

## **WUKARI/TARABA PEACE INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT TRIP DECEMBER 12-17, 2014**

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Locations Visited: Mkar - Benue State, Takum and Wukari - Taraba State, Akwanga - Nasarawa State

### **SUMMARY OF REFLECTIONS, OBSERVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

As the Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation Committee (PJRC) stated in their October, 2014 letter to the Office of Social Justice (OSJ), there are really two different conflicts ongoing in the Taraba and Benue state areas. In addition, the ECC is experiencing a third set of conflicts in their Middle Belt areas – which are more closely related to the Tiv/Fulani (Christian-Muslim) clashes than the Jukun/Jukun/Fulani (Christian/Traditionalist – Muslim) clashes in Wukari.

I agree with the Chairman of the Aku’s Advisory Council: There are few similarities between the conflicts of the early 2000s and the recent broader spectrum violence in the areas I visited.

This means it would be a mistake to assume we can simply repeat the peace initiative model so effectively implemented by Hizkias Assefa and the PJRC in 2000. It does NOT mean that there is no role for a peace initiative. It simply means that a different – and possibly broader - strategy is likely necessary.

*The critical decision will be how to best **begin** this process of engaging the larger and more complex violence swirling around the Middle Belt region. Clearly this must be a Nigerian church and community leadership decision, but they have asked for help – specifically Hizkias Assefa’s help – and the support (financial and other) of the global church (especially the CRC) in doing this.*

Below are several recommendations that may form a basis for moving forward:

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are grounded in observations of Peter Vander Meulen’s Wukari/Taraba peace initiative assessment trip of December 12-17, 2014. The recommendations respond to the logic of the following main conclusions:

The conflicts in Middle Belt are serious, likely to get worse, and put the churches in the region under unprecedented pressure to cope with and respond to violence in ways that are true to their Christian faith.

- The conflicts have complex political/religious/ethnic roots that are local and regional but are being influenced and exacerbated by national and global narratives and political/religious movements. *There are powerful local narratives as to what is*

*happening and why, but it is not clear to me that these narratives are sufficiently detailed, complete, or shared to be a basis for a broad and full-scale peace initiative.*

- The clearest and most bounded of the conflicts appears to me to be the series of eight (so far) incidents that began in 2010 and are centered in the Wukari area. Although I could be wrong, this conflict - in terms of church denominations – seems to have primarily affected the CRCN. *It is this set of conflicts that I believe would offer the clearest entry point for an outside facilitator.*
- Churches are already strong actors in the social and public spaces of the three states visited. The question is how they may be more effective actors/agents for a practical and just peace. If a peace initiative narrowed down to the Wukari conflict is realistic, the PJRC would be the logical convening group but the CRCN would be the most deeply involved.
- Since the local conflicts in Middle Belt gain energy and meaning from regional and global themes of religious and political struggle, the international Church is implicated and needs to accompany – or be in solidarity with – the Nigerian denominations directly affected.

#### Immediate Action Recommendation (to WM, WR, PJRC, and OSJ)

- 1) With the consensus of World Renew and World Missions field staff, the CRCNA's Office of Social Justice (OSJ) - at the invitation of and in partnership with the PJRC - will engage Prof. Hizkias Assefa to plan and implement a *discovery and discernment process* with key leaders associated with the Wukari conflicts. This would involve a visit to Taraba State by Hizkias Assefa at the earliest opportunity in 2015. The central purposes of this visit would be to:
  - a. Assist the PJRC and denominational leaders in analyzing *and coming to an accurate consensus* as to the roots, causes, and mechanisms of the Wukari conflicts.
  - b. On the basis of this consensus, begin to envision the basic elements of a long-term strategy towards a just peace and restored relationships.

#### Recommendations to CRCNA Administration and Agencies

- 2) Set up a small, ad-hoc cross agency staff team (WR, WM, and possibly OSJ) to focus on supporting the CRCN, NKST, and RCCN (possibly through an effective PJRC) as they live in and respond to conflict.

Goals of the group could include:

- a) Education for CRCNA constituents and Nigeria supporters
- b) Identification of available resources (and the raising of additional funds) for relief, repatriation assistance to those who must start life over again, and the financial support of long-term peace building activities. (This could include a possible grant application.)
- c) Linkage of the CRCNA to the PJRC and a broader international ecumenical strategic support group – should there be one.

### Recommendations to the PJRC of Nigeria

- 3) If the PJRC agrees with the “Immediate Action Recommendation”, Bulus Ali will be authorized to schedule and plan a Hizkias Assefa visit for the limited purposes described in the Immediate Action Recommendation.
- 4) Invite World Renew staff in Nigeria to do a Trauma Healing workshop with members of the PJRC and senior denominational officers as soon as possible.
- 5) Appoint a paid staff person (for at least one year) with appropriate communications equipment to work as the PJRC Associate Peace Coordinator under the direction of Bulus Ali. The Associate Coordinator would assist Bulus Ali in the day-to-day communication and organizing work connected with a long-term strategy of peace-building that requires the coordination of national and international institutions and meeting logistics.
- 6) The PJRC should explore with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) the advantages (and disadvantages) of a “Committee of Accompaniment” containing resource persons and representatives of WCRC member denominations who can stand in helpful solidarity with Nigerian Reformed Churches in the long-term as these multiple crisis unfold.

### Recommendation to the Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations Committee (EIRC)

- 7) Communicate to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the three Nigerian denominations affected by the current conflict – the deep concern of the CRC. And that we further communicate that: As an expression of this concern, the CRC stands in prayer and in active solidarity with the Nigerian Reformed Churches in the Middle Belt region - namely the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN), the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (RCCN), the Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST), and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC). In addition, the CRC commends these denominations to the attention of the WCRC in the belief that the growing crisis of violence and displacement in Nigeria requires urgent international attention and solidarity.

END