

## Imam, Pastor in Joint Walk to Peace

Rakiya A. Muhammad<sup>1</sup>

In November, 2007, Rakiya A. Muhammad wrote a wonderful report about the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum, a reconciliation programme funded by the Mennonite Central Committee, but operated out of Kaduna by Imam Dr. Nurayn Ashafa and Pastor Dr. James Wuye. It is reproduced here almost in its entirety.<sup>2</sup> Please note that the beginning of this story is recorded in Chapter 4, Volume 4, p.xxxx. Here, then Muhammad's part of the story:

*It is said that peaceful co-existence is the foundation of every development. In realisation of this, an Imam and a Pastor based in Kaduna come together to pursue a common goal of fostering harmonious coexistence among Christians and Muslims not only in Nigeria but the world over.*

*At one time or the other, both were active leaders in militant youth organizations of their respective religions. They were noted to have participated actively in the Kaduna riot of early 1990s. But then came a turning point in their lives. For the two, Imam Dr. Nurayn Ashafa and Pastor Dr. James Wuye, understanding and acceptance are now their watchwords and to their communities they so preached.*

*To facilitate their newfound passion, they jointly founded the IMC, Muslim –Christian Dialogue Forum in 1995. In the 12 years of its existence, the centre has facilitated mediation process among warring factions in Kaduna and Plateau States including the 2001 Jos crisis, Wase crisis of 2003 and Shendam 2004, Yobe, Nasarawa , the Niger Delta, among others.*

---

<sup>1</sup>DT, 3 Nov/2007.

<sup>2</sup>Two paragraphs have been moved to other locations in the book. They are indicated by ellipses.

*The centre's activities were noted to have brought Muslim and Christian leaders to a dialogue that led to the Kaduna Peace Declaration of August 2002 and former President Olusegun Obasanjo unveiled the peace plague.*

*Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye did not limit their efforts in Nigeria; their activities transcended the length and breadth of the world. They have extended their mediatory efforts to other African countries, Europe, America, Latin America and the Middle East. Countries they have worked in included Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Gambia, Guinea, Lesotho, Canada, Latin America, USA, Bosnia, Croatia, Germany, UK, Poland, Macedonia, Israel, Palestine, Quarter, Australia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nepal.*

*Recently the group moved to secondary schools in Plateau State to inculcate peace education in the youths. The centre held a peace building workshop and started off the formation of peace clubs in schools. At present the centre is into training programmes on rice milling and co-operative society skills centre for women traumatised by conflicts in Shendam and Wase.*

*Wuye, the joint Executive Director of the IMC speaks on what they do. "Well, at our centre as the name implies, we do mediation, we work towards preventing religiously-motivated violence, where violence and crisis are induced by both political and ethnic influences. We also go to prevent such. We do it through workshops, trainings, we also use direct intervention when crisis occur in an area, and when we also see the early warning signs of conflict, we do proactive activities to prevent them from happening." He reveals that the centre was set up in 1995 as a result of a chanced meeting, and that they did not plan to start the centre. "It happened when my colleague and I were invited by the then governor of Kaduna State in 1995 to participate in a programme that was aimed at mobilising women to allow their children to be immunised when there was controversy over immunisation.*

*"So we came as a result of that and a friend of ours who is also a journalist like yourself, who knew me and knew Ashafa as religious youth leaders I was then the Secretary to the CAN at the youth wing and he was also the Secretary to the National Congress of Muslim Youths Organisations (NACOMYO), in Kaduna. We were brought together by that friend, we got talking and eventually the centre was established."*

*Wuye said that initially they wanted doing debate, "but we saw that in debate there is a winner and loser and then we settled for dialogue. That's why, initially, the first name we had was "Muslim/Christian Youths Dialogue Forum" but because we have grown now, we are all elderly now in our late 40s, the name changed and we saw that we are not just working among youths for we are mediating among peoples of different faith and our work is not only local, we are international. We have gone to countries around the world to do mediation."*

*He throws light on their mediatory role outside Nigeria: "We have had occasions to intervene in Burundi, and we advised the setting up of an inter – religious committee in Kenya. Also we were the first group to facilitate a programme for what they called high level Christian/Muslim Consultation and it was held in Nairobi, which was last year. "We have also worked in Southern Sudan and we brought the new Council of Churches in Sudan, the New Islamic Council of Sudan where we also started a work for them to be working. In North America, we worked among the Native Americans, where we went to share what they called healing experience from the Nigerian perspective, from Christian and Muslim perspective in Nigeria. We were in Sierra Leone also to work with if people who have come out of war to see how they can reintegrate using religion as a yard stick for our intervention."*

*Back home in Nigeria, he noted some impacts the centre has had among which is that they are the first people who brought true healing to Yelwa and Shendam after their reconciliation and mediation in 2004 to 2005. He said on February 19th they celebrated peace in Yelwa/Shendam and for now people have gone back there to live.*

*Speaking on the peace-building workshop, Pastor Wuye harps on the need to begin to inculcate this same value into young people across the faith who are also members of the different religious groups in schools. "My bible says blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the Kingdom of God; and the word of God as a Christian tells me that I should pursue peace with all men, which is the holiness without which no man can see God. Every stakeholder must work towards sustainable peace in our land"*

.....

*Both Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye point to one thing as the greatest challenge in this path they have jointly undertaken. Ashafa put it this way. "The greatest challenge is people misunderstanding us, people who think what we are doing is Christian. They think we are talking of mixing the two religions together, that should have only one religion in Nigeria, no, no, no, we know that people are promoting what they call religious initiatives. They are from America, they are from all over the world and we said no to united religion, we say yes to each and individual multi- religious society which Allah has talked about in the Qur'an."*

*In the same vein, Pastor Wuye explains the challenges: "Well in some instances we have been misconstrued as trying to amalgamate the two religions. No, we are not amalgamating our religions. We are saying every body should pursue his religion vigorously, without bias."*

.....

*Another challenge is the hazards they experience in the course of their work. "In one of the places in Kagarko, my friend's life was threatened, they almost killed him, Imam Ashafa was almost killed and even when I showed my identity as a Christian they didn't believe me. So these are some of the threats and challenges we face."*

*However despite these challenges, Imam Ashafa said he remains undaunted by the challenge. "For me and my family, we give our lives to follow this path of interfaith discussion, interfaith dialogue. Nigeria is our country, no matter how religious I am, I cannot be accepted in Saudi Arabia without the green passport, and no matter how*

*religious the Christian is, he cannot be accepted in Israel without the green passport of Nigeria. If this is our natural home by history or destiny, then we need to keep it save."*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>R. Muhammad, 3 Nov/2007. With a Muslim author writing in a Muslim newspaper and with a major Muslim actor and speaker, this article could just as well have been placed among the Muslim material in chapter 3. It was a tossup and tossups come with difficult choices. I decided on this location, because the programme is supported and carried by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). I certainly did not wish to split the discussion over two chapters. It should be recognized that, apart from the MCC role, Muslims should receive as much credit for it as do Christians.