuals who have experienced losses in the religious violence. The presence of inter-faith organisations could be noticed

among relief bodies who have been working over the past two years in refugee camps established to accommodate the victims of the rampaging militants in that part of Nigeria.

The other varieties of inter-faith bodies are the ones inspired and supported by the government, both at state and at federal levels. The Nigerian Inter-religious Council (NIREC) was inspired and supported by the federal government to facilitate dialogue and understanding among the leaders of the major religions in Nigeria. The body consists of leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Jamatul Nasril Islam, the apex bodies of both the Christian and Muslim organisations respectively in Nigeria. The Sultan of Sokoto, the President of CAN and other religious leaders across Nigeria are members of this body. The organisation is co-chaired by the heads of the two most prominent religions in Nigeria. The NIREC organises seminars, workshops, conferences and periodic meetings to address issues of peace and conflict resolutions among the various religious adherents in Nigeria. The organisation, which is more or less a political entity, also tries to arrive at consensus on sensitive national issues which have the potentials of breeding misunderstanding among the various religions in the country. It has instituted quarterly meetings in which the representatives of all the religions are gathered together to discuss and dialogue on issues that could cause frictions among them. It also advises government on steps to be taken to facilitate religious harmony across Nigeria. The equivalents of NIREC are established in some states such as Niger and Kaduna to facilitate peaceful co-existence among religious groups. Such bodies are supported by state government finances and are expected to support government efforts in ensuring peace in the states that established them.

Problems of Inter-faith Mediation

In spite of the efforts of inter-faith mediation organisations to engender and foster peace among various religious adherents in Nigeria, it is remarkable to note that violence, rooted in religion, still occurs intermittently across Nigeria. This is an indication that the inter-faith mediation system in the country is not a perfect system and still faces a number of challenges which sometimes frustrate its efforts. In the first instance, it has been recognised that some of the religious leaders who participate in inter-religious mediations have not displayed sincere commitment to the process in order to engender genuine reconciliation among the different religious groups. Some of them are motivated to engage in inter-religious mediation by various reasons, including the pecuniary benefits accruable there from. Others are more interested in the political privileges and power that inter-faith mediation confers on them. As a result of this, the confidence reposed in them by their followers is quickly eroded and therefore, whatever reconciliation initiated by them is not taken seriously by the followers.

Many of the religious and secular leaders who engage in mediation activities do not have the required skills and education to engage in such activities. Mediation requires some specific skills and tools which enables a mediator to conduct the process without further aggravating the prevailing conflict. Religious

matters are even more sensitive to mediate especially in an environment where they have been been heavily enmeshed into politics. Unfortunately, there are no formal or informal programs in place to educate leaders who engage in inter-faith mediation and to equip them with requisite skills, except for personal efforts to acquire relevant training by such leaders. As a result of this lacuna, some of the inter-faith mediations unwittingly aggravate existing religious frictions because mediators could not demonstrate appropriate skills such as neutrality, sincerity of purpose, educating the parties about the process and encouraging parties to freely express their minds during mediation processes. Some mediators even sometimes exhibit the very attitudes which led to the problems they were trying to solve among the conflict parties they are trying to reconcile.

Another problem faced by inter-faith mediation initiatives is that some of the religious groups approach the process with very fixated and rigid attitudes. Ordinarily, a mediation process should be a flexible, give and take event, with each party ready to offer concessions to the others while accepting concessions from others. However, some of the religious groups sometimes refuse to perceive issues from the perspectives of others, which makes bargaining difficult in the mediation process. The tendency towards extremism and fundamentalism among some religious adherents sometimes accounts for this constraint. At other times, the disparity in knowledge of tenets of religions among those taking part in the mediation and dialogue process, and their followers who view them

with suspicion is a problem. Followers sometimes think their leaders have compromised with the other parties for peace to reign and that such compromises had put their interests at risk. This problem could be solved if inter-faith mediations are supported by massive public enlightenment to educate the public, especially religious adherents, on the need to accommodate the people of other faiths so that peace and development could take place.

The activities of conflict entrepreneurs remain a major problem militating against the success of inter-faith mediation initiatives. Some individuals who benefit from religious conflicts and violence tend to perceive the activities of inter-faith mediation bodies as endangering their economic interests and would spare no effort to frustrate the process. Such "soldiers of fortune", who profit from sales of subversive religious materials, weapons, who collect contracts for re-construction of damaged infrastructures and facilities etc., would often attempt to cause further discords among the various religious bodies by spreading false information that could disrupt dialogue processes so that the society could relapse into conflicts and disagreements from which they could benefit. Such individuals also fuel the embers of fundamentalism and extremism and often lurk in corners of venues where inter-religious dialogues are taking place to incite dissidents and inject negative opinions into the process. This is a problem that many of the inter-faith mediation organisations are yet to understand clearly and device strategies to contend with.

Poor education and widespread ignorance

among Nigerians, especially in areas where ethno-religious conflicts are prevalent, is a major hindrance to the success of inter-faith mediation. Many of the poorly educated individuals do not clearly understand the doctrines of their faiths and they are amenable to misinterpretation of religious doctrines by misguided leaders engaging in such activities for ulterior motives. Even when sincere attempts are made to expose the religious adherents to the truth, their low level of education, prevents them from accepting that they had hitherto been exposed to false doctrines. This situation also is predicated on a high level of poverty among the population. Because of the poor economic situation and the prevailing bad governance at the various levels, it is easy to raise religious dissidents and extremists with financial incentives and misdirect them to engage in negative religious activities. This poses a big challenge to inter-faith bodies whose efforts could easily be frustrated by such activities. Since Nigeria is a vast country, it is difficult to completely monitor those who support religious extremism and the movement of fundamentalist elements around the country. Therefore, one cannot be too sure that religious conflicts could not break out anywhere across the country.

Inadequate or lack of resources to implement inter-faith activities and peacebuilding programs is a major problem facing inter-faith mediation organisations. The scale of devastation in the Northeastern part of Nigeria is currently high due to the activities of the insurgent Boko Haram group. The inter-faith organisations often expressed the willingness to carry out reconstruction and reconciliation projects in this part of the country but are constrained by inadequate resources. Some of the organisations established by the civil society often find it difficult to mobilise resources among their members to engage their target groups in dialogue. Even simple means of mobility are sometimes not available to reach places where potential religious problems could occur to conduct preventive peacebuilding activities. Organisations that rely on resources from government are equally not immune from the problems of in-adequate resources. However, for such organisations, even when the resources are available to them to implement their programmes, the bureaucratic hurdles before accessing such resources could sometimes frustrate their efforts. NIREC, for example, sometimes could not implement some of its programmes because the expected resources from government were not forthcoming or came late.

Future of Inter-faith Mediation and Peacebuilding

Inter-faith mediation and peacebuilding activities will continue to take place in Nigeria for a long time to come because of the volatile inter-faith relationship among Nigerian citizens. The spread of Islamic fundamentalism across the world and the resulting global conflict from the activities of militant Islamic extremists are bound to fuel more inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Even though much of the religious violence that occurs is currently restricted to Northern Nigeria, other parts of the country where people of diverse religions and ethnic nationalities co-habit are also at risk of

experiencing religious conflicts and violence. It is imperative, therefore, for Nigeria to devise a strategy for curtailing the activities of religious fundamentalists and militants. The international community also has the responsibility of supporting the efforts of Nigerian government in this direction in order to control the proliferation of the activities of global Islamic militants.

From the present situation, it is wise to strengthen the pre-conflict peacebuilding activities of the inter-faith organisations. This pre-emptive measure could mitigate the consequences of religious violence and its impact on the population of Nigeria. Nigeria is a big oil producer and exporter. The target of the religious fundamentalists is to paralyse the economy and socio-political development of the country by orchestrating religious violence, if concerted efforts are not made to prevent them. Therefore, both pre-emptive and preventive measures are needed to stem the tide of religious conflicts in the country. However, these measures should not be left to the inter-faith organisations alone. The Nigerian government and international agencies need to support and strengthen the efforts of these civil society bodies to enable them to carry out these activities effectively and efficiently by capacitating them with training and material support to strengthen their resource base.

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