



Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation

"They are blessed who work for peace, for they shall be called God's children." Matthew 5:9

Nigeria's First Lady: Video Threat and FoRB A Press Statement by The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation (TP-MPF), February 26th 2024

First Word: There is hunger in the land. Prices of food items are skyrocketing daily resulting in increased number of Nigerians who cannot afford food. The Nigerian government needs to act beyond providing food stamps. Short term measures should be replaced by longer term approaches to solve the hunger problem in Nigeria which in part is caused by food terrorism nuanced with the present insecurity experienced in Nigeria. To stem the tides of insecurity as a long-term approach to solving hunger, there is need for the government and law enforcement to clamp down on those who make inciteful statements that have the tendency to stir up violence.

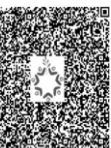
A Crime Punishable by Law

Recently, a [video](#) of an Islamic Cleric speaking in Hausa against Nigeria's First Lady, Oluremi Tinubu for being a Christian went viral on social media. In the video, the cleric declared that the First Lady deserves to die for not just being a Christian but also a pastor. According to him, the First Lady is not the kind of "people of the book" that Prophet Muhammed said a Muslim man could marry. In Hausa, he said: "Now, Tinubu, his wife is an infidel. As an infidel, she is a leader among the infidels. "God's judgement says she must be killed. She's a pastor . . . a leader of infidels (Christians); Allah says they must be killed . . ." Publicly calling for the assassination of a First Lady is a crime punishable under Nigerian law which prohibits any threat to kill or do bodily harm to a public official - in this case the President - or his family. This is not only an issue of religious intolerance but of public order and national security. ***Although the cleric in a subsequent video, has offered an apology for his incendiary remarks,*** the reality is [that](#) the brazen disregard and levity with which the lives of Christians are treated in Nigeria is a serious threat to national unity and internal security. It is strange that Christians who believe in God and are followers of Christ, something recognized in the Koran as people of the book will be referred to as *arne* or infidels by some Muslims. In reality, prescribing death warrants on innocent people in the name of religion is anti-religious and goes against the grain of any godly belief system. This manifestation of religious bigotry and intolerance are hallmarks of radical extremism. It **MUST** be stopped through constitutional/legal means. Our collective silence on such matters is our collective doom as a nation and we become a laughing stock of nations.

Why the Silence?

The recent threat on the life of Nigeria's First lady for the singular reason that she is a Christian, married to a Muslim, who is moderate and a nationalistic leader should be condemned by all well-meaning and progressive Nigerians. The Muslim community and leaders in particular cannot afford to remain silent. There needs to be a major release by the Sultan, who commands the respect of many both Muslims and Christians. Why is there yet to be a word from MURIC which claims to be fighting for justice. Why has there not been total condemnation by JNI? Even though notable Muslim voices such as Hon. Mohammed Bello El-Rufai and Sen. Shehu Sani have condemned the cleric's pronouncements and called for his prosecution. Is it a crime for her to be a Pastor?

Recall that this dignified citizen of Nigeria, our First Lady, was at some point a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. How audacious for a cleric to resort to such deadly tactics, dressed in



religious bigotry, to intimidate a public official of such high standing! The cleric is also heard saying the Muslim-Muslim ticket that brought President Bola Tinubu to power was a scam. Furthermore, he accuses the President of not being able to convert his wife. And so, what? Is the ability to convert a non-Muslim wife to Islam a qualification for becoming President of Nigeria? Is that what the Muslim-Muslim ticket is all about? Well, I have had one or two occasions to listen to both the President and the Vice President speak and they sounded both as if they want to work for a better Nigeria. They claim to be ready to serve this nation and we need to give them the chance to prove themselves. Religious extremism exhibits ignorance and selfish ambition, and will lead us nowhere, except towards anarchy and chaos.

Therefore, as a Social Justice and Peace Advocate group, we condemn this unprovoked call for the death of the First Lady in its entirety. Such flagrant threats to public safety should not be ignored, or there will be no Nigeria as we know it. Clerics who resort to such extremist ideologies and tactics should be condemned within Christendom and more frequently within the Muslim community where such has been rampant. In this instance, it is the responsibility of Islamic leaders not to allow such voices to go uncensored within their fold.

An Affront to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

Many problems are currently plaguing Nigeria. One is the total disregard for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Due to Nigeria's multifaceted complexities, the disregard for FoRB has ripple effects that have resulted in violence and have a tendency to spiral out of control, if care is not taken. Consequently, we declare that the Federal Government must take this threat seriously and deploy its legitimate instruments to ensure that nothing happens to Senator Pastor Oluremi Tinubu.

Our country is currently battling a protracted insurgency that has lasted for over a decade. FoRB issues such as this must be handled within the full ambit of the law. Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right which Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone. Chapter 4, Section 38 of the Nigerian constitution also gives every Nigerian the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. To protect the rights of everyone, the government must be seen upholding the rule of law without prejudice or preference. In doing so, government must be bold enough to call a spade a spade. Failure to do so had caused impunity to abound. When religious clerics like the one in the video make such outrageous public remarks, they promote disaffection and ill-will, and give their followers reason to perpetuate mayhem and violence in total disregard for FoRB. Their hate speech and politically-motivated religious rhetoric is a threat to social cohesion and peaceful coexistence because it breeds religious intolerance and disregard for human dignity and life. Such religious leaders are not patriots, as they do not have the interest of the nation at heart.

Recommendations

1. Leading religious leaders, through NIREC, should meet over this threat to the First lady. This should be addressed and tackled in the open and not through a back door approach.
2. Mr President should give priority to peace building and conflict transformation approach on a national scale.
3. A National Peace and Reconciliation Commission should be set up to promote peaceful coexistence among Nigerians.
4. Respect for Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) should be elevated to the level of national discourse and social action as a conversation, practice and structural framework.
5. The public use of words that depict religious intolerance such as *arne* (infidel) and kafir (pagan) amount to hate speech and should be outlawed not only in our Criminal and Penal Codes, but also in our Constitution.



Conclusion

Religious diversity should not be a source of grief for Nigerians. True religion should be an instrument of peace not destruction and death. Like Maya Angelou said, “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.” She added: “Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible.” And as the current UN General Secretary, Antonio Guterres, said: “We have to transcend our differences to transform our future.” Nigerian religious and political leaders need to instill these social and religious truths into our national consciousness and discourse in word and practice.



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