

*Appendix 67:*

**NOTE: This lecture came too late for inclusion in Vol. 7, where much of it properly belongs. Towards the end of this lecture, Habila Istifanus offers a long list of proposals for improving the Nigerian situation that fits in this Vol. 8. It is a very wholistic set of proposals that covers a wide range. One of its presuppositions is that religious riots are economically motivated. The point I argue in this series is that, though economic and other factors play a definite role, the basic stimulus is religion. For the Proposals find +++++ below.**

**Istifanus' proposals are too many to deal with in this book, let alone doing justice to them. Hence, I treat only a few of those most directly relevant to the religious interests of this book. Those who have read the actual books should understand that "religious interests" are interpreted here in a wide compass, not merely spiritual or churchy stuff. However, I stay close to the very centre in my discussions of Istifanus' proposals.**

Civil Society Political Consolidation And The Challenges Of  
Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Proposals For A Contextual Conflict  
Resolution In Nigeria

**BY  
REV. HABILA M. ISTIFANUS  
(PRESIDENT JPRM & GENERAL SECRETARY  
ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN LAY CENTRES IN AFRICA)**

*[As a matter of concern I would like to dedicate this presentation to two person (Mrs. Christiana Oluwatoyin Oluwasesin and Rev. Ibrahim Yusuf Balami): Mrs. Christiana is a schoolteacher who was killed by Islamic Militants few weeks ago in Gombe while invigilating an examination Balanni's house and Church building were destroyed during a violent demonstration by Islamic militants during a destructive demonstration as a reaction to the cartoon of Prophet Mohammad published in a Danish Newspaper].*

Nigeria is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest world producer of crude oil and the largest black nation in the world. Nigeria by every standard, is expected to be extremely rich. Rather than rank among the best and most prestigious nations in the world, the most populous nation in Africa has become one of the poorest countries predominantly due to corruption. But of equal and grave reason is the destructions of its human recourses, manpower and upcoming generation of able young men and women as a result of several devastating conflicts over several years. The country's population is still largely

uneducated living in very deplorable health conditions. It is no exaggeration that more than 70% of the population has not had any formal education. The World Health Organization (WHO) in a recent research result, said that the average life expectancy of the average Nigerian is 45 years. Otonti Nduka has observed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria has, rather than improved, increased from 28.1% in 1980 - 20% in 1997".

Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Rather than having strength in its diversity, this uniquely multi-tribal country has experienced the most deadly, complicated multi-ethnic and multi-religious violence arguably only after Rwanda and Sudan in Africa, considering the destruction of lives and property over the past twenty or more years.

#### The Participation of Civil Society in Nations Building

The issue of civil society contributing towards nation building is as expedient as the task enormous. One major problem in this area in Nigeria is the fact that successive Governments view the full participation of Civil Society in the democratization of the country with great suspicion. Many civil organizations in Nigeria have contributed so much to the well being of so many people and communities during dictatorship regimes in Nigeria, but whether that has made much sense to successive governments in Nigeria is another thing. I dare say that Civil Societies were in the forefront in the ouster of dictatorial governance in Nigeria. I dare say that in my opinion, the role civil society are currently playing in restructuring the society for strategic development, in Nigeria, are superficial. The concreteness is not there. NGOs, CBOs, FBOs etc. must be taken on board with all sense of seriousness and commitment and their efforts respected and lauded. In some Northern states in Nigeria, particularly where I come from; NGOs are not respected as civil organizations and so their views are rarely considered for anything. The Governments in most of these states see NGO and civil organizations as competitors. If they have their way they will crushed any NGO.

Opinion leaders are of the opinion that most conflicts in Nigeria are essentially the manifestations of poverty and social frustrations.

This is considering the number of conflicts and dimensions these conflicts have taken. Ustaz Ashafa and Evang. Wuye in their submission on the Nigeria situation acknowledge the fact that even though some conflicts that erupted in Nigeria are not of religious nature; they quickly and easily take religious dimension because of the strong ties and affinity to religion by the people.

### **Government official efforts to resolve major conflicts in Nigeria**

I would like to acknowledge some efforts by successive Governments in Nigeria, to resolve some major conflicts in order to bring about peace, stability and unity: The creation of States and Local governments, was with the intention of satisfying different interest groups, especially agitating ethnic/tribal groups. The Federal character commission was established to ensure fairness and balance the issue of employments/appointments to all in Nigeria. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was intended to bring about true integration and national unity. This is expected to guarantee stability. The introduction of Federal unity schools is another effort to integrate the country and to promote tolerance and understanding of various cultures especially among youths. The adoption of various formula of revenue allocation was to reduce tension and gain national acceptability especially in the revenue allocation. In power sharing and the introduction of the multi-party democracy rather than the imposition of two party system, the numerous constitutional conferences organized, even the various forms of military rule, as well as the relocation of the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja have contributed to certain extent in bringing about unity and peace, but it appears all these have generally failed to change the Nigerian situation as expected. Probably it has been operating artificially. The crux of the issue have not been addressed, politically, socially and economically.

\*\*\*\*\*A religious affairs advisory committee was set up by the Federal Government to advice the Federal government on how to go about religious matters, especially in resolving religious conflicts. This committee has remained

just a name. It has been incapacitated by lack of funding and lack of supporting laws that will make it effective.

### **The Causes of the conflicts in Nigeria**

I would like to start by taking a look two presentations on Muslim/Christian dialogue on peace in Jos in two separate statements:

#### ***The Christian puts it this way:***

“Jesus fought no wars, conquered no earthly kingdoms, commanded no army, yet he rules in the hearts of millions of men and women by his offer of love, reconciliation and peace with God, --- Jesus is the epitome of peace --- Jesus is the prince of peace. Jesus never commanded his followers to go to war for any reason; to the Christians therefore no war is holy if it involves bloodshed.”

#### ***The Muslim puts it this way:***

“Peace is indeed the most indispensable principle, which Islam deeply plants in the minds of Muslims; peace therefore became part of their nature. The ‘word Islam is peace’, “--- Islam attach great importance to this value “peace” and that it forms an integral part of the Islamic belief system”.

That is what Christians and Muslims always voice out in the public whenever they are invited to speak on the position of their respective religions on violence in the country. However they still fight and kill one another, destroy properties and displace innocent people! The conclusion of Rev. G. Okezie is that, “war and riots are indication that people are acting according to the wickedness of their evil hearts and not according to the will of the God of peace”. This leaves us with no much to say, except that persons

who therefore utters violent or provocative and inciting words in the name of propagating religion must be arrested dealt with according to the law. This is because we should not see the person as either a Christian or a Muslim. Other wise, we will have to go back to the drawing board to study all over again what the religions in Nigeria really mean by peace and where do they get the meaning.

One major factor that has made conflict persist in Nigeria is the fact that governments in Nigeria-both states and federal- despite "official efforts" to control situation have failed. The governments have, by commission and omission, made Nigeria a fertile ground for breeding of all types of conflicts. One writer has observed that the Nigeria government has never had the courage, and the political will, to punish perpetrators of such deadly conflicts. It is observed that the Nigerian Governments have always been intimidated by powerful individuals in Northern Nigeria, and as a result the federal government never challenged most of the religious riots in Northern Nigeria and no serious attempt is made to bring the people to justice. "Nigerian leaders are so much intimidated by the Northern Nigeria. In fact it was becoming too clear that in Nigeria, for every Government that wants to survive and live well, **'the fear of Kaduna Mafia is the beginning of wisdom'**. Many people in Nigeria have made the observation that whenever there is religious violence, the presidency does nothing, the president either remain silent over it or make a passive statement; unlike in the Niger Delta where he promptly responded with military dispatch. Obasanjo for example; is mostly criticized for his silence over quite a number of religious issues and religious crisis, results of which has always been other outbreak of terrible violence. The president was openly condemned for his

nonchalance at the adoption of sharia in some states in Northern Nigeria. On the adoption of sharia when Obasanjo was informed and advised of what consequent it might hold for the future and the stability of the Country, he was quoted as simply saying, "Sharia will die a natural death".

What is quite amazing is that even as we speak today, you go to the street in major northern towns and you are faced with the irresponsible attitude of those who take joy in provocative preaching in Nigeria, and the unconcern attitude of the people towards that, people that are suppose to stop such happenings do nothing. Such attitudes give room for the youths to think it is okay to attack other people and their beliefs.

The provocative and unguarded public utterances, which are not curtailed or stopped by the government, have been serious threats to peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. But who is monitoring? the government is busy fighting perceived opponents and the Religious leaders are busy making converts while turning themselves into political pressure groups and power brokers for egotistical and personal aggrandizement . The government and the Religious leaders remain adamant because of the fear of becoming unpopular or loosing the people behind them. People they use as bargaining chips. Everybody is afraid to say anything unfavorable to his/her religion even if it is the bitter truth.

The attitude of religious groups on certain issues of national interest is one aspect of the problem. an example is the Miss World Contest that was to be hosted by Nigeria. The reaction of Islamic Militants brought a lot of havoc and

loses to the Country. The government was indecisive. This has given room to a state of anarchy and as a result religious militants are growing into an untouchable scary monsters.

The Jos crises for example wouldn't have degenerated into a deplorable situation if the government was not weak and unable to take a firm decisive action. The government was clearly afraid of the perpetrators. We were attacked in our neighborhood during the last Jos religious upheavals. We had to come out together, men in the area in a joint action to defend our properties. With only sticks in our hands we were able to chase the militants away.

The issue of Islamic **Fatwa** (which is a global problem) is the commissioning of people, just anyone, to kill, particularly to kill the perceived enemy both real and imagined. In this case a 'contract' is placed on any one that offends the Islamic faith (like desecration) so that anyone who kills the person on whom fatwa is pronounced, is rewarded.

The general attitude of Muslims towards Arabic writing in Nigeria is a problem: religious or non religious. Muslims treat any writing in Arabic as sacred and the scholars in Nigeria have not been able to educate the public (especially the vulnerable youths) that Arabic is also a language which is spoken by anybody and could be learnt by any person as a language of communication. In Nigeria, ignorance plays a great role here. Imagine you are in a village in Nigeria and happen to receive a note written in Arabic by a friend which has nothing to do with the Qur'an. If after reading the note is you decide to throw it away, in

reaction in an illiterate community you can be sure of getting thorough beatings, if you escape with your life.

Over the years Religion and its conflicts have become no go areas. These have been delicate points to discuss. This problem is both at the local and national levels . There has never been any successful discussion on religious matters by constitutional conference or National Assembly for the fear of peoples' reaction. There were some attempts but it has never been successful in Nigeria. The few attempted talks were very tense, characterized by walk outs or outright fighting. This is a serious area of concern to start with. How the country is going to overcome this it is not yet known.

A good observation has been made; that undemocratic political structures, coupled with the quest by leaders to suppress oppositions, involving the use of police to repress or coerce the people, and the unnecessary use of force to suppress socio-economic discontents among people, contribute very much to violent conflicts.

The demands of globalization and its total disregards for humanity; spiritual, moral and social has unconceivable effects on the people. Its major concern is on profit making and this is clear of the activities of trans-national and multinational corporations. In Nigeria, what we may see is multinationals taking over huge expanse of land, ignoring the issue of pollution and safety requirements and generally neglecting their social responsibilities to the communities where they operate. Plateau State, Niger Delta are practical examples. Looking at the mining activities of foreign companies in the past, the beautiful landscape of Jos has remain terribly devastated, and it has generated much problems and conflicts for the communities as they now often fight over scarce farm lands.



According to some findings; the unbalanced world economic system is responsible for more than 60% of the African tumultuous situation. And unless the so called world powers decides to change things - Africa will continue to experience poverty and perpetual conflicts. A report of a conference on Nigeria's debt situation mention, as one of the main root causes of crisis in Nigeria, the following:

'An unjust international financial system may continue to create tension and more unforeseen conflicts'.

Presently, there is the continuous impoverishment of the people through the abuse and mis management of local government allocations and resources, and this is so constitutionally structured. I am afraid this will continue to be one major cause of civil unrest fullness and youth restiveness at the local government level. Having being a Local Government Chairman for three years, I have experienced that personally. I am speaking from experience. The former President of Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), Late Joseph Jela in 2000, presenting his welcome address during one of the Local Government workshops in Nigeria, clearly confirmed this abuse. I quote him here verbatim; "In our brief stay in office, we discovered that the existing local government system in the country was greatly abused; its voice was muzzled and its plans scuttled." Jela went on and accused the States for making Local Government unsuitable for desired growth.

\*\*\*\*\*Nigeria's government is aware that in most of the states, especially where worst scenario of conflicts has been experienced; more than 70% of the people are complete illiterates (literally they have not been to any school). The people t this level completely depend on what they are told or preached to, and since most Nigerians claim to be people of high penchant for religion they can quickly act irrationally on issues of religious sentiments. They are gullible and can act barbarically can cause destruction of the unimaginable type at any little

provocation without caring to substantiate any issue. Many selfish politicians and some disgruntled individuals have taken undue advantage of this volatile situation.

**The “Practice of Religion” in Nigeria is one major problem:**

The practice of religion in Nigeria is something completely different from what we might observe in other parts of the world. There is a very strange mode of religious worship that is emerging everyday in Nigeria. I appreciate the total commitment and expression of faith with which Nigerians devout to religion. But this dogmatic zeal has been hijacked and manipulated by dubious religious and opinion leaders. The situation is compounded by the fact that there is wide spread of reckless and irresponsible fanatic behavior which could only be best described as psychic religious madness, or outright terrorism hiding behind a kind of disorganized empty pietism in the sphere of religious worship in the Country.

We have experienced, in Nigeria, the paradoxical display of religious zeal which most of the time has resulted not in the spiritual development or upliftment of the people but in miseries and regrets for many followers.

The inappropriate competition that exists between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria has created confusion in the hearts of many to-be-convert. Some of them now would rather welcome the desire to identify with African traditional religion. It appears wicked people who want to create instability for their cynical reasons hide under the umbrella of religious practice.

Our mode of worship is prone to violence; the worshipers themselves cannot seem see that either Christian or

Muslims. Christians, not being their neighbours' keepers, make too much noise on Sundays, not caring about the peace of their neighbors or other people who might need some quietness for a cool weekend. As if in a show of acquired noise generating machine, Muslims place powerful loudspeakers on top of their worship places, they themselves are not able to bear the loudness of the speakers, while playing tapes to all directions at the highest volume, knowing very well that the Mosques are in residential areas. It is now part of the They worship to first of all mount roadblocks on Fridays. The traffic hold up creates inconveniences for commuters and that can provoke many people. But people are afraid to complain because of the fear of being called a sinner, unbeliever.

On the issue of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria Inter-gender, an NGO, has clearly explained the dimension and forms conflicts are now taking in Nigeria.

“In Nigeria, more than ever before, differences based on ethnicity and religious beliefs are becoming more nearly drawn and redrawn. The return to democratic rule has opened up the possibility of individual and group expressions, people now define their world in “we versus them” terms and this has heightened the growth of violent conflicts across the country in the realization of the ideology being promoted. These conflicts are predominantly over issues of religious seclusion, ethnic superiority, boundary, status and political appointments. They have predictably led to several violent eruptions with resultant colossal loss of life and property across the nation”.

“The incidence of poverty has increased, from 28.1 percent in 1980 - 20% in 1997 according to Otonti Nduka”.

#### Politicizing of Governments Institutions/Agents:

Governments are sometimes politicized and used against opponents. This has serious effects on the civil society. EFCC & ICPC were all politicized and used to fight opponents. It is also like setting up an institution, corrupting it and deceiving the public that it an institution that is fighting corruption. There was no reason for Ribadu, the head of EFCC, to collect N5, 000,000 from USA. The organization (EFCC) does not need one penny from anywhere to fight corruption in Nigeria. For him to complain that he has no enough money to fight corruption is to show that they are defeated right from the beginning. Indeed the US government should be accused for giving the money which is now used to deliberately punish the poor masses. It is better to use this money to support NGOs that are having programmes affecting the poor directly. One of the failures of EFCC was that mainly opponents of the government were picked. EFCC was involved in sponsoring the impeachments of State Governors. The pursuance of the State Governors while still in office is a failure known right from the start, because Ribadu is aware that they have immunity.

#### The issue of Mafias in the country:

Dr. Ayochia in reference to the Kaduna Mafia said that the Kaduna Mafia is “financially powerful, politically conscious, ambitious and even vicious group”. Kaduna Mafia is a problem to the poor masses in Nigeria, and as long as they continue to exist, the poor man will continue to get poorer. It is a sort of deeply rooted structured corruption, planted by the British Colonial Administration. That is why former Governor of former Gongola State Col. Yohanna Madaki had to say that, if he could have his way, he would exhume Lord Lugards’ remains from the grave, because Lugard was the person who betrayed the peasants, particularly in the North, otherwise the common man wouldn’t have been suffering like this.

In 1973, General Yakubu Gowon a Military head of State then, exhibited clearly his fear for the powerful north when he could not withstand the ferocity of the criticisms of the faceless mafia he had to change his position on the participation of women in election in Nigeria.

### **The extent of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria:**

In Nigeria, ethnic conflicts have very disturbing connotations and are sometimes easily perceived as the product of a struggle for power and wealth among members of constituent ethnic groups. The lack of proper management of manpower and resources usually explode into destructive violence. Ironically, most of the people in the rural communities, as far as I know, struggle for survival they are mainly concerned about their immediate needs. Usually someone, somewhere uses or manipulates them for his/her end. 'Ethnic conflict in Nigeria is also the product of the political or administrative policy of divide-and-rule that mobilized and manipulated ethnic consciousnesses. The main problem with the Nigerian society is that whatever problem, conflict or crisis, it can quickly get religious coloration in no time.

1. The maitatsine riot in Yola (1984) claimed more than 1,000 lives, and more than 3,000 rendered homeless, still more than 100 million naira worth of properties were destroyed.
2. The Jukun-Tiv ethnic Conflict in the 1990's which claimed more than 2,000 lives, more than 4,000 people were rendered homeless & many people badly wounded, millions of naira worth properties destroyed.

3. The 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> deadly conflicts in Numan; destroyed more than 800 lives, 2,000 casualties & properties destroyed.
4. The inter-ethnic conflict in Ganye between Chamba farmers & Fulani cattle settlers killed up to 6 people. Police station was later consequently destroyed (burnt) and properties destroyed in another separate violence.
5. The Jos crisis claimed more than 1,500 lives (official figures) but over 3000 estimated, Churches & houses destroyed. The number of displaced people was not accurately estimated, but was certainly large in number. The Bauchi State Government resettles not less than 500 people
6. The Gombe religious crisis claimed so many lives and properties. So many people displaced.
7. Bauchi religious crisis claimed so many people, so many Churches destroyed.
8. The Zangon Kataf Ethnic Conflict claimed so many lives - millions of naira-worth properties destroyed.
9. Riot over the Miss World Pageant claimed more than 200 people.
10. The issue of cartoon of Prophet Mohammed ignited deadly violence in many states in Nigeria, where more than 300 people lost their lives. A friend with whom we graduated from the Seminary lost every-thing. His Church building and the Pastorium were burnt to

ashes, and he narrowly escaped death after almost being hacked to death.

11. The Wase Communities, mostly the communities we are working with in Plateau State, were destroyed as a result of ethnic conflict (Fulani and Tarok). The villages were destroyed and most of the communities have ceased to exist.

We can go on and on, in Nigeria to mention even more deadly conflicts that has almost tore Nigeria into pieces. These destructive conflicts are almost becoming a normal thing in Nigeria. It doesn't disturb some people much anymore.

### **A Proposal for A Way Forward +++++**

Considering the loss of lives and the destruction of properties, it is necessary to say in the words of Francis Cardinal Archue that inter-religious cooperation in the emerging situation is not optional. Cardinal Archue writes: "The emerging situation calls for joint action of people from different religions to promote justice and peace, to reduce or eliminate tension and extremism and to defend human dignity, and human rights, especially as regards to life and family. Inter-religious cooperation is not optional".

Since most of the conflicts in Nigeria; whether political or ethnic, usually end up bearing religious coloration and ends up between two religious (Islam and Christianity), there is need to give a closer watch or study of the two religions. There must be a serious deliberation on the issue of religion in Nigeria; how these two religions and any other religion should operate. Any religious group that abuses its freedom, the Nigerian government must be strong enough to intervene and arrest and bring to justice those involved.

Some key decisions and guidelines on religious issues in relation to public interest must be made very clear and strict methods to observe must be put in place to ensure strict compliance.

At my interaction with a number of people in Nigeria; the general opinion is that a hard decision has to be made against religious groups in Nigeria: for example any religious group that starts a violent act or demonstration must be made to pay the cost of destruction created as a result of their action. Failure of which should result in the banning of that religion.

Religious freedom does not mean a practice at the expense of the lives or the peace of other people.

Nigerian Muslims and Christians are of the habit of polluting the atmosphere with noise through use of powerful loud speakers, which is mostly needlessly used without any control. These are some of the things that provoke anger and stimulate violent act. There must be serious restriction or strong law against that. There is also the problem of blocking access roads on worships days. This must be checked.

All religious Pilgrimages to all Holy places must be left in the hands of each religion. The government should leave every religious issue to each religious group. Otherwise there should be a Ministry of religious Affairs empowered to address all religious issues from the perspective of justice. This must be in line with equity and fair play.

Where there are structures or establishments in respect to religious - ethnic groups, and are not functioning; this must be studied and the results must be taken seriously.

For us to be comfortable and safe in Nigeria, the government should direct the activity of every religion as transparent as possible. Every thing must be made public (as much as possible) for public verification and scrutiny. Otherwise, Nigerian government should be completely free from religious affiliations and should make every religion completely independent and should strongly re-emphasize her secular nature as much as she can. The government should make it clear to every religion, her limitations and responsibilities in the country. The government should make it



abundantly clear as matter of policy where religion starts and where it ends in public life.

#### *Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*

Various programmes, which will bring Christians-Muslims together, should be continuously promoted. Communities could be brought together and be encouraged to jointly embark on a number of activities and projects. To diffuse emerging signs of conflicts, flash points should be sought and identified. People in these marked areas should be provided with a joint project to engage them especially in such a project of joint economic interest. They should also be given opportunities to embark on an exchange visits. Making communities to accept visiting each other's camp to see what the other is passing through creates a situation of empathy and warmth.

#### **Adult Education & Literacy Programme:**

More than 70% of Nigerians are illiterates. So why don't we make adult education a priority programme? We need to provide opportunities for community members to learn how to read and write. We also need to take advantage of their coming together to provide ecumenical education, draw their attention on some critical social and religious issues that have to be taken seriously in order to promote togetherness and unity, and clearly discourage divisions.

There is every need for all Civil Organizations in Nigeria to put in place a reliable mechanism of ensuring justice. The effort of ensuring justice bestows peoples' confidence in the process of conflict resolution. We are all aware of the fact that to attain sustainable peace; the issue of justice has a great role to play. Our concern for peace is just not when we stop people from violent act, but how they live together with necessary capacities to handle their crisis the best way they can. There is a serious need to emphasize peace promotion to avoid the "fire brigade approach", which the Nigerian government is used to.

The **Poksum** Programme of JPRM: ++++++

This is the idea of bringing together conflicting communities or people that have signs or pointers to eradicate conflicts. They are brought to engage in a social or entertainment programme, which will make them discuss naturally and willingly. Certain difficult and sensitive issues are brought forward and talked away but in a lighter mood. The result of this type of free and natural discussion is used later as the basis of further discussions at conferences and interactive programmes. The programme is informal with no specific topics known to the attendance, and the attendance is not officially controlled. It is the programme officer that knows which issues are to be brought forward and which issues to leave out.

### **Dialogue for Peaceful Change:**

This is a formal peace programme, which JPRM has just newly adopted from Oikosnet. At the moment we have made it an integral part of the peace building/promotion programme. This is as a result of our participation in the peace network of the Association of Christian Lay Centres in Africa (ACLCA). A meeting is set, and certain learnt skills are adopted to facilitate the discussion. Dialogue for Peaceful Change (Dpc) is presently adopted and applied by members of the global Oikosnet, which JPRM is member through ACLCA.

Visiting Conflicting Communities, Meeting with victims, advocacy call on strategic leaders and prominent opinion leaders forms essential aspect of peace promotion activities. Also taking every step possible to visit those considered troublesome or “tough and dangerous”.

The need to resuscitate and integrate African traditional method of conflict resolution in the widely Western Method is now seriously lauded by WANEP, ACLCA Peace Network etc. The call to resuscitate the African traditional method of conflict resolution is necessitated by the present fact that globalization poses enormous challenges to Nigeria and African communities at large, especially its spiritual void-ness. Wanep call it “**Trado-African Conflict Resolution Methods.**”

*In Africa the participation of the community in resolving issues or conflicts is very essential. The Chamba people refer to that as **Mumpirikenen**. The issue of resolving conflict in the trado-African methods makes it impossible to handle it as an individual issue. In the present dispensation the issue of involving many actors is an essential aspect of attaining sustainable peace.*

In the African setting the issue of educating the Children on the traditional knowledge of peace is always mandatory. The aspect is when children are also taught what to avoid who to fear and who to they must try to remain at peace with. Nowadays we lack peace education in our school syllabus. Children and the youths hardly have anytime from home to learn about peace. The culture of peace is less promoted. It is in view of this that JPRM has great emphasis on peace education in her 41 adult education classes. JPRM has emphasized peace education as an important aspect of sustainable society and community.

It has been observed that one of the main reasons for constant religious and ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria especially in Northern Nigeria, and consequent set back has been “--- the unnecessary manipulation of superficial differences such as ethnic and religious divergences”.

### **Declare a Decade of Nonviolence in Nigeria:**

To effectively understand the Nigerian context of the Ethno-Religious Conflicts and to formulate lasting solutions, there is need to organize biannual (well planned) inter-ethnic and inter-religious conferences. These will include down to earth presentations brought down to the level of the average Nigerian. This should continue for a decade. A committee that will work full time for that and will do no other work other than the planning and coordinating the conference activities, sharing and distributing the outcome of the conference. It must be a free and frank, safe and secured conference. Such conference has already been sounded in the publication of Dr. Ityavyar.

On the issue of poverty, there is no alternative; something just has to be done to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. If the developed countries don't see the call necessary now, the repercussions will be too expensive in lives and stability of the entire continent in the not too distant future. There is a Hausa saying that goes **“wanda ya kwana lafiya shi ya so”** The poor masses in Nigeria have nothing doing and they must survive, through legitimate but most often, criminal ways. When they are pressed, committing a crime and corruption becomes a wise decision to save your life. Ayida in his submission on Nigeria explains this; “There is too much human misery around. The emisceration of the rural poor and the pulverization of urban dwellers are demonstrated in the apparent lack of collective will to survive, has gone too far. It is difficult to imagine how the urban poor survive today.

### Conclusion

It is a biblical exhortation that we must “Depart from evil, and we must do good; we must seek peace, and we must pursue it” (Ps 34:14) Peter making reference to the position of the Psalmist against evil has to make it very clear for the followers that if anyone love life let him/her turn away from evil, let him turn away from evil, and do good; Let him seek peace, and pursue it (1Pe 3:11). It is enough to advice Nigerian Preachers/religious leaders, public figures to listen to the above message of the scripture.

(ASV)

“Poverty is responsible for many evils; poverty is defined in the dictionary as absence of everything that makes a person happy”. If that is the case we must tackle poverty and ensure that every one is at least comfortable in terms of what to eat. The Mission of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth was very clear: He was anointed to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim the freedom of the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the down trodden and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Lk.4: 18). We have made the mission of Christ so difficult in many parts of the world by our oppressive economic policies. Instead of freeing the down trodden we have entangle them in a wicked system and the downtrodden are still crying because of the shackles of poverty that we have put on them. If we are Godly people I think time is over

due for us to use all our wealth sacrifice our enjoyments to set free the people that are enslave with the shackles of poverty.

Once more I would still like to refer to another reference of the Bible. "There must be no poor among you" How do we understand this? How do we explain this to ourselves in this world? Are we all people of God? Or do we just look at issues only within our exclusive camps? If we are all one people of God then we must listen to the cries of people from around the world. The Bible is aware of the consequence of having the poor among you. If you continue with your unjust economic structures and destructive monetary policies, you will continue to have more and more poor people among the nations of the world. And the more they are growing in number the more you will continue to have restlessness.

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**Civil Society Political Consolidation, and The Challenges of Ethno-Religious Conflicts:**  
**Proposals for A Contextual Conflict Resolution in Nigeria**

***BY REV. HABILA M. ISTIFANUS***

Nigeria, a multi-religious society, diverse cultures with numerous & different ethnic identities have also multi-facets of complicated and destructive conflicts, possibly more than any country in West Africa, if not in Africa as whole. The 6th largest world producer of crude oil is also one of the most populous countries in Africa, is also listed as the 6<sup>th</sup>. Most corrupt countries in the World by transparency International. More than 70% of the population is still uneducated. The life expectancy of an average Nigerian is soon not going to exceed 45 years in few years to come, as a result of inadequate health care in the Country according to WHO.

**A short Appraisal of Civil Society Organizing in Nigeria**

Government has not in the real sense of it recognized civil organization and the huge repertoire of knowledge that resides within the sector is good enough to contribute to the development of the Nigeria state. Till date civil groups are treated with disdain, and are often referred to as trouble makers and rubble rousers in the politics of development (according to John Muro). Successive Governments view the full participation of Civil Society in democratization of the country with suspicion. There are so many civil organizations in Nigeria that have contributed so much to the well being of the masses during dictatorship regimes in Nigeria, but whether that has made much sense to successive governments in Nigeria is another thing.

**The Causes of conflicts in Nigeria**

***The Christian:***

"Jesus fought no wars, conquered no earthly kingdoms, commanded no army, yet he rules in the hearts of millions of men and women by his offer of love, reconciliation and peace with God, --- Jesus is the epitome of peace --- Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus never commanded his followers to go to war for any reason; to the Christians therefore no war is holy if it involves bloodshed."

***The Muslim:***

“Peace is indeed the most indispensable principle, which Islam deeply plants in the minds of Muslims; peace therefore became part of their nature. The ‘word Islam is peace’, “--- Islam attaches great importance to this value “peace” and that forms an integral part of the Islamic belief system”.

Hearing the above one would agree with Rev.Okezie that, “war and riots are indication that people are acting according to the wickedness of their evil hearts and not according to the will of the God of peace”. Then the Nigerian case needs more indebt and careful studies.

The major problem that is aggravating Nigerian situation is weak government. It is observed that the Nigerian Governments (including military regimes) have always been intimidated by the power elite of Northern Nigeria, and for that matter the Governments never challenges most of the religious riots in Northern Nigeria or no serious attempt is made to bring the perpetrators to justice. In fact it was becoming too clear that in Nigeria, every Government that wants to survive and live well, must recognize and identify the Faceless Kaduna Mafia. It was becoming a popular notion that **‘the fear of Kaduna Mafia is the beginning of wisdom’**. In fact the Federal Government with its might and with the power of its constitution could not protect **Amina Lawal** who has to seek refuge out of the country.

The general attitude of Muslims towards Arabic writing: religious or non religious. Muslims in Nigeria treat any writing in Arabic as sacred and the scholars in Nigeria have not been able to educate the public (especially the vulnerable youths) that Arabic is also a language which is spoken by others and could be learnt by any person as a language of communication. There is a clear fear by legislators to touch the issue of religion, by past governments. Even civil society organizations are afraid to touch the issue of religion.

**The Bastardization Local Governments by States:** The former President of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), Late Joseph Jela in 2000 clearly confirmed that. “... the existing local government system in the country was greatly abused; its voice was muzzled and its plans scuttled.” The States are making Local Government unsuitable for the desired growth. In this regard Ubasanjo & Nuhu Ribadu must be praised for their seriousness to help the Local Governments.

**The “Practice of Religion” in Nigeria is one major problem:**

The situation is compounded by the fact that there is wide spread of reckless and irresponsible fanaticism which could only be best described as psychic religious madness, or outright terrorizing attitude hiding behind a kind of un-organized empty pietism in the sphere of religious worship in the Country.

**Politicization of Government Institutions/Agents:**

Essential government institutions are politicized: EFCC & ICPC) were all politicized (at least as the public sees it) and used to fight political opponents. It was widely criticized that they were involved in sponsoring impeachments of State Governors. The pursuance of the State Governors while still in office was not the best approach right from the start, because EFCC was aware that they have immunity.

**International Community:**

The unjust world economic order accounts for more than 60% of the African situation today. And unless the so call world powers decides to change things - Africa will continue to experience poverty and instead of reducing conflicts and violence it will continue to be on the increase.

**The issue of Mafias in the country:** Kaduna Mafia: “financially powerful, politically conscious, ambitious and even vicious group.” is a problem to the poor masses in Nigeria. It is a sort of deeply rooted structured corruption, planted by the British Colonial Administration. That is why former Governor of former Gongola State Col. Yohanna Madaki has to say that, if he could have his way, he would exhume Lord Lugards’ remains from the grave, because Lugard was the person who betrayed the peasants, particularly in the North, otherwise the common man wouldn’t have been suffering like this.

### **A Proposal for A Way Forward**

There is need for a joint action of civil society organizations and all the religions to what to do on the issue of peace and justice in Nigeria: to eliminate extremism, and to **defend human dignity, and human rights at all costs**. Some key decisions and guidelines on religious issues in relation to public interest must be made very clear, and strict methods to observe them must be put in place; to ensure strict compliance. Any religious group that starts a violent act or demonstration must be made to pay the cost of destruction made as a result of their action. Failure of which should result in the banning of that religion.

There must be serious restriction or strong law against the use of loud speakers & blocking of access roads on worships days. There must be a Ministry for religious Affairs empowered by law to address all religious issues from the perspective of justice, to be led and run by men & women of proven integrity.

The government should direct all activities of the various religions be made transparent. Every thing must be made public for public verification and scrutiny. The government should make it clear to every religious group her limitations and possibilities in the country. Make it clear as a matter of security where religion starts and where it ends in public life.

Functional Adult education that will also provide peace & ecumenical education must be given a serious consideration. There is a serious need to emphasize peace promotion to avoid the fire brigade approach, which the Nigerian government is used to. Peace is not promoted in Nigeria, it is enforced and such is an artificial peace. It is in view of this that JPRM has put great emphasis on peace education in more than 41 adult education classes.

**African traditional Conflict Resolution Methods must be revived:** The need to resuscitate and integrate African traditional methods of conflict resolution in the widely Western Method is now seriously lauded by WANEP, ACLCA Peace Network etc. The call to resuscitate the African traditional method of conflict resolution is necessitated by the present fact that globalization pose enormous challenges to Nigeria and African communities at large, especially its spiritual void-ness. WANEP call this **Trado-African Conflict Resolution Methods**

*In Africa the participation of the community in resolving issues or conflicts is very essential. The Chamba people refer to that as Mumpirikenen. The issue of resolving conflict in the trado-African methods makes it impossible to handle it as an individual issue. In the present dispensation the issue of involving many actors is an essential aspect of attaining sustainable peace.*

**Declare a Decade of Nonviolence in Nigeria:** Organize biannual well planned inter-ethnic and inter-religious conference, down to earth presentations, but brought down to the level of the average Nigerian. This should continue for a decade. A committee that will work full time for that and will do no other work other than the planning and coordinating of conference

activities and sharing and distributing the outcome of the conference. It must be free and frank, safe and secured conferences.

If Western Countries would truly like sustainable peace, then there must be deliberate continuous effort for it. There is a Hausa saying that goes **“wanda ya kwana lafiya shi ya so.”**

## **Conclusion**

Luke 4:18 & 19

“Poverty is responsible for many evils; poverty is defined in the dictionary as absence of everything that makes a person happy”. If that is the case we must tackle poverty and ensure that every one is at least comfortable in terms of what to eat. Secondly, all religious books talked about elimination of poverty. “...there must be no poor among you...” If we are all one people of God then we must listen to what the holy books say about poverty as the cause of evil including conflicts. The holy Books are aware of the consequence of having the poor among you. Tell the world powers, tell IMF, tell World Bank, if they continue with their unjust economic structures and destructive monetary policies, we will continue to have more and more poor people among the nations of the world. And the more they are growing in numbers the more we will continue to have restlessness.