



CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

“That they all may be one” John 17:21

CAN DECLARATION: NIGERIA RENEW

I. Introduction

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is an ecumenical body and an umbrella of all Christians and the Church in Nigeria. It comprises of five denominational Blocs; namely, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); the Church Council of Nigeria (CCN); the Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) / the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN); the Organized African Independent Churches (OAIC); and the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) / the Tarayyar Eklisiya Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN). This body speaks on all issues concerning Christians and the Church in Nigeria.

This declaration is a follow-up to the research report *‘Crushed but not defeated, the impact of persistent violence on the Church in Northern Nigeria’*, February 2016 of Open Doors International which is endorsed by CAN. It addresses the Nigerian government and the International community so that they may know about the scope of this violence and its negative impact and respond in a proper way to end the violence, restore the situation to normality and deal with the negative consequences for Christian communities as well as intercommunal relationships.

This declaration expresses its hope that with the new Buhari government there is a chance for renewal in Nigeria and in particular for the Christian minority in the northern region, hence the title which at the same time is a call for Nigeria to renew.

The declaration presents *the situation of Christians in Northern Nigeria (II), the Response of the Christian Association of Nigeria (III)* and *its call for Action and Advocacy (IV)* to the Nigerian government and the International community. At the end the signatures are given of the CAN President, its General Secretary and the five denominational Bloc leaders.

II. The Situation of Christians in Northern Nigeria

The statistics of targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization of Christians world-wide has become unprecedented in recent times. Christians in the Middle East; Western, Central and Southern Asia; North and East Africa have had their own share. One of the worst phenomena, yet to the world unknown, is targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization against Christians in Northern Nigeria. The research report *‘Crushed but not defeated’* it is a documentation of a field research on the impact of persistent violence on Christians specifically in Northern Nigeria. The research work presents facts that

show grave and gross violations of human rights and religious freedom of Christians, which have over the years failed to attract the attention and concern of the International community. The narrative in mainstream media is almost exclusively focused on violence conducted by Boko Haram, ignoring that the situation in Northern Nigeria is much more complex than this, and also ignoring other sources of violence identified in the report. The narrative in mainstream media characterizes the conflict in Nigeria as a conflict devoid of religious dimension. Although the conflict has undeniable political, economic, social and ethnic components, a strong religious dimension has been identified by this research. The combination of religious, political, economic, social and ethnic factors is what makes Christians extra vulnerable. Media, policy makers and international role players should acknowledge the religious dimension of the conflict in Nigeria.

In order to change the ignorance of the International community, and even that of the Nigerian society, accurate facts about the situation of Christians in Northern Nigeria are imperative. According to the report Christians in Northern Nigeria are over 30 million (31.2%) and form as such a substantial minority in this region. It is on the account of being a minority and political, economic, socio-cultural and religious interests of the majority that they suffer terribly from marginalization, discrimination and targeted violence. The following violent outbreaks against Christians in the northern region are quite evident: politically motivated communal clashes; the 2011 post-electoral crisis; the Islamic Boko Haram insurgency and Muslim Fulani herdsmen invasions and attacks; as well as marginalization and discrimination in Sharia states and Muslim society at large. This research has revealed this by giving evidences that violence on Christians has been well calculated and targeted. The actors (perpetrators) of this persistent violence on Christians in Northern Nigeria have been identified by the research findings as: (1) the northern Muslim political and religious elites; (2) radical Islamic groups; and (3) Muslim Fulani herdsmen. These very actors have perpetrated their acts within the framework of a Culture of political violence, coupled with corruption and impunity. And their acts often have a nature of ethnic cleansing or even genocide. Furthermore, these perpetrators are motivated by the following drivers: (1) protection of northern Muslim political and economic interests; (2) protection of Muslims' social and cultural identity; (3) protection of Islam's dominant religious position. Moreover the historical roots of the ethno-religious riots and crises and the dual and conflicting ideology of democracy and theocracy as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution play an important role. Nevertheless, these social, cultural, religious, economic, political and constitutional factors cannot be placed above human rights, religious freedom and democracy in Nigeria. The human dignity and freedoms of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities in the northern region cannot be trampled upon by any reason or cause. Perpetrators of violence against Christians and others should be held accountable.

Through compromise, the Federal Government of Nigeria and that of the states in Northern Nigeria have never taken a strong, constitutional and political stand that guarantees the safety, security, rights and freedom of Christians as citizens of Northern Nigeria. To buttress this fact, the research shows that between 2006 and 2014 an estimated 11,500 Christians have been killed, since 2000 over 1.3 million Christians have been displaced and also 13,000 churches have been destroyed or abandoned. The most affected Christian communities are in northern Adamawa, Borno, Kano and Yobe states. Christians in

these states have had to relocate mainly to the predominant Christian states in the Middle Belt areas: Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue and Taraba. Furthermore, Christian communities in these predominant Christian states in the Middle Belt areas are at the same time the most affected by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen forceful invasions and attacks. While radical Islamic groups are pounding upon the minority Christian communities in Far Northern states, Muslim Fulani herdsmen are invading, attacking, killing and displacing people from their ancestral lands and forcefully settled among them in Middle Belt states, and Sharia state governments and northern Muslim society at large are rendering their Christian population to second class citizens. In view of these gross violations of the rights of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities, both the Nigerian Federal government and that of the states, in practice have turned a blind eye.

III. The Response of the Christian Association of Nigeria

From the foregoing, the outcomes of this research report calls for the necessity of taking appropriate actions by the Nigerian Church, the Federal and State governments of Nigeria and the International community. Otherwise, this targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization of Christians in Northern Nigeria, if unchecked and halted, could lead to the extinction of the Christian faith and Christian communities in Northern Nigeria. Christians in the Northern region have for long been abandoned to their own fate by the Nigerian authorities.

On account of this grave, regrettable and endangered situation of Christians in Northern Nigeria, we call in strong terms the attention of the Federal government of Nigeria, the governments of the Northern states, the Nigerian community and the International community to address this situation and to also ensure true freedom and equality for Christians and other non-Muslim minorities in the Northern region. These freedoms include: (1) the assurance of freedom and rights for Christians and other non-Muslim minorities as citizens of Nigeria; (2) halting forceful invasions, attacks and take-over of the ancestral lands of the indigenous Christians and other non-Muslim minorities; (3) addressing and investigating pervasive cases of targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization; bringing perpetrators to justice and ending impunity (4) enshrine democracy and rule of law; and (5) removal of dual conflicting ideologies of democracy and theocracy in the Nigerian Constitution. Furthermore, in view of the devastating impact of persistent violence on Christians, the Church of Nigeria will act decisively and responsibly. For this reason, we first of all call upon all churches, denominations and organizations to rise up and face the challenge of the suffering Church and its possible extinction in Northern Nigeria. Secondly, we call upon the Nigerian and International communities to have strategic plans of salvaging the situation and predicament of Christians. Thirdly, we must act now to address the humanitarian crisis of Christians living in the North-East and some Middle Belt areas of Nigeria.

We, Christians of Nigeria, gathered together in the Christian Association of Nigeria are concerned about the downturn of Church life and the suffering of Christians in Northern Nigeria, and will do the following:

1. We and each of our denominational blocs will develop a coherent vision, strategy and plan to address the persistent violence against Christians and the possible extinction of the Church in Northern Nigeria.

2. We will educate the Nigerian and International communities on the nature and impact of targeted violence, persecution, discrimination and marginalization of Christians in Northern Nigeria and also be engaged in advocacy at these two levels.

3. We will monitor and liaise with the Federal government of Nigeria and also with each Northern State government on the issues of targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization of Christians.

4. We and each of our denominational blocs will act now to address the humanitarian crisis of Christians living in the North-East and some parts of the Middle Belt in standing in solidarity with the brethren impacted by persistent violence and taking measures to strengthen and alleviate their sufferings in:

- taking measures on the security of vulnerable Christian communities in hostile environments. We will do so because we are also deeply touched by the Christian communities that are traumatized and are defenseless.

- raising adequate financial and moral support for both the host communities and the displaced persons. We will do so because we are concerned about the Christian communities that receive the displaced and are overwhelmed by the humanitarian crisis and lack human, financial and other resources to cope with the urgent needs.

- taking up the issue of the loss of land and property of fleeing Christians with the state governments of Northern Nigeria to ensure that both are returned to them unfailingly. Because we are shocked and saddened to hear that the properties and lands of fleeing Christians are being bought, confiscated or simply occupied by the marauding and invading perpetrators of violence on Christians.

5. We will additionally set up a legal team to reach out to the affected areas for details of the nature and extent of the violence against Christian communities. Documented targeted violations, discrimination and marginalization shall be brought to the attention of government and the legal team will commence actions to bring redress to all acts of impunity, injustice and discrimination. For this reason, CAN is appealing to both National and International lawyers who have expertise in these areas to avail their services to the targeted Christians in Northern Nigeria.

We also express our concerns over the possible negative deterioration of the attitude of Christians towards Muslims on account of the first being targeted by violence, discrimination and marginalization. For this reason, we call upon all Christians in Nigeria to continue to act lovingly towards all Muslims. In the face of violent targeting, discrimination and marginalization our response should not be that of fear or intimidation but rather should be as stated in 2 Tim 1:7. *“For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and a sound mind”*. In that respect we are pleased with the increase in faith and commitment of Christians that stayed behind in affected communities in the northern region despite persistent violence, for they are a showcase of perseverance and resilience.

In continuation, we are expressing our profound gratitude to all churches and individual Christians who have contributed in one way or the other to alleviate the sufferings of the displaced and violently targeted Christians. We also appreciate the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations in addressing the situation.

IV. A Call for Action and Advocacy

In summary, CAN wishes to state that all citizens of Northern Nigeria both Christians and Muslims are suffering from violence by Boko Haram, yet Christians suffer disproportionately as they are often specifically targeted. In addition, they also experience marginalization and discrimination in the Sharia governed states and Muslim society at large as well as violence against them by Muslim Fulani herdsmen in Middle Belt areas.

For this reason, we call for definite action that should be taken in different domains by the Nigerian authorities as well as the International community in order to restore peace, apply justice and to bring reconciliation in Northern Nigeria, so that Christians along with other citizens will experience security, equality, freedom, and prosperity, and can recover from psychological trauma and material damage.

These advocacy actions include the following, bearing in mind that Nigeria is member of the United Nations since 1960, and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1993, the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) in 1990, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in 1983:

SECURITY

Section 14 (2) (b) of the Nigeria Constitution states that

“The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government” and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People – *Article 1*, states *“Indigenous people have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International human rights law.*

We call upon the Federal government, in view of the above statutes, to rise up to her responsibility to ensure the comprehensive enforcement of these provisions as a panacea to the current violence against the (indigenous) Christian communities in Northern Nigeria.

We call upon the Federal government to ensure that these constitutional provisions are fully implemented by the various state governments in Nigeria.

We also call upon the International community to monitor and advocate that the security of every Nigerian is guaranteed by the Federal, State, Local governments and the Nigerian communities.

We urge the Nigerian government to carry out her primary role of protecting the lives of all citizens of the nation irrespective of their religious leaning against all forms of targeted violence, discrimination

and marginalization. The Nigerian Church sees it as her responsibility to alert the government to this constitutional task if needed.

We call upon the International community, in addition to what the African Union and neighboring countries are doing, to pay greater attention to the regional spread of Boko Haram to neighboring countries and take pro-active steps to contain the threat their insurgency holds. The International community is also urged to closer scrutiny on sponsors of Boko Haram, and start taking measures such as financial and travel restrictions.

HUMANITARIAN

We recognize and appreciate the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organization to provide relief to the Internally Displaced Person's (IDP's) through various organs and committees. However they must ensure that the relief materials will reach and benefit all persons affected, without excluding certain ethnic or religious communities, and do not remain confined to only the North-East. Areas where relief materials are yet to be deployed include Plateau, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Taraba and Benue states. Because violations perpetrated in these areas have a nature of ethnic cleansing or even genocide, and relief materials on the short term and aid and development on the long term are yet to get there.

We appeal to the Federal-, State-, and Local authorities; to the Nigerian churches and community; and the International community to continue to provide relief and support to the affected persons until their needs are fully met. The International community should urge the government of Nigeria and the Nigerian community to step up their efforts to support those who are affected by the violence in Northern Nigeria, as well as it should support them in doing so.

LEGAL

Section 38 (1) of the Nigeria constitution states that:

“Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”

We therefore urge the government of Nigeria to fulfil its obligation to protect all its citizens, and put in place effective measures in order to prevent or sanction violations of freedom of religion or belief when they occur, and ensure accountability. Next to this necessary investigation, bring perpetrators to justice, and ending impunity is necessary, because without these, bringing an end to persistent violence is useless.

We therefore urge the Nigerian authorities to address, and to investigate cases of targeted violence, discrimination and marginalization, bringing perpetrators to justice and ending impunity.

We therefore ask the International community to urge the government of Nigeria to conduct an in-depth investigation into the atrocities committed against civilians in general, and against Christians in particular in Northern Nigeria and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice.

We therefore ask the International community to urge the UN Human Rights Council to mandate a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the atrocities committed against civilians in general, and against Christians in particular in Northern Nigeria, including bringing the perpetrators of violence to justice.

POLITICAL

With dismay we have observed the use of State machinery, institutions, power and influence specifically targeted against Christians. We have also observed the practice of some state governments to favor one religion, as against others, which is a direct contradiction against Section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution, which states clearly that, *“The Government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion”*.

We urge the Nigerian government therefore to safeguard that religion will not be used or allowed to be used to promote injustice, impunity and discrimination and urge the International community to monitor application of this principle.

ECONOMIC

We plead with the Nigerian government not to just provide food items to the IDP'S, but to empower them economically so that they can cater for themselves. State governments need to ensure even development, equal treatment and economic empowerment of all entities within the state.

We urge the Nigerian government in the task of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation to go beyond geographic confines to identify those who were victims of the Boko Haram insurgency, the Fulani herdsman attacks and other forms of targeted violence in one geographic area, and have lost all their properties and were forced to migrate to new locations. Such victims should be identified and also assisted by the government.

SOCIO – CULTURAL

We call on the Federal government to fully implement the Nigerian Constitution on the rights of all citizens (its Chapters 2 and 4) and as well as the U.N Charter on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. CAN is calling on the Federal and State governments of Nigeria to guarantee the rights of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities. All religious and ethnic community should be free to strive within the framework of the law. CAN is strongly against the forceful eviction and annexation of the ancestral lands of the indigenous Christian and other non-Muslim minority communities in Northern Nigeria.

We strongly reject the justification of the perennial invasion and attacks of the Muslim Fulani herdsmen on grounds of seeking grazing fields for their cattle and as a result engage in conflicts with farmers. The ancestral lands of the Christian indigenous and other non-Muslims peoples should not be allocated as grazing reserves. The most sensible and economically wise approach would be to build ranches for the herdsmen in their states of origin.

We consider the current Grazing Reserves Bill proposal as a deceptive manner of appropriating the lands of the Christian indigenous and other non-Muslim ethnic groups for the Muslim Fulani herdsmen and spreading this method by lawmaking all over the nation. The proposal should be dropped outright for the interest of national and communal peace.

We observe that persistent violence against the Christian minority in Northern Nigeria affects Christian women and girls the most (e.g. the Chibok girls). Yet, there have not been enough attempts to address the problem. Consequently, the government of Nigeria and the International community should attend to the issue of Violence against Women with vigor.

RELIGIOUS

Sections 10 (about the non-adoption of any religion as state religion) and 38 (1) (about freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the Nigerian Constitution – as quoted before - specifically deal with religion.

We advocate for the strengthening of section 10 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), by emphasizing government's neutrality. Government should not expressly or by conduct through its practices, policies and conduct tacitly adopt or appear to adopt any religion as state religion either at the Local, State or National level. Its constitutional responsibility shall be to provide the enabling environment and create the regulatory framework for the actualization of the Constitutional right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

We furthermore, state that every religious community in Nigeria shall to the exclusion of government, be at liberty to set up and manage its religious institutions and other religious practices, within the national legal regulatory framework.

We also urge the Federal government within the same framework to ensure that no militant religious group picks up arms against any citizen of the nation.

EDUCATION

We call upon the Federal and State governments of the affected states to ensure that schools in the North-East should be reconstructed. Youths that have been out of school for years should be rehabilitated. There should be provision for adult education and special training for IDP's.

We call upon the Federal and State governments to ensure that education is open for all youth of Nigeria, irrespective of their religious adherence, and that school curricula are not biased or discriminatory towards other religions. On the contrary, a curriculum encouraging (religious) tolerance and pluralism should be implemented.

We call upon the Federal and State Governments to ensure that according to section 38 (2) of the Nigerian Constitution Islamic Religious Education in no way is considered compulsory for non-Muslims in schools in Northern states and that according to section 38 (3) Christian Religious Education is taught to Christian students in schools in Northern states.

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

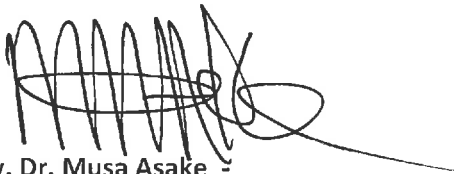
The plight of the Christian and churches in Northern Nigeria is serious and we are happy and determined to defend their cause. We are also confident that this declaration will serve to the Nigerian government, the Nigerian community and the International community to grasp the width, depth and height of the

problem and make them ready with us to meet the challenges presented. We thank God to whom all wisdom, power and judgment comes as to our responsibilities and actions on this world.

To conclude, we wish to recognize and appreciate the efforts of the Buhari Government in fighting insurgency and corruption. May God give the President and Government grace to do so much more.

Nigeria, Abuja, Christian Center, February 2016

On behalf of the Christian Association of Nigeria

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of vertical, wavy lines followed by a large, circular flourish.

**Rev. Dr. Musa Asake -
CAN General Secretary**