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NIGERIAN INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL (NIREC) AND THE NIGERIAN STATE

Akiti Glory Alamu

Introduction

Recent events have strongly indicated that there is hardly any government programme without religious considerations. Isiramen rightly observes that in Nigeria, religion occupies a formidable position in the lives of the people as reflected in the national constitution. Successive governments have always called on religious leaders in charting a positive path for Nigerian nation.¹ This pride of place which religion occupies is pivotal to human affairs and national discourse. The various religious tenets teach peace and co-existence, but the practitioners of religion have turned religion into horrible weapon of war, which has drenched human blood, destroyed human civilizations', and sent whole nations into unprecedented agony.² Religion is, therefore, seen as representing something other than what it appears to be, and as such it could not be a real cause for conflict. Thus, religion is being used as an instrument for political mobilization, fulfilment of parochial and selfish interest, and ethno-sectional aspirations. Today, people have regarded religion as a major factor in communal strife, and activities find its exemplars in their own religious traditions to justify their violent act in God's name.³

In fact, incessant ethno-political violence wears religious garb, including the sectarian the *Boko Haram*, group. The nation appears

¹ C. O. Isiramen, et al (eds) *Religion and the Nigerian Nation: Some Topical Issues*, Ibadan: En-joy Press & Book, 2010, p. XI.

² A.G. Alamu "Religion as scapegoat in Ethno-Political violence in Nigeria" in H. O. Anyanwu and M. E. Udoh, (eds), *Religion and Culture: understanding the dynamism of Faith in Africa* (Beijing: Universal Academic Services, 2010), p. 97.

³ A.G. Alamu, p. 97.

to be sliding into depression and a standstill, since she could not be assertive in matters seemingly religious. Civic and moral approaches to political and religious issues are swallowed up by state of nature-violence. It is against this background that NIREC-Nigerian Inter-Religious Council – was established as an independent religious body to quell every religious violence and dialogue or act as mid-wife between religious organizations *vis-à-vis* the government on matters of religions. The responsibilities include unity and bond among the various faiths practiced in contemporary Nigerian Society. Therefore it is the intention of this paper to give an *exposé* of NIREC as a body saddled with the responsibility of quelling or an extinguisher of violence and providing succour during crises and demonstrate the fact that Nigerian state as a nation has made violence a way of life; and a critique of the position of NIREC, coupled with its responsibilities and as well as recommendations, will be x-rayed at this time when crisis is a mouse clicks away.

Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC): An Overview

Nigerian Inter-Religious Council as an Independent body was established during the Obasanjo administration. To be precise, NIREC as a body was inaugurated on the 29th September, 1999 under the supervision of President Olusegun Obasanjo at the National Christian Centre. However, Onaiyekan painstakingly related how it all began. According to him, the Nigerian Inter-religious Council started in 1999 at the initiative of the National Executive Committee of the Christian Association of Nigeria under the presidency of His Eminence, Sunday Mbang, Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigera.⁴ At that time, Onaiyekan was the vice president who received series of complaints in Christian circles about how Muslims are alleged to take undue advantage of

⁴ J. Onaiyekan, "Dividends of Religion in Nigeria". Public Lecture at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, 12 May, 2010, p.10

Christians in many areas of our national life. It was resolved then that, rather than continue to sulk and complain, they might try to reach out to the leadership of Islam and create a forum for discussion and mutual negotiation.⁵ He further buttresses that

We were aware that a forum of Christian and Muslim leaders had been brought together earlier on by government generally under circumstances of crises. This was during the crisis that followed the announcement of Nigeria's membership of the OIC. We felt however that such a forum would be more effective if it was at the instance of the two groups themselves and not created by government, even though we expected government to show not only interest and commitment but support as well. This was passed as a resolution of CAN and a delegation was composed to reach out to the Muslim leadership.⁶

In the light of this, as plans were underway to reach the Sultan of Sokoto, late Maccido, who was the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA), the president of CAN, Prelate Sunday Mbang, on a visit to the state house, Abuja, mentioned our plan to the then President Olusegun Obasanjo, who immediately indicated an interest and enthusiasm for such a plan. No doubt, the President himself facilitated the meeting in Sokoto as he appointed Professor Yusuf Obaje who was the Chaplain of Villa to be in charge of the logistics.⁷

In no time, a government plane was made available as the governor of Sokoto, Sultan and the leadership of the Supreme council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) warmly welcomed the Christian delegates in Sokoto. The mission of the Christian leaders was presented with pageantry and the Sultan "immediately responded that this corresponds very much with the wishes and desires of the

⁵ J. Onaiyekan

⁶ Onaiyekan, pp.10-11

⁷ Onaiyekan, p.11

Muslim leadership".⁸ The Sultan added that "we do not delay any further. And so, the Nigerian inter-religious council was born right there in the palace of the Sultan".⁹ Onaiyekan again observes that the actual name, NIREC, was coined by professor Obaje and it was agreeable to all.¹⁰ All the delegates in attendance agreed on the 29th of September for the official inauguration, as both Christian and Muslim leaders remarked the significance of the 29th in both faiths. "That is how, on the 29th September, 1999, we gathered at the inaugural occasion in National Christian Centre, Abuja and President Obasanjo inaugurated the NIREC with great joy and with great expectations."¹¹

Since then, NIREC has been meeting on a fairly regularly basis, except for a short space of lack of activity immediately after Professor Yusuf Obaje was no longer in the Presidential Villa. The Late President Yar'Adua immediately took up the issue on assuming office and insisted that activities should resume with full vigour. He then appointed Professor I.O. Oloyede, the present Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin as the National Co-ordinator, in succession to Professor Obaje. NIREC has been meeting four times a year regularly since then.¹² By and large, the composition of the leadership and membership takes the tune of Chairman of CAN and Chairman of SCIA as Co-chairmen of NIREC, with fifty membership, with twenty-five members apiece.

Aims and Objectives of NIREC

It is germane to state here that Nigeria belongs to both religious communities. There will always be Muslims and there will always be Christians in this country called Nigeria. However, NIREC is known with the following aims and objectives;

⁸ Onaiyekan
⁹ Onaiyekan,
¹⁰ Onaiyekan, p.12
¹¹ Onaiyekan,
¹² Onaiyekan,

- It is saddled with the responsibility of carrying out a service for the tranquillity and the peace of the nation;
- NIREC deals largely with the relationship between Christians and Muslims, not only in tiers of reducing conflicts, but also, and above all, in working together on our common challenges.
- It wields moral authority to promote peace and harmony in Nigeria.¹³
- It is a force for change and reconciliation in Nigeria.¹⁴
- NIREC is to seek and promote national unity; and
- In Nigeria, Muslims and Christians are to rediscover their national bond and its cultural basis to find a new and concrete approach to the complexities of religion and state in a pluralist society, which is what Nigeria, is, and finally initiate a commitment to human rights – those of the individuals as well as communities.¹⁵

Apart from the aims and objectives of NIREC, Onaiyekan still wants us to be equipped with more information pertaining to NIREC. It is observed that NIREC is not a parastatal of government and has not been established by government; rather, it was founded on the free decision of the leaders of the umbrella organization of the Christian and Muslim Communities in Nigeria.¹⁶

Again, NIREC is not a government agency. It was agreed and insisted that since it is carrying out a service for the peace of the nation, it deserves the support of government in the area of funding. Until now, both the federal government and state government are funding it. However, NIREC continues to insist on its own autonomy since it believes that government funding cannot mean that it must say what government wants it to say.¹⁷ NIREC ought to

¹³ Onaiyekan, pp13-14

¹⁴ M. Kukah, *Human Rights in Nigeria. Hopes and Hindrance mission*, p.41

¹⁵ Josiah Idowu-Fearon "Interfaith Relations and Community Development: How Feasible>What are the obstacles? How do we Surmount This?" BBA Worship With FBOS and NGOs from Plateau State, 22nd-24th January, 2009, 2009, p.10

¹⁶ Onaiyekan, p.12

¹⁷ Onaiyekan, p.13

be in a position to work autonomously and independently for the good of the nation in line with the objectives that it has set out in the constitution. Because governments come and go, with various opinions of what NIREC is doing, Onaiyekan observes that other Inter-religious Councils have been inaugurated in other African countries like Nigeria. But these African countries are looking up to Nigeria as a model to follow in this regard. No wonder, an African council of religious leaders has been founded in 2002 again by the Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo.¹⁸ To complete the picture, there is a world body called the World Conference for Religions for Peace which actually provided the basic concept for the establishment of the inter-religious councils not only in Nigeria but in many parts of the world. NIREC in a way is affiliated to that world body and it has provided an opportunity to compare notes with similar organizations, learning from each other.

Benefits of NIREC

So far, the benefits of NIREC are enormous and can be highlighted as follows:

1. It is a body set up by moral will to dialogue among religions practiced in contemporary Nigerian society in order to ensure peace and co-existence;
2. As an independent body, both Muslims and Christians can freely interact on this platform and make their cases known;
3. NIREC has painstakingly intervened in many religious crises such as Jos, Abuja and Kaduna;
4. It also involves itself in war against Malaria and HIV/AIDS, message of free and fair elections, good governance, the fight against corruption, and generally promoting peace and harmony in our land;
5. It wields moral powers to indict the government in case of extremities.

¹⁸ Onaiyekan, p.14

The Nigerian State: A Meaning

According to *Encarta Dictionaries* 2009, a state is a country or nation with its own sovereign independent government: a country's government and those government controlled institutions that are responsible for its internal administration and its relationship with other countries.¹⁹ However, the *Thesaurus Dictionary* defines a state in political science as generally a group of people inhabiting a specific territory and living according to a common legal and political authority, a body politic or nation.²⁰ In this definition, the term state includes government. While, in the modern nation state which consists of a group of people with the same or similar nationality inhabiting a definite territory, emerged by a gradual process extending over centuries. With these definitions, Nigeria as a nation can safely be called a state. It exemplifies political authority as reflected in the aspiration of the people inhabiting a definite territory over centuries.

The Nigerian state has its origin in territory, drawn by the colonizers, following certain considerations and regardless of ethnicity of the people in the territory. Isiramen therefore sees Nigerian state as a sovereign or independent political community with its own authority for the establishment of the common good of the people.²¹ She further buttresses the constitutive elements that form the characteristics of a nation in this paradigm;

- i. a plurality of people whose togetherness is determined by interest or culture;
- ii. a distinct permanent territory or settlement for the people;
- iii. a public authority with power to make ultimate decision;
- iv. a positive legal and constitutional order for the attainment of the common good, whose responsibility it is to determine and legalize the political authority.²²

¹⁹ *Encarta Dictionaries*, 2009

²⁰ *Thesaurus Dictionary*, 2009

²¹ C.O. Isiramen *et al* (eds) p.XIX

²² C.O. Isiramen

Undoubtedly, the purpose of the Nigerian state is the promotion of the general political common good of the citizens. However, Nigeria as a state appears to have derailed as a nation. Political stability and development, territorial inheritance, peaceful co-existence, unity, togetherness and harmony are all things of the past. Thus, the Nigerian constitution recognises Nigeria as a secular and pluralistic state. The constitution does not adopt any religion as state religion. Likewise, it does not permit the dominance of any religion over others in national affairs. Section 10 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria prohibits the adoption of a state religion, both at the federal and state levels, and thereafter declares, "The government of the federation and of the states shall not adopt any religion as state religion". This is designed to create a religious harmony. Also, Section 38 of 1999 states that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, belief, worship, practice and observance"

Despite the constitutional provisions, the Nigerian state is unfortunately balkanized with Hobbesian state of nature. Apart from ethnic rivalries and sectarian violence, the Holy writ of Christians and Muslims has become instruments of devastation, brutality, destruction and strife. Nigeria as a nation with many human contradictions such as kickback, embezzlement, greed, privatization, corruption, murder, kidnapping, militancy, political violence, thuggery, electoral frauds, and power failure and among others, negative appellations. In fact, since 1960 when Nigerian state gained her independence, the nation has been rife with signs of uncertain future, a future with signals of guerrilla warfare, political anarchists, trigger-happy politicians, a future of back-breaking hardship, injustice and deprivations. It appears that the future is subsumed under multifarious cataclysms.

The Theoretical Framework for NIREC and the Nigerian State

This work provides a framework for the relationship between NIREC and the Nigerian State. Thus, cultural dispensationalism becomes

crucial in order to reconcile the complexity in a pluralistic state like Nigeria. In fact, pluralism itself helps religious people, both the conservatives and liberals, to define themselves. At the same time, it invites scrutiny of the combinative ways in which religious Nigerians are alike. No doubt, cultural dispensationalism provides a culture-oriented way to read the society. It seeks for cultural contraction and consolidation among contemporary religious conservatives and liberals. Those who seek such cultural contraction, in numerical terms, have grown a good deal-so in one way they are a part of the culture of expansion. But their preference for contraction expresses a habit of mind and a response to complexity in today's world. Within the response of the dispensational message is the idea that the world is growing worse and human beings cannot by themselves undo the damage and right the situation.

Dispensationalist view requires expansion and contraction and together they create a system that provides some cultural balance. Dispensationalism links the liberals and conservatives together. It points to a combinativeness in which, in subtle ways, religious people copy one another and hold similar patterns of thought and value underneath apparent differences. Culture-systems theory argues that greater contraction is needed to balance greater expansiveness. More of the one requires more of the other, and conflict is likely to disappear. This theoretical framework helps us to situate or contextualize NIREC and the Nigerian state as being culturally contractual so as to ensure consolidation. This also promotes the principle of live-and-let-live, togetherness, brotherhood, communalism and we-feelings which transcend religious leaning to the level of humanity. Divine or cultural rescue is necessary for dispensationalists.

NIREC and the Nigerian State

Among the aims and objectives of NIREC, there is the phenomenon of religion as an all-encompassing one; touching on every aspect

of life, especially as regards Nigerian state. It is expedient to state that tranquillity and peace of the nation are paramount in the mind of NIREC. Not only that, NIREC is to ensure the relationship between Christians and Muslims, not only in terms of reducing conflicts but also and above all in working together on our common challenges. With some of these aims and objectives of NIREC, nothing so far has been achieved. The enemies of statehood have become numerous.

The Jos communal clashes has been termed ethnic problem, not religious. Even the explosion of bomb on December 25, 2010 in Jos Metropolis was condemned by NIREC which has accused the country's politicians of fuelling sectarian violence and settling political score through killings. The city of Jos "has been the scene of bloody clashes between two religious groups, but the crisis is widely believed to arise from political and economic reasons"²³ As I observed elsewhere, Jos crisis "was politically motivated and masterminded. Christians and Muslims are unfortunately trading words against each other. They should identify the enemy. The enemy is not religion, because it has four fangs-politics, the citizens, settlers phenomenon and economy – all wrapped in the toga of religion to stoke the various conflagrations."²⁴ NIREC co-chairman, Mohammed Sa-ad Abubakar, described the clashes between followers of Islam and Christianity in the city of Jos as politically motivated, but covered under a religious disguise for the dastardly act.²⁵ It is clear from all indications that NIREC has always condemned the spate of violence in some Northern states where sectarian violence, post-election riots, urging the perpetrators of the violence to stop the carnage immediately. NIREC again cautions "that at this state of Nigeria's socio-political history, Nigerians should

²³ "Politicians fueling Jos crises" NIREC; <file:///c:/documents%20and%20settings/user/Desktop/157697.htm>, accessed on 22/6/2011

²⁴ A.G. Alamu, p.102

²⁵ "politicians fuelling Jos clashes"

be able to address their political differences when they arise in a civilised manner without blood-letting."²⁶

Even before the elections in April, 2011, a NIREC meeting was held in the ancient city of Ibadan, where the then Governor, Alao Akala, delivered a monumental speech that touched on national issues. This meeting was highly significant because it was coming at a time when ethno-religious harmony and tolerance is at a crossroads. Akala remarks that:

Since the beginning of year 2010, we have witnessed in this country, sectarian violence of unequal proportion in our history. The persistent loss of lives and property occasioned by communal strife and religious intolerance in several parts of this country has assumed a worrisome dimension... We cannot fold our arms in anguish and allow this country to go up in flames because of avoidable communal and religious disagreement.²⁷

He equally exonerated the political arena from this turmoil. According to him, in the past, political skirmishes took the central stage in our country, but now that we are beginning to breathe the fresh-air of political maturity which is devoid of the usual turbulence, a new phenomenon of large scale annihilation of rival ethnic and religious groups has brought some of this country into turmoil.²⁸ Alao Akala also made a case for NIREC when he averred that it is true that NIREC has held deliberations in Abuja, Enugu, Maiduguri, Lagos, Kano, Jos and Port Harcourt over the years to find lasting solutions to religious and communal disaffection; the Ibadan meeting should become a watershed in our resolve to be on top of the situation.²⁹ He unequivocally added that:

²⁶ "NIREC Condemns violence in Northern states" <file:///C:/Documents%20and%20settings/user/Desktop/207332-nirec>, accessed on the 22/6/2011

²⁷ Gov Akala at the meeting of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) <file:///C:/Documents%20and%20>

²⁸ Gov. Akala

²⁹ Gov. Akala

While we acknowledge the past efforts of this body to moderate the violent tendencies of various religious and ethnic groups since its inauguration on September 29, 1999, recent events have proved that what is required is a more focused synergy of government religious leaders, the traditional rulers and indeed the political leaders to stop or reduce to a manageable level this civil strife that has raged on unabated.³⁰

Akala surely pointed out that the extent to which NIREC has acted so far is not enough as a result of the helpless situation of the body. He admonishes that efforts of government, traditional rulers and political stakeholders are needed to cow the firearms. He unhesitatingly attests to the fact that;

"We are convinced that it is now time to put in place an effective monitoring team in each of the six (6) geo-political zones of the country to constantly monitor developments and take prompt actions to nib in the bud all catalysts including political, economic and religious militancy that may ignite trouble. The monitoring team should include members of the armed forces, the police, the state security services representatives of traditional rulers and other relevant security agencies."³¹

The most recent, worrisome and commanding intractable miasmic evil is the frequent explosion of bombs orchestrated by the sectarian *Boko Haram*. As a matter of fact, the rate at which they are operating in Nigeria has assumed a national and an alarming proportion, a development which certainly will put the future of our dear nation in jeopardy. Importantly, NIREC has been helpless and inactive in the face of this dastardly act as the sectarian *Boko Haram* which is averse to western education, socialism and democracy in Nigeria, is clamouring for religious freedom, exclusive

³⁰ Gov. Akala

³¹ Gov. Akala

rights and an Islamic state. Thus, this sectarian group emerged in 2009 with the foregoing slogan and the group has been terrorising Bauchi, Maiduguri and Yobe till its leader, Yusuf, was subsequently arrested and killed. Since then, *Boko Haram* has assumed a dangerous dimension such that, it has moved beyond Bauchi and Maiduguri. Today, this group has been operating in Niger, Abuja, Plateau, Yobe, among others. In Abuja, for instance, the fear of "*Boko Haram* is the beginning of wisdom" as bomb substance is perceivably planted everywhere. The *Boko Haram* in late June, 2011 penetrated police force Headquarters in Abuja to unleash terror, of whose shock the Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Ringim, is yet to recover from. Also, mention must be made of the explosion that ravaged the UN secretariat in Abuja late October, 2010.

Today, *Boko Haram* has become widespread and hardened. Recently, *Boko Haram* circulated a letter in Maiduguri, written in Arabic and Hausa, where it reaffirmed the commitment to the destabilization of the country.

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out *Jihad* in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will not accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that the Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any systems of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system and that is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, socialist and whatever. We will not allow Nigerian constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Qu'ran. We will not allow adulterated conventional education (*Boko*) to replace Islamic teachings. We will not respect the Nigerian government because it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and police because they are not protecting Islam. We do not believe in the Nigerian Judicial system and we will fight anyone who helps the government in perpetrating illegalities.³²

³² TELL Magazine, No. 18, May, 2011, p.46

The sect further reaffirmed its anarchist agenda

We are not sorry for all the people that we are killing including wardheads, politicians, police and the army because they are associating themselves with the government by arresting Muslims brothers and sabotaging Islam. We want to make it clear that we are fighting not just because our mosques and centres of learning were destroyed in Maiduguri, or because we were chased out of our houses. The reason we are at war is that our freedom has been curtailed. From time immemorial we have been advocating for freedom of worship and assembly and the need for everybody to believe in Allah. We have been preaching that the people should jettison modern democracy and embrace Islam.³³

The above clearly indicates that there is no reason whatsoever to infer that *Boko Haram* wants peace, harmony, development and sharing our common humanness, rather by obstructing the peaceful co-existence, forcefully enforcing *jihad* and Islamic religion on its victims, declaring Islamic state with *Sharia* as the basis for Nigeria Judicial System freedom of Islamic rights and the total and outright rejection of modern democracy, socialism and Western education. Despite this threat, Alao Akala sympathetically enjoins NIREC not to be deterred by the recent development of *Boko Haram*. According to him,

We should not allow recent developments in some parts of the country to frustrate our future efforts, but rather accept it as a challenge to find lasting solutions to the problems. I have no doubt in my mind that this body is competent and possesses the capacity to tackle this seemingly intractable societal malaise head-long.³⁴

With this encouragement given to NIREC, it is expected that NIREC should intensify its efforts to put a halt to these Gestapo conducts. This avowed commitment and support enjoyed by NIREC

from the government, kind-hearted people and men of goodwill are the sustaining spirit and catalyst by NIREC.

A Critique of NIREC

In spite of the avowed roles and commitments of NIREC, NIREC is a toothless bull-dog that cannot bite its victims, let alone its villains. NIREC as a religiously independent body does not represent all the religions practiced in contemporary Nigeria. In the composition of NIREC, African Religious adherents (Afrelists) are not integrated into the body in the first instance. This makes it one-sided and biased. Dopamu therefore opines that its membership should be revisited in order to address and incorporate representatives of African Religion (Afrel) to its composition.³⁵

With all sense of justice, NIREC can only recommend a blueprint to the government, but it does not possess the legal power to implement the blueprint. This was what informed Akala to state that "it has become obvious that timely intervention must come from stakeholders".³⁶ This timely intervention from stakeholders includes government, the traditional rulers, religious leaders and indeed the political leaders since NIREC is incapacitated to stem the tide of political, ethno-religious and sectarian violence in contemporary Nigeria.

Furthermore, NIREC has, in the words of Kukah, never really made any significant breakthrough even during times of national crises, such as over the issue of *Sharia*, *Boko Haram* and ethno religious violence.³⁷ The council continues to hold many meetings in areas such as Port-Harcourt, Lagos, Maiduguri, Jos, Sokoto, Abuja, Kano, Enugu and Ibadan, yet their practical outcome has been minimal. The public really has no contact with what the council

³³ TELL, p.47

³⁴ Gov. Akala

³⁵ Ade. P. Dopamu, *In the Service of Humanity: A farewell Lecture*, (Ilorin: University Press, 2009) pp.61-62

³⁶ Gov. Akala

³⁷ M. Kukah, p.41

is doing. Moreover, the body is not independent, and is still being funded by the Federal government and the states visited. It is, therefore, almost impossible for the council to move beyond the self-imposed limitations that come from this patronage.³⁸

It is uncertain to say how long the council will last, for and whether there are plans in future for it to become independent and more assertive in addressing national issues. Its role needs not be that of a fire extinguisher in time of crisis, although it has so far failed to fulfil even that role. Not only that, there are internal difficulties arising from the background of the different groups of leaders. Whereas the Christian leaders have independence and no links with government, the Muslim leaders are all appointed and funded by the government. It is hard to get them to accuse, attack or criticise government policies.³⁹

During any national crisis, NIREC as a body has always been overwhelmed by the multi-dimensional shape that the events take. In this vein also, no culprits arising from any recommendations made, have been brought to book, because there is no willpower to execute such a programme. Be that it may, the body is nationally recognised as that of fire-extinguisher which is more or less an added plus to its programme.

Recommendations

Having critically examined the strengths and weaknesses of NIREC in the nation, it is necessary to make the following recommendations that will better enhance the activities of NIREC in contemporary Nigeria.

- NIREC should be an independent body, free from government funding and interference. It should be seen as an NGO sponsored by non-governmental agencies from within and without. NIREC should be reorganised by the statutory law of

the nation. In other words, NIREC should be constitutionally empowered and effective in the discharge of its duty to the nation. As an independent body, as I argued somewhere, members would be sincere, objective in constructing, advising, informing and implementing it policies and both the government and the public can be educated and carried along. This will enhance continuity, objectivity and sincerity of purpose. With this, government would be exonerated, as the Muslims and Christians would blame their common enemies-the political anarchists.⁴⁰

- NIREC as an independent body with constant dialogue and feedback would spawn new atmosphere that will inform open-mindedness, a just and peaceful society where no sins of omission and commission will be committed.⁴¹
- NIREC as an independent body devoid of government's interference can serve as a moral compass for the nation.
- If independently constituted, NIREC will truly enforce a change and reconciliation in Nigeria, where both Christians and Muslims will not only reduce conflicts but also, and above all, work together in their common challenges.
- It is obvious that religious violence and explosives orchestrated by *Boko Haram* are much more frequent in the Northern part of Nigeria than in the Southern parts. The fact remains that while northern protests have a reformative air, the southern ones revolve around ethical issues. Olupona and Falola explain the limited geo-political impact of the protests, even though most, if not all, of the protests address the need to transform the symbolic and institutional frameworks of collective life. To them, religion is a tool being manipulated by the ruling *elite* to

³⁸ Kukah

³⁹ Kukah

⁴⁰ A.G. Alamu, "The Sins of Omission and Commission in Nigeria's Religious Violence: Dopamu's Hermeneutics As an alternative" *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 5. (June-December, 2009) p.93

⁴¹ Alamu, "The Sins of Omission and Commission..." p. 94

veil the contradictions in their performances.⁴² They further buttress that the variables which inform religious protests in Nigeria include the geo-political spread of religious communication and state-civil society relations.⁴³ Therefore, the government, political *elite*, ruling *elite*, religious leaders and political anarchists should promote a vital need for inter-religious communication which would seek to correct the bases and the lacunae of the state's tense relationship with religious groups.

- *Boko Haram* as a sectarian group in Islam should be stopped and crushed by all means since they are not even ready to stop or negotiate with NIREC as well as other stake holders in the nation. Religious sentiments should be put aside since this sectarian group is vomiting hailstone, fire and ready to crush anyone, whether government or her agencies at any slightest opportunity. Even the group is ready to tear the nation apart if not checked. The group sees Nigeria as a madhouse where the worst is not bad enough. A country where one absurdity succeeds another; and anarchy becomes breakfast.

Conclusion

Having understudied the roles of NIREC in Nigeria, we discovered that there are loopholes and lacunae in the activities of NIREC. As a matter of fact, Nigerian state is so fragile, that it even relies on external agents to relieve it of its inherent structural weaknesses ingrained in the very process of exploitative dependency and structural incompetence. Kukah argues that the Nigerian state was conceived, nurtured and sustained in violence. No wonder, both Islam and Christianity become very serious sources of severe strains and disruptions on African politics as the new identities

⁴² J.K. Olupona and T. Falola, (eds) *Religion and Society In Nigeria, Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd. 1991) p.231

⁴³ J.K. Olupona and T. Falola

created by them would later have explosive consequences.⁴⁴ In the face of these contradictions, NIREC is handicapped to make any change, because a sect in Islam (*Boko Haram*) within the three main religions in Nigeria professes teachings that are dangerous and intemperate to the legitimate order, upright morals, social serenity, peaceful co-existence and unity, thereby plunging the state into an awkward situation and forcing it to take measures against such sectarian groups, forbidding the application of its teachings. This sect is making heroes out of its worshippers comparable to martyrs.

To this end, the Nigerian state as a secular and pluralistic society should imbibe the culture of heterogeneity. Africans cherish human diversity in an attempt to live as neighbours from the same source – God – with only different religious backgrounds. The truth of the above quest for peace is that, for us, some truth is yet to be learnt that will remove the scale off our eyes. However, if this is not adopted pragmatically, the government should employ the service of all the necessary security agencies to cow any armed regiment or guerrilla warfare decisively without any further negotiation. Nigerian state right now should have an integral agenda of unifying, and by extension, protecting the interest of all its citizens under one umbrella.

⁴⁴ M.H. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd. 2007) pp.38-39