

THE GIDEON & FUNMI PARA-MALLAM PEACE FOUNDATION
COMMUNIQUÉ AT THE END OF ONE-DAY ROUNDTABLE FOR TOP
CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM LEADERS HELD AT THE NOVEL SUITES AND
RESORTS, JOS ON TUESDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY 2019

Organized by The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation

PREAMBLE

1. On Tuesday 5th February 2019, a one-day Roundtable for Christian and Muslim Leaders took place at the Novel Suite and Resort, Jos, Plateau State on the theme: *Support Nigeria Towards Free, Fair and Violence-Free 2019 Elections: What can Religious Leaders do before, during and Post-elections?* The Roundtable sought to harness the resources and potentials of religious leaders towards promoting peaceful, credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria in February and March 2019, and beyond.

2. The imperative of the Roundtable is highlighted against the background of the high tension being witnessed in the build up to the 2019 general elections, largely due to the destructive narratives along ethno-religious fault-lines. Such narratives thrive on years of indoctrination. Beyond indoctrination, some religious leaders have raised tension with predictions of winners and losers of the elections. The tension is further exacerbated by certain unscrupulous political leaders who have been promising to deliver millions of votes to their political parties without regards to the sanctity and/or integrity of the electoral principle on secrecy of votes. Elections are typically easy spark plugs for violence in Nigeria. No nation survives with constant violence as a mark of her Statehood. Therefore, there is need for proactive steps to be taken.

3. In view of the foregoing, The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation organized the one-day Roundtable to brainstorm on violence-free elections 2019 and come up with recommendations towards the successful conduct of the 2019 elections and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

ATTENDANCE

4. Stakeholders were drawn from Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, and Lagos States, as well as outside the country including the Ambassador of the United States of America to Nigeria, His Excellency, Stuart W. Symington who gave the keynote address. Others included: The Archbishop of Jos Catholic Archdiocese, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama; Secretary-General of the Jamatul Nasril Islam (JNI), Sheikh Dr. Aliyu Khalid; ECWA President, Rev. Stephen Panya Baba, a Theologian, Rev. Prof. Yusuf Turaki, (JETS), an Islamic Scholar Prof. M. T. Yahya (UNiJos), Assoc. Prof Ibrahim Hassan (UniJos), Deputy Chief Imams Mami Kassim Kabir & Hon Ghazali Adams, Prof Danny McCain (UniJos), Archbishop John Daniel Praise (PFN), Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle, CAN National President (Rep. Rev. Dr. Kyenveh Koeleh Saleh, Baptist Convention President, Plateau) Rev. Dr. Dachollom Datiri, COCIN President (Rep. by Rev. Dr. Amos Mozoh, COCIN, Gen Sec) Rt. Rev. Dr. B A Kwashi, Anglican Bishop of Jos (Rep.), and other eminent religious leaders, media executives, security operatives, and academics. There were 74 people from Kaduna, Abuja, Niger, Benue, Lagos and Plateau in attendance.

OPENING SESSION

5. The Roundtable took place under the Chairmanship of the Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, who emphasized the relevance of the programme to the successful conduct of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. He said this is a noble and commendable initiative which is a call to political sanity and justice as we face the election; sanity and justice on the part of the electorate, the electoral officials, the security agents, political leaders, actors, etc. He further commended the Conveners of the event, The Revd Gideon and Professor Funmi Para-Mallam for organizing the event at this auspicious moment in Nigeria's political history. The opening prayer was offered by Archbishop John Daniel Praise.

6. Sheikh Dr. Aliyu Khalid delivered the welcome address. He noted that the event was timely and appreciated all stakeholders for participating, urging them to ensure that the deliberations were sincere and conducive for recommending relevant policies to government.

7. The Revd Gideon Para-Mallam made a few remarks regarding the motivation for the Roundtable, highlighting the critical gatekeeper role of Christian and Muslim leaders in shaping the mind set and behavior of people within their respective faith communities. He informed the audience that the Peace Foundation had designated three focal areas: citizens empowerment, leadership transformation and creating an awakening among women to be agents of change across Africa. He further used the opportunity to thank the religious leaders and others for making the sacrifice to come, as well as the US Ambassador and his team, as a testament to their commitment to the promotion of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

8. Rev. Stephen Panya Baba offered an inaugural and dedication prayer for The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation. He called on the Almighty God to bless and prosper the Foundation as it prepares to carry out the vision of transformation and fostering sustainable peace in Nigeria and in Africa.

9. A short video clip presented an overview of the dire nature and consequences of electoral violence in Nigeria.

10. The Keynote Address delivered by the Ambassador of the United States of America, His Excellency, Stuart W. Symington called on religious leaders to eschew unguided utterances and actions that could instigate violence. Due to their powerful influence in their communities, Religious leaders should say no to violence and yes to peace by growing peace especially through words and actions. He further stressed that Nigeria has a critical role to play in world, which she has discharged over the years through peacekeeping, restoration of democracy and the credibility of the 2015 Nigeria's election to inspire freedom, liberty and democracy.

11. Thereafter, the Chairman opened the floor for questions and general discussions/interactive session between Stakeholders and the Keynote address Speaker.

12. Goodwill Messages were delivered by Rev. Dr. Supo Samson Ayokunle, CAN National President; Most Rev. Nicholas Okoh, the Primate of Nigeria, Anglican Communion; Most Rev.

Benjamin Kwashi, Anglican Bishop of Jos Diocese; Rev. Stephen Panya Baba, ECWA President; General (rtd) Martins Luther Agwai; Chairman of The Para-Mallam Peace Foundation, Dr. Solomon E. Arase, Former Inspector General of Police and Board Member of the Foundation; Plateau State Commissioner of Police; NTA Zonal Director; Bishop RBC Nwankwo, OAIC; Alhaji Sani Mudi, leader of JNI; Rev Dr. Femi Adeleye, Director (ICI-Ghana); Mrs. Rhoda Jihota, Chairman of WOWINGCAN-Plateau State; Prof. Danny McCain, University of Jos and Dr. Daniel Bourdanne, IFES General Secretary (Oxford, UK).

BREAKOUT SESSION

13. The Breakout Session was divided into four (4) groups as follows:

Group 1: *The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Democratic Principles in their Communities*, Facilitated by Professor Oluwafunmilayo Para-Mallam, mni.

Group 2: *The Role of Religious Leaders in Addressing Hate Speech within our Faith Communities*, Facilitated by Professor Ibrahim Hassan.

Group 3: *The Role of Religious Ethics and Morality in Preventing Electoral Malpractices*, Facilitated by Professor Sunday Agang.

Group 4: *Elections 2019 – How can Religious Leaders initiate and sustain Inter-Faith Dialogue: Before, During and After*, Facilitated by Sheik Dr. Aliyu Khalid represented Prof. MT Yahya.

OBSERVATIONS

14. The Stakeholders made the following observations, that:

Democracy is essentially about the people. Therefore, the entrenchment of democratic principles such as respect for human and citizen rights, representation, freedom, equity and justice is crucial to ensuring sustainable peace in any society.

Typically, religious institutions in Nigeria – just like traditional institutions – tend to be non-democratic in their organizational culture and practice. Consequently, there is a disconnection between such institutions and the people, particularly the most vulnerable elements, that is: the poor, women, youth, children and minorities.

There is an urgent need for religious leaders to promote democratic principles and practice within faith communities in efforts to bridge the gaps among and between them.

Politics in Nigeria has been played with bitterness, subterranean actions, winner-takes-all mentality, tribalism, bigotry and sectarian conflicts, which translate into poor governance, poverty, disease, insecurity, and other social malaise.

Elections in Nigeria have been characterized by acrimony, rancor, hate, tension and violence along sectional, ethnic, religious and political fault lines, resulting in the destruction of lives and property, displacement and the disruption of family and community life.

Stakeholders expressed deep concern over the continued celebration of corrupt and violent individuals in our political space who continue to win elections through electoral fraud and manipulation in the country at the expense of credible, righteous and upright individuals.

Nigerian politicians and religious leaders have played the ethnic, sectional and religious card to promote hate, disunity, acrimony and violence because of their parochial interests. That election managers and democratic institutions have over the years not been transparent and open in the discharge of their duties to the country.

Stakeholders noted the influential role of the media, especially the social media, in the promotion of violence and hate as the country approach the 2019 general elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Stakeholders made the following recommendations:

Religious leaders have a duty to work hard to ensure that democratic values are imbibed and institutionalized within their respective organizations. This would enable them to promote peace through respect for democratic freedoms, which must be balanced with mutual respect for the rights of others,

Religious leaders should mobilize citizens towards peaceful coexistence and violence-free elections and encourage them to celebrate and emulate peace agents in the society.

Religious leaders should model teach and inspire democratic principles in their congregations and communities through emulating the democratic values and actions of their founders of their religions, as well as through effective communication, character, and interfaith dialogue.

Religious leaders should mentor small groups and younger leaders to correct wrong perspectives and misbehavior,

Religious leaders should be transparent and sincere and promote good governance through their recognition of and support for people of integrity in politics.

Religious leaders should shun money politics.

The process of ensuring that religious leaders play a crucial role in building a democratic culture in Nigeria should be an ongoing one and continue beyond the 2019 elections in the form of training and inter-faith dialogue. The preparation for 2023 must be NOW.

Religious leaders should eschew hate speeches, division, hatred and bitterness by growing peace and the culture of peace including love, understanding, solidarity, dialogue, tolerance and togetherness. More specifically, religious leaders should foster peace by intentionally discouraging the spread of hate speech among their adherents.

Politicians should promote the Nigeria project where politics is devoid of tribalism, religious sentiment, self-centeredness and hatred, but played in a manner that election produce winners who are genuine performers, fair-minded, and willing to serve the common good of all citizens. Losers in election should accept defeat as there can only be one leader elected at a time.

There is need to use the Interfaith Dialogue Platform as a veritable instrument for the conduct of credible and peaceful elections.

Religious leaders should go beyond dialogue to mobilize Christians and Muslims to work together to promote social upliftment, religious harmony and community peace.

Election managers and democratic institutions should discharge their constitutional and statutory duties with transparency, openness, credibility and be accountable to the citizens.

There should be concerted efforts towards addressing the structural problems of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, exclusion, ignorance and illiteracy through deliberate policies and programs of economic empowerment.

There is need for reforms in the country's educational system to introduce and/or strengthen the curricula on civil and peace education where moral, ethics, rights and obligations are taught to citizens. Religious leader should promote access to education in their domains to promote voter literacy among the general public.

There is an urgent need to strengthen our socialization institutions such as the family, religious bodies, communities, education institutions towards the inculcation of sound moral values of human dignity, respect for human life, truth, good neighborliness, love, and tolerance.

Government and stakeholders should institutionalize mechanisms for youth empowerment and coexistence within our communities ahead of election and beyond.

Media stakeholders should eschew hateful and divisive narratives by being sensitive to issues that generate conflicts and violence as the country approaches the 2019 general elections.

Religious leaders, and the country at large, should avail women and young people the critical space for leadership, governance and conflict management in the country in order to benefit from their unique contribution and capabilities.

CONCLUSION

16. The stand-in for the Chairman, Monsignor Prof. Gotan (2nd half of the program), thanked all the participants, gatekeepers and critical stakeholders who have played key roles in helping to defuse the state of high tension during this period. He thanked the Conveners, The Revd Gideon and Professor Funmi Para-Mallam, mni, who despite paucity of funds, were able to draw together men and women of timber and caliber to engage in these intense and fruitful deliberations.

17. He further noted, that to bring about change in any society, just a small group such as this one is required. He commended the level of participation in the plenary and breakout sessions, which challenged everyone to go forth as ambassadors of The Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation. The Foundation has shown how to do so much with so little.

18. The Dominion Chapel Int'l in Abuja was appreciated for assisting the Peace Foundation with a modest seed contribution towards this event and two other anonymous friends who also made modest contributions and participants who commendably paid their way to and from the event.

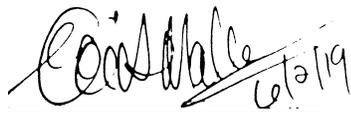
19. Participant called on all Religious leaders and Nigerians to resolve to call-out those who make divisive statements which are not true and capable of sparking violence in the country to retract such statements once proven. There should also be sanction through the law for such.

21. In the pursuit of peace and justice, participants urged that INEC should only announce transparently, only the results of those who win the elections without manipulation. Justice nurtured by truth guarantees peace and is the best antidote to violence prevention.

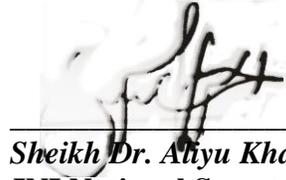
20. Finally, it was reiterated that Nigeria belongs to all of us and we do not have any other country but Nigeria. Therefore, let us talk and walk the peace we all earnestly desire and deserve. Done this Tuesday 5th February 2019 at Novel Suite and Resort, Jos, Plateau State

May God grant Nigeria a Peaceful and Violence-Free 2019 Elections.

SIGNED:



The Revd Gideon Para-Mallam
Founder/Convener & IFES Ambassador



Sheikh Dr. Ahyu Khalid Abubakar
JNI National Secretary



Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama
Catholic Archbishop of Jos & Chairman of the Occasion