

PEACE-BUILDING: AN ANTIDOTE TO RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Moses Onyekachi Nwakanma & Oliver O.C. Uche

*Department of Religion and Human Relations,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

Abstract

The concepts of hostility, conflict, crisis and violence have been topical right from the origin of man. The implication therefore is that war and hostility is almost as old as human being. Unarguably, the historical accounts of human existence are replete with orgies of wars and its attendant consequences. Most times it takes both covert and overt forms and sometimes it takes either of the patterns. Many are yet forget the horrible accounts of the first and second world wars, the holocausts and other killings across the world. The formation of the United Nations Organizations (UNO) after the Second World War has not deescalated all forms of war among various nations and global blocks. Here in Nigeria, despite the abundance of natural, material and human resources the country is richly endow with, religion and ethnicity have unarguably continued to shape the sensibility of the citizens. The avoidable Nigeria/Biafra civil war, the protracted ethnic conflicts between Ife and Modakeke in Osun State, Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state, Jukun and Tiv in Taraba state, the killings by Maitatsine, Sharia and Boko Haram zealots across the northern parts are some of the ethno-religious conflicts that have seriously questioned the oneness of Nigeria as espoused by her forebears. Regrettably, governments at all levels seem to be more interested in launching military actions and spending huge on amassing ammunition but spending little or nothing on peace-building. The end result of these acquisitions is seen in the escalation of conflict, promotion of violence, intolerance, injustice, instability, impunity, abuse of human dignity and rights as well as the empowerment of men with unfettered access to arms. War can be compared to a game which one can understand its beginning without knowing its ending. Virtually, everything in life has alternative(s). The alternative to war can never be war rather peace. This paper x-rayed the value, importance and promotion of peace-building as a medicine that can counteract the poison of ethno-religious conflicts bedeviling the country.

Key Words: Peace-building; Ethnicity; Religious conflict; Antidote

Introduction

Nigeria is an important or very integral on the sociopolitical existence of the African continent and the entire world hence she is fondly called the “giant of Africa” and the most populous black nation of the world. She is a well-endowed nation with plenteous natural resources on the African continent. Even when its last population and Housing Census report in 2006, its population is still under assumption and has been assumedly put at over 200 million. Nigeria is one of the world's most ethnically diverse nation comprising multi-ethnic nationalities. Some the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are larger than many independent states in Africa. Some researchers have posited that among the estimated three thousand ethnic groups in the world at the early 1960s, about one thousand of them were represented in Africa while over four hundred are found in Nigeria. There are three groups that are very dominant among all the numerous ethnic groups in the country. There are views among some scholars that Nigeria provides one of the best-case studies of ethno-religious conflicts. With over four hundred ethnic groups, distributed among the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigeria since independence, has produced a catalogue of ethno religious conflicts that resulted in an estimated loss of over three million lives and unquantifiable psychological and material damages. This has also given birth to many religio-ethnic militias whose emergence has caused the deep divides between the various ethnic groups, religious intolerance and bloody with more devastating results using the ethnic militias as the executors of ethno-religious agenda. Hence this study is enthused to analyze the idea of peace as the measure of checkmating these dangers.

Clarification of Some Terms

Peace-building

The idea of peace-building can be described as the process of setting up, nurturing, maturing, working, improving and sustaining the culture of peace. It implies training and making the populace believe and adopt peaceful attitude. Peace-building is primarily is all about dealing with the reasons why people fight against each other in the first place. It entails also supporting societies to manage their differences and conflicts without resorting to violence. Nevertheless, to understand peace-building, there is the need to appreciate the factors that contribute to peace and it is their absence that can potentially lead to conflict. Can we briefly take a look at some of the issues that can contribute to peace? Ordinarily, peace can be more than just the absence of violence. Issues such as when everyone lives in safety, without fear or threat of violence and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice, when everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are trusted with fair and effective laws that protect people's rights, when everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people everyone has

fair and equal access to the basic needs for their wellbeing-such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare and a decent living environment everyone has an equal opportunity to work and make a living, regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity. These are the factors that, taken together, provide people with the resilience that allows them to deal with their differences and conflicts without violence.

Some of the ways in which this can be achieved are through: bringing different groups together to build trust and promote reconciliation engaging in various forms of diplomacy and support for formal peace processes strengthening democracy and inclusive politics (e.g. inclusion of marginalized groups, active citizenship initiatives, etc.) improving justice systems (e.g. anti-corruption initiatives, constitutional reforms, access to justice initiatives, truth commissions, etc.) working to improve community security and shape the behavior of security forces working together with business and trade to create sustainable jobs or improve their employment practices improving infrastructure and urban and rural planning creating free and inclusive media making development programmes (health, education, economic development) in conflict areas more sensitive to conflict dynamics so that they deliberately contribute to peace. Importantly, peace-building is done collaboratively, at local, national, regional and international levels. Individuals, communities, civil society organizations, governments, regional bodies and the private sector all play a role in building peace. To sustain positive change, everyone affected by a violent conflict has to be involved in the process of building peace.

Antidote

An antidote is a chemical substance that stops or controls the dangerous effect of a poison. In other words, ethnic and religious conflicts are poisonous to humanity.

Ethnic

This could be seen as a relationship, concern, favor or regard shown to person or people because of common language, culture and origin. Ethnicism in the Nigerian context can be defined as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race, religion and/or common history. For the purpose of this study, Achebe's (1997) version of ethnicity "as discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of birth" is considered as the divisive form of ethnicism and it shall so be regarded throughout the work. Ethnicity has to more to do with a social reality that is manifested in interactions among individuals of different ethnic groups within a political system where language and culture are the most prominent attributes. Ethnicity is natural in almost all societies made up of more than one ethnic group. This observation tends to offer the suggestion that the interaction between different ethnic groups within a single political set-up generates ethnic identity. Eriksen (1996) sees it as an

interaction that can create a common consciousness of being one in relation to other relevant ethnic groups. That in turn, results in the emergence of in-group and out-group confines which come to be guarded jealously over time. Based on this approach, ethnicity thus becomes a process through which ethnic identities are politicized (p.30). All through the history; ethnicity has been viewed in terms of a group setting and associated with the idea of nationhood. Peterson, Novak and Gleason (1982) argue that the word “ethnic” is derived via Latin from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning nation or race (p.1). Thomson (2000) defines an ethnic group as “a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship, ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language”. Ethnicity, however, focuses more on sentiments of origin and decent more than the geographical considerations of a state (p.58). Ethnicity seems to be based on the wider functions of the state which has the greater impetus of organizing people with the aim of getting what the state is distributing and, in another way, preventing others from getting it.

Religious

An act of practicing religion. Cicero in Nmah (2009) holds the view that religion came from a root word *leg* meaning to take up, gather, count or observe the signs of divine communication. Karl Bahner described religion from the word *religare* which means binding oneself back to one’s origin or goal or to bind oneself fast to God (p.22). Therefore, to be religious can be described as the sacred attitudes of an individual toward whom and what he believes in.

There has been a series of arguments on whether ethnic identity is a more prominent and stable source of identity in Nigeria than religious identifications and inclinations. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) argue that in the Hausa-Fulani North, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and only serves to stimulate ethnicity. But of the two major ethnic groupings in Nigeria, the Yoruba people are more likely to identify themselves with their ethnic group than are the Northern Hausa-Fulani (pp.10-11). Nigeria has three major religious identities: Christian, Islam and traditional religions. Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) state that traditional religions are the most politically inactive of the three groups, ‘numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and sub-groups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses (p.557) Osaghae and Suberu (2005) concur with Lewis and Bratton (2000) that Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be the backbone of religious disparity and conflict and this differentiation underlies the North-South cleavage.

Religion plays a critical role in Nigerian society and has expressed itself as a potent force in the geopolitical development of the country. This force which has been used to unite Nigerians is the same force that has led to numerous conflicts in the country.

Conflicts

It means to come into collision or disagreement, be contradictory, at variance, or in opposition, having clashes and to fight, contend or to do battle. Unarguably, this is an integral part of organizational life and can be found in most climes, societies and occupations. Countries that want to excel and flourish do not simply seek for ways to manage conflict alone but also eliminate it. Luthans, Rubach and Marsnik (1995) argue that instead, they try to make the best of conflict and use its potential for learning and improvement. Carnevale and Mazzuca (2014) affirm that when conflict is not personal but concerns the job or the task at hand and it can be a creative force for change.

Resolving conflict demands creativity. Creativity requires the following abilities: openness, listening, acceptance, mutuality, risk-taking, trust, awareness, collaboration, and practice. These are the same skills required of an improviser. Improvisation requires you to be open to the ideas of others and accepting of what they offer. You approach the situation without preconceived ideas. This is the cornerstone of creative problem solving. This openness allows you the opportunity to listen and “get out of your head” rather than focus on your position or pre-planned strategy. Disputants rarely enter a mediation or negotiation with this frame of reference. It is, therefore, even more important that the mediator enter the session open to possibility. Quieting your mind so that you can hear your intuitive voice and be open to possibility is the first step in mediation.

What is Ethno-Religious Conflict?

Ethno-religious conflict is distinguished from other types of social conflict in that it involves ethnic groups, which are of different religions.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Functionalist and Conflict theories in explaining the cohesive and progressive functions expected of ethnicity and religion to the society and the dangers when it works to the contrary. Iruonagbe (2013) avers that Durkheim one of the proponents of Functionalist theory believes that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs that form the collective conscience. The absence of the aforementioned threatens social order, social control, social solidarity or cooperation and the unity of the people (p.5). Coser (1956) being one of the disciples of the foremost originator of the conflict theory, Karl Marx, said that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (p.3). Ani (2012) affirms that conflict manifests as products of interactions amongst human beings and groups who plot to outwit others (p.158). This theory is used because it implies that conflict is generated by the quests to protect one's

identity and maximize one's interest. Functionalist theory is employed because religion and idea of ethnicism are some of the factors that a society needs to properly function. Therefore, the society will be in danger if religion and ethnicism fail to perform or function negatively. It is used to highlight the dangers of how dysfunctional religious and ethnic beliefs can retard the growth and progress of a society. Contextually, Peace-building: an antidote to religious and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria implies the adoption and practicing of the culture of nurturing and living out peaceful dispositions the reliable means to managing conflicts that erupt from the angles or religions and ethnicities in Nigeria knowing conflicts is disastrous to unity and existence of the country.

Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

Located in West African part of the continent of Africa, Nigeria is the most populous nation on the continent. With riches in natural and human resources, Nigeria is ranked as one of the most developed states in Africa but perennial conflicts of interest between various ethnic groups have put a damper on further political and economic development. Thomson (2000) notes that many of these have led to political mobilization based on ethnic lines (p.65). The issues of boundary demarcations during the colonial period added to Nigeria as a political entity being created in 1914 a multi-ethnic nation consisting of multi ethnic groups speaking multi languages. Falola (1999) states that there are three main groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbo, who roughly accounted for 28%, 20% and 17% of the population respectively (p.5). Taken that these groups interacted with one another before the colonial era, they were not primordial societies and Thomson (2000) believes that the artificiality of the British-drawn boundaries contributed to the 'social construction' of these ethnic groups, so much so that "the creation of these 'tribes' are closely linked to the era of British colonial rule" (p.66).

The Eruption of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Concerning ethnic conflict, Bostock (1997) defines it as a "breakdown of accommodation of ethnic minorities within a state". We have a few reservations with this definition, however. Firstly, ethnic conflict can also result from a failure to accommodate ethnic majorities within the state. Secondly, result from insufficient accommodation within the state, as perceived by ethnic groups, without a breakdown having to occur. The cause of ethnic conflict might not necessarily lie within the state, but can be the result of external influences (94). Ethno-Religious conflicts in Nigeria erupt summarily on the account of the breakdown of relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another; it is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. In Nigeria, it is interesting to note that ethnicity and religious bigotry has become the fulcrum of various forms of nationalism ranging from assertion of language,

cultural autonomy and religious superiority to demands for local political autonomy and self-determination. All these sometimes lead to some forms of contextual discrimination of members of one ethnic or religious group against another on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols and religion. Therefore, in a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Nigeria, with some forms of contextual discrimination, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic components explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation as far back as 1980s to date.

Diaries of Some Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Scholars like Falola (1999) are of the views that the military coup marked the beginning of a deeper crisis in Nigeria simply because Ironsi, an Igbo man succeeded the head of the coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. Hence, the coup was interpreted by other groups as Igbo coup. Ironsi was soon deposed by Gowon in a counter coup in July 1966. Gowon was from the north, and “like the politicians, the soldiers too had their ethnic loyalties”. The situation in Nigeria degenerated fast, leading to a general massacre of thousands of Igbo in the north, followed by the Igbo’s declaration of the eastern region as the independent state of Biafra in 1967 (p.11). Other nations of the world were reported to have taken sides in the war. Thomson (2000) describes this event as the low point in Nigeria’s aspirations of national unity but a probable highpoint of political mobilization along ethnic lines (p. 68). Nel and McGowan (1999) affirm that in the civil war that ensued, Nigeria was brought to the world’s attention with the US and the USSR backing Nigeria while Biafra receiving support from states like France, Portugal and South Africa. Re-unification only took place after the civil war was ended three years later in 1970, but by then almost two million “Biafrans” had died (pp.155-156). Before the present democratic experiment in Nigeria, there were ethno-religious conflicts that claimed so many lives and property. Notable among such crises are the Maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s, Jimeta-Yola religious disturbances in 1984, Zango Kataf crises in Kaduna State 1992, Kafanchan College of Education Muslim Christian riots; Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes between 1981-1982, the cross versus the crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan between 1981 and 1985, the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots in 1982, Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto in 1982, and the Muslim-Christian Clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin, Kwara State in 1986. However, with the birth of Fourth Republic, there came exponential increase of ethno-religious violence. Its frequent occurrence could be attributed to the freedom provided by democratic rule. Kura (2010) the first leg of ethnic and religious riots in Nigeria in recent

time was in July 1999, when some Oro cultists in Sagamu, in Ogun State accused a Hausa woman of coming out when the cultists were outside with their gnome. This led to some altercations, which eventually led to full-blown crisis. Many people, majorly of Hausa and Yoruba ethnic groups lost their lives (pp.33-34). The infamy was however, temporarily put to check only when a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed on the sleepy town of Sagamu. As it is in the culture of Nigerians, as the infamy was put off in Sagamu, reprisal killings started in Kano, a major Hausa city. As a result, many people died and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. Kano residents of Southern extraction who had lived, all their, adult lives in the ancient city of Kano had to return to their native land to count their losses. When Kano City was settling down for peace, Lagos erupted with another orgy of violence, visibly as a mark of vengeance of the Kano mass killing of the Yoruba tribe men. This time, the O'dua People Congress moved against the Hausa/Fulani traders in the popular 'mile 12 market and for two days, the area was turned to a killing field.

Another ethno-religious conflict that left an unwanted mark in Nigeria was the Kaduna conflicts which moved as far as Enugu state in the southern part of Nigeria. The root cause of this set of riots was the introduction of the Islamic Code known as Sharia by some governors of the northern states of Nigeria led first by Governor Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State in October 1999 that was greeted with pockets of harmless protests. However, what appeared to be subdued fire was ignited when Governor Mohammed Makarfi of Kaduna State tried it in February 2000 to impose Sharia in the state. Largely because of the deep-seated animosities between the Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State especially in the state capital and coupled with the fact that both faiths are almost at par in population, the bloodletting that followed was unimaginable. As usual, the Igbo tribe (a predominantly Christian ethnic group from the southern Nigeria) was mostly affected. Like the Sagamu incident we discussed before now, other Igbo cities erupted in violence when many Igbo were returned dead and those who were lucky to escape narrated accounts of targeted attacks by the Hausa/Fulani in Kaduna. Still in that October, 2000, Erukora (2005) submits that another ethno-religious conflict occurred in Lagos particularly Idi Araba/Okoko-Oba. This conflict erupted between the Hausa residents and the Yoruba group at Idi-Araba in Lagos. The major cause of the crises was the use of a convenience by a Hausa resident. What could have been this misunderstanding led to the killing many Yoruba residents of the area with bows, arrows and machetes. The O' dua People Congress (a Yoruba militia) responded and things went out of hands. What can be regarded as the fray of madness later spilled into Okoko-Oba, another Lagos suburb with a high population of Hausa/Fulani stock. The violence later spread to Kano and as expected the southerners were mostly the victims (p.63). Kura (2010) states that in September 2001, ethnic friction between the Tivs and the Jukuns in the Plateau state reached fever pitch following what came to be referred to as 'mistaken identity'. It is reported that some Tivs took about nineteen soldiers to be Jukuns

in fake army uniform. These youths captured them and slaughtered them. Then the Nigerian army embarked on devastating reprisal attacks in Zaki-Biam. According to some controversial numbers at least a hundred people died in the army attacks. Another spate of violence spread to Jos plateau state after a Christian was appointed as a Local Council Chairman. By the time the menace was brought to a standstill, over one hundred and sixty lives had been lost (pp.34-35). In October, 2001, there was another mayhem in Kano that was caused by an international event when some terrorists attacked the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in the United State of America and shortly after the United States launched an offensive against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Kano city erupted with another round of ethno-religious conflict. In this case, some Islamic fundamentalists who felt that the United States of America had no reason to bombard Afghanistan decided to set the city of Kano on fire. Like the earlier crises in the city, the Southern tribes in Nigeria were mostly the victims.

Between 1999 and 2013, numerous conflicts have been witnessed in Nigeria. The most important among them is the Boko Haram crisis which is on-going. Shehu (2011) avers that this group has a bloody campaign to impose a sui-generis Islamic regime based on Sharia in the northern part of the country. Actually, it is hard to argue that Boko Haram is a religious or ethnic conflict. In the former case, it targets more Muslims than Christians. In the latter, it is mostly an ethnic Northern conflict. For this reason, though Boko Haram uses a religious discourse, it may be more appropriate to call it simply a terrorist organization. With regard to the numerous conflicts and the Boko Haram menace in particular, the country's stability is under constant threat. Boko Haram has introduced into Nigeria's political and social life a level of insurgency never witnessed before. The insurgency became violent in 2008 even before the country could heal from previous ethno-religious conflicts (p.3). Amanambu (2013) suggest that Boko Haram was founded around 2002 by late Muhammad Yusuf. It is formally identified by its members as 'Jama'atahlis Sunnah lid Da'watwal Jihad', which means 'people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad. The name of the group 'Boko Haram' is loosely translated from the Hausa language to mean "western education is sinful". This meaning is extended to mean any western culture is prohibited. It is for this reason that followers of this outfit advocate for a government based on Sharia as opposed to a democratic one. Warner (2012) argues that it is possible to count Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamic fundamentalism as the basic items of the Boko Haram's ideology. The group which was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri did not become militant until 2009 when its leader was captured and killed by the Nigerian army. Since then, the group has engaged in gun battles, arson, bombing and stabbing, in promoting their ideology. He also believes that Boko Haram can be examined in various ways. But these four reasons account for the eruption of these terrorists, the long history of continued radical Islamic movements in the Northern Nigeria contributes to the rise of the

group, the group is founded owing to the socio-economic marginalization of the country's mass population in the north, it can be understood as seeking revenge especially in response to the extrajudicial attitudes of some of the law enforcers and there is the view and the perception that the group is employed by the elites from the North to express their grievances over lack of interest demonstrated by the federal government while not forgetting that the group can be understood as developing as an offshoot of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and probably Al-Shabaab (pp.39-40).

All the crises events presented above and which occurred before and since the coming of democracy in 1999, remain stark reminders that the conflict hotbeds around the country are always steaming and ready to explode at the slightest provocation. From the various examples of ethno religious conflicts cited, it can be seen that there is no sharp distinction between ethnic conflict and religious conflict. What this means is that a Conflict that begins as an ethnic 'conflict may end up as a religious crisis and vice-versa. This explains why ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are always devastating in their effects.

Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Many reasons have rightly adduced by scholars on the causes of ethno religious violence in Nigeria. The major cause of what we now see as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry. In every nation (Nigeria inclusive), there is no complete agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. There are two basic factors causing ethno-religious violence in Nigeria and they are absolute ignorance and human interests. Ignorance is the chief cause of the ethno religious violence. No Nigerian applied to be Igbo, Hausa Yoruba, Efik, Ibibio, Mada, Igala, Kanuri etc but by birth they found themselves where they are today. They have not taken time to understand that every human is created by one being. The religions they are fighting and killing one another in their names were actually imported to them. They were not discovered from their environment. Aside ignorance, who will fight over issues as these? The political class seems to be aware of this will always employ all manners of tricks to deceive the masses so that they will continue to set them against one another. The second issue is interests. Nigeria is seen as a sharing entity. With the monthly sharing of monies to the three tiers of governments, the allocations and distribution of state wealth base clearly of who you know, where you are coming from and not what one is doing, the interests in sharing all these especially the political side of it has led to conflicts that will usually go with ethnic and religious colorations. Amanambu and Nwakanma (2021) identify the dangers of ethnicity as divisiveness, recruitment of mediocre as leaders, killing rational thinking and breeding hatred, breeds tribal warlords

who rise to challenge national sovereignty, helps in producing Leaders that are Unaccountable.

Peace-building and Ethno-Religious harmony in Nigeria

The importance of peace cannot be over emphasized to the sustenance of humanity and the society. It is said that every war ends at the dialogue table ten if the people will eventually be talking about peace at the end, why the taking up arms in the first place? The culture of building peace in the minds and hearts of the people saves the country the wanton destruction of lives and property. It promotes tolerance above vengeance; it ensures understanding in the midst of misunderstanding, it promotes forgiveness instead of revenge. The fact remains that all those lives lost in the ethno religious conflict cab never be replaced. The culture of peace helps people develop sound mind for the sustenance of humanity and society. Peace is the way to life.

Recommendations

The civil society should insulate themselves from partisan politics and other the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) they should play special roles in conflict management in Nigeria. They should organize it in particular way that they will serve as facilitators of dialogues between conflicting groups. The culture of peace should be inculcated into the children from the day they are borne if possible be made a compulsory subject at all level of schools in Nigeria.

Nigerian leadership must design and adopt superior ideology that will ensure common good. It will urgently dismantle the structure of ethnic and religious warlords and ensure that politicians de-establish their selfish politicking from religion and ethnicity. It will also ensure that sustainable peace and social equity which will minimally reduce the platform for the rise of ethno-religious fighters in Nigeria. Stronger ideology aimed at creation of common good will spur the Nigerian government to meaningfully address the range of social, political and economic challenges facing the country. It will focus on improving its governance capacity at all levels through recourse to the rule of law and bridge the offensive gap between the rich and the poor.

The interfaith and Daily Life forms of dialogue should be vigorously pursued by all and sundry since Christians and Muslims live next to each other and mingle freely in all aspects of life. They meet in the market places, on the streets, in schools and other institutions. Christians receive Christmas and Easter Greeting Cards from their Muslim friends, neighbors and relatives. Muslims and Christians worship together during wedding or burial of relatives, friends, colleagues and business associates. There is also an urgent need to improve on all round quality of education in Nigeria because human and social

developments depend on information and learning and any society that wants to develop must prioritize education. The leaders should be upright and strong. They should do away with the Fire Brigade Approach to governance. For example, the success credited to the military after their alleged invasion of Sambisa Forest and other strongholds of the Boko Haram with other ethno-religious terrorists may be good but not enough. This is because these monsters should not be fought from the defensive approach. The fact remains that those who have been killed, maimed, raped, disfigured and have their hard-earned properties destroyed cannot be resurrected, revived and placated. Politicians should refrain from playing on people's religious sentiments in canvassing for support, knowing how this can easily erupt into violence. The constitution should be strengthened and our elite should always ensure a level playing field where individuals should have access to adequate opportunity for personal and co-operate developments. Purposeful leadership aimed at national development devoid of primordial interest should be championed. The die-hard religious and ethnic warlords in Nigeria should reconsider their agitations and activities in a multi-religious and cultural Nigerian society. All hands should be on deck to work for a state that is religiously neutral, a state that can uphold the rule of law and civilized where Human Rights are adorned. The culture of peace should be promoted because peace is the way.

Conclusion

Unarguably, ethno-religious conflicts are some of the major challenges facing the world and in particular Nigeria. These conflicts also have a compounding influence on other issues such as political, economic and social stability. The case of ethnic conflict in Nigeria is illustrative of this point and indeed multi-faceted and extremely complex. Taken that both religion and ethnicity will not totally elude the society, the culture of peace building is very needful to checkmate the ugly fallouts of ethnicity and religiosity.

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