A PANACEA FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA

PRESENTS

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FREEDOM OF RELIGION
A 2-DAY INTERFAITH PEACE CONFERENCE

REPORT

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TAKING ALL MEN BROTHER (TAMEB)
An interfaith and Intercultural Peace Advocacy Non-Governmental Organization, Nigeria
Freedom of Religion: Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria

CONFERENCE REPORT
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- Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola (Presbyter, Methodist Church Nigeria)
- Mr. Yusuf Olayode representing Rafiu Adeniran Lawal (Building Blocks for Peace/United Network for Peace Builders)
- Awise Olakunle Oligbinde (Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa)
- Dr. David Akeju (Ph.D. Department of Sociology, University of Lagos)
- Mr. Adewole Adejola (Senior Program Officer, BudgIT)
- Barr. Lanre Ogundare, representing Dr. Babatunde Oni, (Associate Professor of Law, University of Lagos)
- Mr. Adams Oluwafemi Akewula, representing Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu Ph.D, (Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan)
- Dr. Joseph T. Atang, (Nigeria Country Expert for KAICIID Dialogue Centre)

Also, the efforts of TAMEB publication team in the compilation and publication of this report are appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

OmoYemi Oni
Executive Director, TAMEB
INTRODUCTION

This document is an official report on the Freedom of Religion conference, themed **Freedom of Religion 2019: A Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria.** The event took place at the Institute of Church and Society, Christian Council of Nigeria, Samonda, Ibadan on the 26th and 27th of June 2019. The event had 146 participants, including religious clerics and other adherents of the main religions in Nigeria (such as African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam). This wide distribution represented people from all works of life, ranging from religious and sociological scholars and students, to executives in public and private sectors, as well as civil society advocates. At the two day event, there were eight papers presented by experts of the triadic religions (African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam), sociology, legal, youth, economic and interfaith advocacy. Thereafter, participants were divided into seven focus groups, namely: family, educational institutions, community, parliamentary, religious leaders, Mass Media and public/private sector focus groups. Each of the focus groups discussed the roles of the different stakeholders in the promotion and implementation of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria. TAMEB adopted the resolutions as part of its advocacy tool for the fostering of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem identified by TAMEB which informed the convening of this conference is the fact that Nigeria is a multi-religious country where freedom of religion and belief is enshrined in the constitution, but is hardly practiced by the adherents of the different religions. This has, therefore, led to bigotry, fanaticism, extremism, violence and terrorism, in their various, shades in the country.
A SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW OF THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION CONFERENCE

The conference tagged Freedom of Religion: A Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria (FoR 2019), was designed by Taking All Men Brother (TAMEB) to address and proffer solutions to various forms of unfriendly relationships amongst the various religious groups, denominations and sects in Nigeria.

The program presented expert views on freedom of religion from Islamic, Christian, African traditional religions, youth, legal and sociological and economic perspectives. Participants engaged in focus group discussions where the practicality and workability of religious freedom at the family and community levels were looked into. The role of religious leaders, educational institutions, parliamentarians, the media, as well as the private and public sectors, in the promotion and implementation of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria were identified. Finally, appropriate policy actions on interfaith peace and harmony were recommended to relevant stakeholders.

Objectives:

The major objectives of the conference are hereby outlined as follows:

Specific Objective 1: To educate religious leaders, scholars, adherents and other stakeholders on the core meaning of freedom of Religion or Belief, in line with the tenets of the triadic religions in Nigeria and according to the Nigerian constitution, while exploring the implications of religious intolerance, hostility and violence on individual Nigerians and the Nigerian society at large.

Specific Objective 2: To educate religious leaders, scholars, adherents and other stakeholders on freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right that must be valued and respected in order to foster peace and harmony in Nigeria.

Specific Objective 3: To collectively create a document that will inform stakeholders on how freedom of religion or belief can be implemented in the family, school, community, as well as the roles of mass media, religious leaders, parliamentarians, private and public sectors in the promotion of freedom of religion or belief.
THE EXPERTS

Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola (Presbyter, Methodist Church Nigeria)

Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola is a Presbyter in Methodist Church Nigeria and the Program Officer for Christian Council of Nigeria, South West Zone. He also serves as the Research Officer for the Institute of Church and Society, Samonda, Ibadan. His academic background is Counselling and Social Psychology. He has facilitated workshops on several thematic areas including Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria (FoRB) and has attended several conferences. He is a seasoned social pastoral worker, with high level of responsibility for stewardship. He is a passionate change agent with cognate experience in livelihood, pastoral and social entrepreneurial competences. He has flair for demonstrated effective and efficient leadership.

Mr. Yusuf Olayode representing Rafiu Adeniran Lawal (Building Blocks for Peace/United Network for Peace Builders)

Rafiu Adeniran Lawal is the Leading Director of Building Blocks for Peace and the United Network for Peace Builders (UNOY) International steering group representative for West Africa and Central Africa. He is a passionate youth peace advocate, who is deeply involved in the adoption and implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. He has a Master’s Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Ibadan.

Awise Olakunle Oligbinde (Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa)

Chief Olakunle Oligbinde is the Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa, Ebute Meta. A renowned leader in Ancestral religion within and outside the country, he is an advocate who strives to propagate the virtues of Ancestral beliefs and to correct the long held prejudices against it. He has a degree in Statistics from the University of Ibadan and certifications from the Institute of Management Studies in London. He worked with the Federal Office of Statistics (1963-1971), from where he was seconded to Federal Tuberculosis Center (Chest Clinic), General Hospital, Lagos, and then the Federal Ministry of Trade and Industries, Lagos. He then moved to Nigerian Ports Authority, Lagos, where he served in Management Services, Audit and Operations Departments in the various ports formations. He retired from professional service in 2002.

Dr. David Akeju (Ph.D. University of Lagos)

Dr. David Akeju holds a BSc, MSc, and Ph.D. in Sociology (Demography and Population Studies) from the prestigious University of Ibadan. He was born into a Muslim family but later converted to Christianity. After acquiring his MSc degree, he worked in Adamawa State as a program officer implementing programs among Hausa/Fulani people. Growing up in the north provided him the opportunity to interact and build
bridges across religious and ethnic divides. It has also given him the advantage to share topical issues bordering on religious harmony with deep insight. He has a very strong passion for Nigeria and a strong desire to see the birthing of a unique Nigerian identity, irrespective of religious and ethnic diversity. He strongly believes that achieving interfaith harmony in Nigeria could be prototype to attaining global peace. He has been published in international journals and consulted for local and international organizations. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Lagos.

Mr. Adewole Adejola (Senior Program Officer BudgIT)
Mr. Adewole Adejola is a Senior Program Officer at BudgIT, a Nigerian-based NGO. His works span several projects funded by the UN Development Fund, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Making All Voices Count, Indigo Trust, Omidyar Network, among others. He is committed to improving citizens’ access to government and to drive key reforms in civic institutions at federal and state levels. Mr. Adewole works at grassroots and sub-national levels within communities and states across Nigeria, facilitating interactions between citizens and the government on how to solve community-based issues affecting the people. He has consistently tracked government projects which were paid for by taxpayers' money, but never delivered or were implemented at substandard levels. His work is to unearth, collate and present information that propel citizens towards enlightenment and organized fora to demand for delivery of public services. He has served as facilitator in different training workshops and made presentations on budget tracking and monitoring.

Barr. Lanre Ogundare representing Dr. Babatunde Oni (Associate Professor of Law, University of Lagos)
Babatunde Oni, an Associate Professor of Law, obtained his LL.B (Hons) from Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. He won the Idowu Sofola (SAN) prize for best results in Nigeria Legal System and Research Methods, the Akinola Adaramaja (SAN) prize for best results in Nigerian Land Law, Equity and Trust, Commercial Law, as well as other academic prizes from Ogun State University. He obtained his LL.M from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and his Ph.D. from University of Lagos. He was also a coordinator of the LL.M Programme from 2011 to 2013. Dr. Oni is an international scholar of repute with several publications both in local and foreign journals, and has won several international awards. He is the coordinator of Wills Clinic of the University of Lagos, Faculty of Law and a consultant to numerous clients in Nigeria and abroad. He is also a member of Peace Advocate of HWPL based in South Korea.
Mr. Adams Oluwafemi Akewula representing Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu Ph.D (Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan)

Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu is a Professor at the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His specialization straddles Middle Eastern and North African Studies. He equally has competence and expertise in Literary Criticism/Pragmatics, Islam and Gender, and Islamic Law and Jurisprudence. He was once a Bill Gates Scholar and Fellow, African Scholar Program, University of Massachusetts. He has also previously worked as a visiting scholar at the International Islamic University, Malaysia, among others. He is presently a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana and a board member of National University Commission (NUC).

Dr. Joseph T. Atang (Nigeria Country Expert for KAICIID Dialogue Centre)

Mr. Joseph T. Atang is currently the Nigeria Country Expert for KAICIID Dialogue Centre, an international intergovernmental organization for interreligious and intercultural dialogue established by Saudi Arabia, Spain, Austria and the Vatican, with headquarters in Vienna, Austria. He also doubles as the Technical Adviser to the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) in Nigeria, an interfaith dialogue platform for Nigerian Christians and Muslims established by KAICIID in 2017. He was a member of the Kaduna State Peace and Reconciliation Committee (2011 – 2012) and a member of the Kaduna State Committee to Stem the Incessant Killings in Southern Kaduna, 2015. Mr Atang is a recipient of the Donald Paulson Award of the Department of Conflict Resolution, Human Security and Global Governance at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, U.S.A. He is a certified mediator of the District Court of the State of Massachusetts, U.S.A. He was the Secretary, Dispute Resolution Graduate Students Council, University of Massachusetts in Boston from September 2007 – May 2008. He is equally a member of Discussion Group on Conflict in Africa, Program on Negotiation (PON), Harvard University, Boston, U.S.A (September 2007 to date).
THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION 2019: A PANACEA FOR PEACE AND HARMONY IN NIGERIA
CONFERENCE REPORT

The Freedom of Religion, 2019, conference, was opened on the 26th of June 2019 with the recitation of the second stanza of the national anthem of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which served the dual function of an opening prayer. The chairperson of Taking All Men Brother (TAMEB) declared the conference open by delivering a welcome address, in which she stated the reason for organizing the Freedom of Religion 2019 conference. In her own words, “As we are all aware, Nigeria is a multi-religious country where freedom of religion is enshrined in the constitution, but is hardly practiced by the adherents of the different religions. This has therefore led to bigotry, fanaticism, extremism, violence and terrorism in their various shades in the country”. She further said this conference was organized to enable experts from Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religions, Economics and Sociology, Law, Youth Advocacy and Civil Society Organizations will take the center stage and educate us on the problems that have plagued us; focus groups will be formed among the participants to discuss the problems and proffer solutions to the problems.

The first speaker was Very Rev. Segun Babalola, who spoke on the Christian perspective on Freedom of Religion. He noted that Nigerians have little knowledge about the core issues of religion, and are, therefore, overzealous concerning their religion, which has led their abuse of freedom of religion and lack of respect for human dignity. He suggested inter-religious conferences such as this, where proper understanding and practice of religion would bring about an enlightened just society where there is respect for human rights and dignity.

The second speaker was Mr. Yusuf Olayode, who represented Mr. Rafiu Lawal of Building Blocks for Peace in presenting the youth perspective. His paper presentation was titled “What a Future void of Religious Freedom holds for Young People”. During his presentation, he posited that lack of education and politicizing of religion has led to the abuse of freedom of religion. He also noted that politicians have used their religious affiliations as their only manifesto and often incite the youths against their opponents by appealing to their religious inclinations. He further spoke about the effect of religious intolerance on the youth, which includes creation of wrong values of religion and the society, radicalization of youths for violence etc.

The third speaker, Awise Olakunle Oligbinde, spoke about African Traditional Religions (ATR) and how freedom of religion has affected it. He noted that African Traditional Religions has been grossly misunderstood and therefore twisted out of context, such that all evil things have been attributed to ATR. He suggested that the government should recognize ATR as one of the state religions and the misconception that traditional rulers were representative of the traditional worshippers should be done away with.

The fourth speaker, Dr. David Akeju, presented a paper titled “A critical analysis of long years of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria”. Dr. Akeju, a sociology expert, identified the acceptance of alien religions (Christianity and Islam) over our own indigenous beliefs as one of the problems facing freedom of religion in Nigeria. He stated that this acceptance has divided us along religious lines and has destroyed the fabric of who we were before colonialism. He also identified lack of religious tolerance as a problem facing freedom of religion in Nigeria. He suggested that government must show commitment to creating new social values and Nigerians should focus on what unites us more than what divides us. He also suggested that families should teach religious tolerance and inculcate the right values into the younger generation.

The fourth speaker, Mr. Adewole Adejola from BudgIT spoke on the effect of freedom of religion on the economy. He noted that division along religious lines has blinded us to the excesses of our elected representatives. He suggested active interest in our national budget which can be done by using the Tracka
app by BudgIT. He said the Tracka App can help Nigerians monitor and report development activities within their constituencies. He further stated that such active participation in the economy will hold our elected officers accountable, thereby alleviating poverty and reducing the human resources available for exploitation, religious violence and crimes against humanity.

The fifth speaker, Barrister Lanre Ogundare, who represented Dr. Babatunde Oni, presented a paper titled “Right to Freedom of Religion as a Panacea for Peace in Nigeria”. He suggested that practical upholding of the fundamental human rights, especially the right to freedom of religion, is the only way to attain freedom of religion. He also suggested that religion should be used as a tool for unity rather than unrest and violence.

The conference continued on the second day with the presentation by Dr. Adams Akewusola, who represented Prof. Afi Ayinde Oladosu. The theme of his paper presentation was “Terrorism under the guise of “Islamic Jihadist” movement: do these represent the teachings of Islam?” He identified lack of understanding and minimal comprehension of the Quran on the part of the Muslims as a big threat to freedom of religion in Nigeria. He also noted that most Muslims were not practicing Islam, because they were not living in peace with their neighbours. Thus, he suggested that Islam should be rescued from the ill-informed Muslims. He also suggested that a war should be waged against ignorance so that everyone will be enlightened. Finally, he suggested that religion should not be compulsory, and that dialogue should be embraced rather than violence.

The last paper presentation was by Dr. Joseph Atang, a representative of KAICIID, whose paper focused on the “Realities in Communities Fighting Religious Wars”. He cited misinformation, lack of values and the need for a sense of belonging as the leading causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria. He also cited socio-economic injustices, politicization of religion, language and linguistic diversity, as well as government’s use of force to stop religious uprisings rather than dialogue, as the challenges facing interfaith dialogue in Nigeria. He suggested legislation against hate speech and violent extremisms as a way of promoting interfaith dialogue. He further suggested government’s funding for organizations that are involved in interfaith dialogues.

After the presentation of the final paper, participants were divided into seven focus groups, namely: family, educational institutions, community, parliamentary, religious leaders, Mass Media and public/private sector focus groups. Each focus group was tasked with the responsibility of explaining the role different stakeholders have to play in promoting freedom of religion in Nigeria.

Afterwards, the representatives of each focus group were given the floor to present their resolutions. Thereafter, Mr. Omoyemi Oni and Mr. Ugochukwu Amadi, representatives of Taking All Men Brother, officially adopted the different resolutions as part of TAMEB’s advocacy tool for freedom of religion in Nigeria.

Following the official adoption of the resolutions, Ms. Iyabo Ogundiran (the TAMEB Board Chair) presented awards to distinguished individuals for their remarkable contribution towards the success of the event. Awise Olakunle Oligbinde gave an appreciation speech on behalf of all the awardees.
REFLECTION ON PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION

1. General impression of the reflection and learning among the participants.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the participants confessed that they were ignorant of the concept of freedom of religion or belief before attending the conference, and that they were now well enlightened by the experts, particularly on the implications of freedom of religion or belief for peaceful co-existence at all levels of the Nigerian society.

2. Review on participation in the exercises and discussions

The question and answer sessions made the conference highly interactive such that many participants were able to actively share their opinions, experiences, fears, challenges, and solutions to the problems of religious intolerance and conflicts in Nigeria. Opinions on group and personal hostilities, particularly the African traditional religions and its adherents, were particularly moving and thought-provoking. The participants welcomed with excitement the opportunity to voice their contributions on how freedom of religion or belief can be promoted in Nigeria. Therefore, the focus groups were very engaging and the contributions represented the participants’ various demography.

3. Interactions across demography (i.e. how did hierarchy/structures, religious differences, age and gender affect the interaction and learning environment?)

The atmosphere was cordial; attendees were relaxed and confident enough to express themselves without inhibitions. Participants interacted regardless of status, position, gender or age. Although most of the attendees comprised of Muslims, Christians and African Traditionalists, issues of religious differences had no negative impact on the conference. They interacted freely among themselves, especially during the focus group discussions. Furthermore, new contacts and relationships were established across various divides.

4. Content Review

The presentations received positive review by the participants. They opined that more of this type of conferences is needed to enlighten the ordinary citizens. They also stated that in future, there is need to organize conferences for policymakers and people in government.

5. Some Matter that arose from the Conference

Emerging hot issues highlighted during the conference include the disturbing level of discrimination and stigmatization of adherents of the African traditional religions, problems and prospects of inter-religious marriages, religion as criteria for employment and job promotion, and forceful inter-religious conversion. There was also ethical debates on admission into private and public schools, use of religious headwear, accessories and other regalia as attachment to school uniform (e.g. hijab, Ifa beads); the use of public roads by Muslims or Christians for prayers, thus denying others of their right to free movement until the religious program ends. Appropriate resolutions and recommendations on these issues were made by the focus groups.

6. Some observations and changes in the attitude of the participants during the conference.

Changes were observed in the following areas: knowledge about human rights, knowledge about freedom of religion and its challenges, and knowledge about ways and methods to promoting freedom of religion or belief at all levels of the society. In addition, at the commencement of the conference, participants chose to seat next to people of similar religions and there was little or no
interaction with others that they had no affiliations to. As the programme progressed, seating arrangements changed and therefore there were more interactions across divides. Nonetheless, two female Christian participants opined that they cannot allow their daughters marry Muslims. One young female participant asserted that she cannot marry a Muslim. These people appear to retain their hardline beliefs despite the orientation provided by the conference.

7. **Reflection on how participants plan to use their new insights and skills to promote freedom of religion or belief**

Seventy-four percent (74%) of the participants opined that they are willing to promote freedom of religion or belief in their individual social context, starting with their immediate families and then to the larger society. They are willing to domesticate the tenets, principles and values of freedom of religion or belief in different social context in order to make Nigeria a better country. Many also indicated their interests in the organization and desire to become active members.

8. **A summary of TAMEB’s concrete action plan developed to further promote freedom of religion or belief.**

i. Organize more workshops in other parts of the country on freedom of religion or belief for employers of labour, religious and community leaders, and parliamentarians.

ii. Take the message of freedom of religion or belief to the primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

iii. Use the social media to propagate the concept of freedom of religion or belief.

**OTHER COMMENTS**

Most volunteers, who were students from the University of Ibadan, decided to forego their stipends for transportation, citing the fact that they had been enriched by the program and were also grateful for the opportunity to serve their country as their reasons.
THE FOCUS GROUPS RECOMMENDATIONS

Family Focus Group

The Role of the Family in Promoting Freedom of Religion

1. Relationship between the Family and Religion:
   - They are agents of socialization. They share the same goal of integrating the child in a particular way.
   - What the family prepares is what the religion works on.
   - Basically, every human being is obliged to morality and these two (family and religion) address this.

2. How important is the Family in Our Understanding of Freedom of Religion?
   - If the family is peaceful, the society reaps from this.

   - Anchored on principles of self-interest and prejudice which is natural in human beings.
   - According to Thomas Hobbes in “The Selfish Will of Man”, “Man is Wicked”.

4. How Does Family Orientation Affect Freedom of Religion?
   - Authoritarian and Liberal orientations, the laissez-faire is dangerous either to have choice or not affects the individual’s way of relating with other religions.

5. What is the Place of Peer-Group Influence in Freedom of Religion?
   - Evil communications corrupt good manners.
   - Temperament

6. How can the Family be an Instrument in Ensuring Practice of Freedom of Religion as well as Peace and Harmony in Nigeria?
   - By adopting principles of liberal approach in child upbringing and socialization.
Educational Institution Focus Group

The Role/Contribution of Education to Freedom of Religion to Ensure Peace and Harmony

1. What They Do Wrong
   - Addressing the curriculum (Inclusion of CRK/IRK/African Traditional Religions)
   - Discriminating against other religions.
   - Admission Policy
   - Dress Codes: Institutions are allowing people to dress without considering the standards in the name of Freedom of Religion, there should be a uniform dress code.
   - Institutions are allowing people to misinterpret.

2. What They Do Right.
   - Allow time for prayers (in some institutions)
   - Freedom of Dressing
   - Tolerance
   - Provision of Worship Places
   - General rules to prayers for the religions.

Recommendations:

- Parents Teachers Association should be involved in designing the school curriculum.
- General course on Inter-Religious Discussions should be included in the curriculum.

Community Focus Group

The Role of the Community in Promoting Freedom of Religion

The first thing to be done is Ideological Change: There is the need to pursue an ideological reorientation in the community. It can be done in three stages:

1. Community: What is the world’s view of that community? If there’s the need to change it, it should be done.
2. Religion: How the people perceive or know religion? A warped knowledge of religion will definitely bring about religious conflicts.

3. Personal: Each individual needs to be made to have good knowledge of themselves and the society.

Practice Ideological State: There’s the need to practice what has been changed ideologically.

Enforcement of Values: Institutions should be put in place to ensure that these values are instilled. Also, committees can be set up in communities to look into interfaith matters.

Advocacy: The leaders of the community need to be consulted for support.

Enlightenment: There has to be a sensitization on interreligious reorientation.

Tolerance: Take on other people and tolerate their excesses.

Co-Habitation: We should be able to live amongst ourselves without fear or discrimination.

Point of Convergence: An avenue for all forms of faith to meet and discuss socially.

Use of language/emotional intelligence for everyone.

Understanding of community background.

Allow more things that unite than divide us.

Stop religious favoritism

Attitude:

- Avoid Conflicts
- Consider the attitude of the people in the community
- Be good citizens
Parliament Focus Group

1. The Role of the Legislators in Promoting Freedom of Religion
2. The teaching of interfaith dialogue should be included in all school curriculums from primary to tertiary level.
3. All media houses should be mandated to dedicate at least an hour daily to the broadcasting of interfaith dialogues.
4. Parliament should legalize interfaith groups and communities in public and private institutions.
5. Parliament should legislate to remove all physical structures for religious activities from all public institutions.
6. They should legislate against disturbance of public peace by religious bodies i.e. noise pollution through the use of public address systems, spill over from places of worship onto public roads.
7. Sanctions and penalties for religious killings, maiming and inciting gatherings or speeches should be clearly stated.
8. Parliament should legislate the government and private bodies to reward moviemakers that promote interfaith contents.

Religious Leaders Focus Group

The Role of Religious Leaders; what should be Their Contribution to Freedom of Religion.

1. Religious leaders should know their faith: they should let the people under their faith know what they stand for and remove any form of bias.
2. Religious leaders should not adore the rich people ignoring the fact that they should teach peace with no form of bias.
3. Leaders ought to live in line with what they are preaching, knowing that they are the representatives of God.
4. Religious leaders should always speak objectively whenever they are in public knowing that we are not all on the same level of understanding and background.
5. Religious adherents should relate with followers of other religions bearing in mind that no religion is superior or inferior to another. We should be culturally aware and tolerant, leave behind any form of culture or religion prejudice and learn to collaborate with people we don’t have same opinion or
common value. Therefore, leaders should be able to collaborate with one another with no segregation based on religion or belief.

6. Leaders have to look into fundamental issues: All religious leaders should pay more attention to salvation rather than material issues.

ii. Poverty in the community can sometimes bring up religious issues and unfortunately some religious leaders build on the ignorance of people. Under normal circumstance, no reasonable and responsible leader should organize a general program for their congregation during working hours on a weekday, nor should a productive individual be found attending such programs at hours they are supposed to be at work.

iii. People believe prayers are the only way out. It is the job of religious leaders to enlighten them on the truth “heaven help those who help themselves”.

7. Leaders should preach to their followers about freedom of religion, they should not see adherents of other religions as inferior or superior to them in any way. They should not see their religion as the only way to salvation. Only God has a say and final judgement, therefore we should not play God or arrogate unto ourselves the power of God.

ii. Leaders should not fuel the bias or disbelief of their followers by preaching false doctrines and practices. They should teach the truth about freedom of religion.

8. Leaders should teach followers to be tolerant of other religions; religious practices different from ours doesn’t mean they are wrong or right.

9. Religious leaders should be knowledgeable, be properly informed and be up to date by attending refresher courses and conferences such as this one organized by TAMEB.

Religious leaders should:

- Allow inter-marriage
- Stop discriminating
- Stop elevating one religion over another
- Engage in religious education
- Stop persecuting adherents of other religions.

10. Religious leaders shouldn’t coerce people to accept or reject a religion; they need to educate people on freedom of religion.

11. Leaders should not mislead or take advantage of their followers’ gullibility by saying negative things about other religions.
12. Leaders should be trained and they should lead by example.
13. Religious leaders should not be politically polarized.

Mass Media Focus Group

The Role of Mass Media in the Promotion of Freedom of Religion

The mass media is very important in the propagation of freedom of religion. Any nation or organization that thrives always has strong media influence. Believes and ideologies that have thrived have been propagated through media. Mass media cut across different platforms (television, radio, print, social media etc.). However, the media has, unfortunately, sometimes been used to propagate hate and negativity on freedom of religion.

First of all, the media needs to stop the propagation of false information. Also, individual need to abstain from publishing unverified news.

Secondly, the media needs to be unbiased in their dealings with religious information. Equal opportunities should be giving to all religions to propagate and enlighten people on their point of view without being criticized, insulted or looked down on.

Furthermore, the media should be given opportunity and freehand in their dealings with religious institutions, but this should be done under proper monitoring and regulations.

The media should document and disseminate (for the education of the public) incidences where media has been used negatively under the guise of religion. This would enlighten people on how Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions are being misused to suit personal gain.

Also, the government should get actively involved in the propagation of interfaith and enlightenment on religious tolerance in order to foster harmony in the country.
Public and Private Sector Focus Group
Role of Public and Private Sector in Fostering Freedom of Religion

People should be respected according to their faith and there should be equal treatment of employees irrespective of their religion. It has been noted that if there’s religious division in an organization, it could hinder its productivity.

When taking up a job, people should know the nature and religious inclinations of the job. Furthermore, there should not be discrimination in dressing; employees should understand and oblige by the rules and policies guiding the workplace.

Employment should be by merit; positions should be alternated between religions; and equal opportunities should be giving to all regardless of religion.

There should be flexibility and balance such that individuals will be able to cope under different religious settings. The government should make clear policies to guide public schools and institutions.

Organizations like National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) should be cautioned on use of offensive language and violence. The government should also desist from using pressure groups such as NURTW for political gains.

Greetings should be official and not religious

The government should find lasting solutions to religious crises across the country.
CONCLUSION

At the end of the Freedom of Religion 2019 conference, the conclusions of the participants are as follows:

They agreed that all human beings are from God and that religion serves the same God in various ways. Based on this, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humankind were strongly affirmed. Consequently, they agreed that we should accord everybody the right to adopt any religion of their choice and practice it without any infringement to freedom of religion or belief and social hostilities. They affirmed that everybody has the right to his/her own views on matters of religion within the ambit of the law and that we should respect other people’s religion or faith perspective. We should not interfere unlawfully and unduly in other people’s religion. We should desist from castigating or destructively criticizing of other people’s religion. Participants also resolved that they would uphold the secularity of the Nigerian state by letting everyone know that they have the right to practice their religion in their own ways. They condemned the acts of pressurizing or persecuting anyone on the basis of religion. Believing that no religion allows anyone to shed another person’s blood on the basis of religious differences, they resolved to lead by example in the promotion of Freedom of religion in their respective domain, starting with their immediate family to the larger society.

It was widely recommended that more conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized to educate the masses on the concept of freedom of religion. It was suggested that everyone should begin the practice of freedom of religion from his/her immediate family and lead by example. TAMEB was urged to organize more dialogue on the concept of freedom of religion, as well as partner with similar interfaith and peacebuilding organizations. Participants also suggested that government should be neutral in matters of religion. Participants urged religious leaders to intensify efforts to educate their adherents on the concept of freedom of religion. They recommended that that freedom of religion is a fundamental human right which everyone must respect and uphold. Thus, the family, school and community, mass media, parliamentarians, religious leaders, employers of labour should stop infringing on the fundamental human right of others.
APPRECIATION

Firstly, we thank God for making the conference possible and for providing all the resources needed. Special thanks to all the attendees for taking time out of their busy schedules to partake in this program. To all our resource persons, we are immensely grateful to you for enriching us with your deep insight and vast knowledge on issues affecting freedom of religion or belief. Without your participation, the conference could not have been a success.

Special appreciation to all our friendly organizations: the Institute of Church and Society (ICS); King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID); West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP); Space FM 90.1 Ibadan; Building Blocks for Peace; United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY); BudgIT; Civil Society Coalition on Sustainable Development(CSCSD); Muslim Society of Nigeria, University of Ibadan; St. Peter and Paul Catholic Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan; Emmanuel College of Theology and Christian Education, Samonda, Ibadan; Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan; Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan; Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan; Dominican University, Samonda, Ibadan; Ijo Ose Meji, Oja-Oba, Ibadan; Association of Traditional Medicine Practitioners, Ibadan; Ogboni Fraternity, Ibadan; Babatunde A. Oni Co. Chambers; who have contributed to the success of the conference through their participation.

Special thanks to Dr. (Rev.) Ibrahim Yusuf Wushishi, the Very Rev. O. Kolade Fadahunsi, as well as the staff of the Institute of Church and Society for their support. To Dr. Joseph Atang, who despite all odds offered immeasurable support to the conference.

We also will like to thank Dr. Augustine Agugua, Awise Olakunle Oligbinde and Dr. Charles Obafemi Jegege for their incessant support to TAMEB since inception and for their constant words of advice to our youths on the TAMEB WhatsApp group.

Finally, big thanks to all TAMEB members and volunteers, as well as Dr. Oludayo Ogunbowale (the conference moderator) and all the welfare staff for your hard work and dedication.
APPENDIX

Links to the paper presentations


Terrorism under the guise of “Islamic Jihadist” Movement: Do these represent the teachings of Islam? by Professor Afis A. Oladosu: https://www.slideshare.net/tameb/terrorism-under-the-guise-of-islamic-jihadist-movement-do-these-represent-the-teachings-of-islam-by-professor-of-afis-a-oladosu


The Role of Interfaith in Peacebuilding (The KAICIID example in Nigeria) by Mr. Joseph Atang: https://www.slideshare.net/tameb/the-role-of-interfaith-in-peacebuilding-the-kaiciid-example-in-nigeria-by-mr-joseph-atang
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An interfaith and Intercultural Peace Advocacy Non-Governmental Organization, Nigeria
Freedom of Religion: Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria

CONFERENCE REPORT
Authors:
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The conference planning committee of TAKING ALL MEN BROTHER (TAMEB) hereby appreciates the following resource persons whose papers and contributions made the conference a huge success:

- Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola (Presbyter, Methodist Church Nigeria)
- Mr. Yusuf Olayode representing Rafiu Adeniran Lawal (Building Blocks for Peace/United Network for Peace Builders)
- Awise Olakunle Oligbinde (Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa)
- Dr. David Akeju (Ph.D. Department of Sociology, University of Lagos)
- Mr. Adewole Adejola (Senior Program Officer, BudgIT)
- Barr. Lanre Ogundare, representing Dr. Babatunde Oni, (Associate Professor of Law, University of Lagos)
- Mr. Adams Oluwafemi Akewula, representing Prof. Afini Ayinde Oladosu Ph.D, (Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan)
- Dr. Joseph T. Atang, (Nigeria Country Expert for KAICHD Dialogue Centre)

Also, the efforts of TAMEB publication team in the compilation and publication of this report are appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Omoyemi Oni
Executive Director, TAMEB
INTRODUCTION

This document is an official report on the Freedom of Religion conference, themed Freedom of Religion 2019: A Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria. The event took place at the Institute of Church and Society, Christian Council of Nigeria, Samonda, Ibadan on the 26th and 27th of June 2019. The event had 146 participants, including religious clerics and other adherents of the main religions in Nigeria (such as African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam). This wide distribution represented people from all works of life, ranging from religious and sociological scholars and students, to executives in public and private sectors, as well as civil society advocates. At the two day event, there were eight papers presented by experts of the triadic religions (African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam), sociology, legal, youth, economic and interfaith advocacy. Thereafter, participants were divided into seven focus groups, namely: family, educational institutions, community, parliamentary, religious leaders, Mass Media and public/private sector focus groups. Each of the focus groups discussed the roles of the different stakeholders in the promotion and implementation of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria. TAMEB adopted the resolutions as part of its advocacy tool for the fostering of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem identified by TAMEB which informed the convening of this conference is the fact that Nigeria is a multi-religious country where freedom of religion and belief is enshrined in the constitution, but is hardly practiced by the adherents of the different religions. This has, therefore, led to bigotry, fanaticism, extremism, violence and terrorism, in their various, shades in the country.
A SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW OF THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION CONFERENCE

The conference tagged Freedom of Religion: A Panacea for Peace and Harmony in Nigeria (FoR 2019), was designed by Taking All Men Brother (TAMEB) to address and proffer solutions to various forms of unfriendly relationships amongst the various religious groups, denominations and sects in Nigeria.

The program presented expert views on freedom of religion from Islamic, Christian, African traditional religions, youth, legal and sociological and economic perspectives. Participants engaged in focus group discussions where the practicality and workability of religious freedom at the family and community levels were looked into. The role of religious leaders, educational institutions, parliamentarians, the media, as well as the private and public sectors, in the promotion and implementation of Freedom of Religion in Nigeria were identified. Finally, appropriate policy actions on interfaith peace and harmony were recommended to relevant stakeholders.

Objectives:

The major objectives of the conference are hereby outlined as follows:

Specific Objective 1: To educate religious leaders, scholars, adherents and other stakeholders on the core meaning of freedom of Religion or Belief, in line with the tenets of the triadic religions in Nigeria and according to the Nigerian constitution, while exploring the implications of religious intolerance, hostility and violence on individual Nigerians and the Nigerian society at large.

Specific Objective 2: To educate religious leaders, scholars, adherents and other stakeholders on freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right that must be valued and respected in order to foster peace and harmony in Nigeria.

Specific Objective 3: To collectively create a document that will inform stakeholders on how freedom of religion or belief can be implemented in the family, school, community, as well as the roles of mass media, religious leaders, parliamentarians, private and public sectors in the promotion of freedom of religion or belief.
THE EXPERTS

Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola (Presbyter, Methodist Church Nigeria)

Very Rev. Olusegun Oyetunde Babalola is a Presbyter in Methodist Church Nigeria and the Program Officer for Christian Council of Nigeria, South West Zone. He also serves as the Research Officer for the Institute of Church and Society, Samonda, Ibadan. His academic background is Counselling and Social Psychology. He has facilitated workshops on several thematic areas including Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria (FoRB) and has attended several conferences. He is a seasoned social pastoral worker, with high level of responsibility for stewardship. He is a passionate change agent with cognate experience in livelihood, pastoral and social entrepreneurial competences. He has flair for demonstrated effective and efficient leadership.

Mr. Yusuf Olayode representing Rafiu Adeniran Lawal (Building Blocks for Peace/United Network for Peace Builders)

Rafiu Adeniran Lawal is the Leading Director of Building Blocks for Peace and the United Network for Peace Builders (UNOY) International steering group representative for West Africa and Central Africa. He is a passionate youth peace advocate, who is deeply involved in the adoption and implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. He has a Master’s Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Ibadan.

Awise Olakunle Oligbinde (Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa)

Chief Olakunle Oligbinde is the Awise Secretary General of the indigene Faith of Africa, Ebute Meta. A renowned leader in Ancestral religion within and outside the country, he is an advocate who strives to propagate the virtues of Ancestral beliefs and to correct the long held prejudices against it. He has a degree in Statistics from the University of Ibadan and certifications from the Institute of Management Studies in London. He worked with the Federal Office of Statistics (1963-1971), from where he was seconded to Federal Tuberculosis Center (Chest Clinic), General Hospital, Lagos, and then the Federal Ministry of Trade and Industries, Lagos. He then moved to Nigerian Ports Authority, Lagos, where he served in Management Services, Audit and Operations Departments in the various ports formations. He retired from professional service in 2002.

Dr. David Akeju (Ph.D. University of Lagos)

Dr. David Akeju holds a BSc, MSc, and Ph.D. in Sociology (Demography and Population Studies) from the prestigious University of Ibadan. He was born into a Muslim family but later converted to Christianity. After acquiring his MSc degree, he worked in Adamawa State as a program officer implementing programs among Hausa/Fulani people. Growing up in the north provided him the opportunity to interact and build bridges across religious and ethnic divides. It has also given him the advantage to share topical issues bordering on religious harmony with deep insight. He has a very strong passion for Nigeria and a strong desire to see the birthing of a unique Nigerian identity, irrespective of religious and ethnic diversity. He strongly believes that achieving interfaith harmony in Nigeria could be prototype to attaining global peace. He has been published in international journals and consulted for local and international organizations. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Lagos.

Mr. Adewole Adejola (Senior Program Officer BudgIT)

Mr. Adewole Adejola is a Senior Program Officer at BudgIT, a Nigerian-based NGO. His works span several projects funded by the UN Development Fund, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Making All Voices Count, Indigo Trust, Omidyar
Network, among others. He is committed to improving citizens' access to government and to drive key reforms in civic institutions at federal and state levels. Mr. Adewole works at grassroots and sub-national levels within communities and states across Nigeria, facilitating interactions between citizens and the government on how to solve community-based issues affecting the people. He has consistently tracked government projects which were paid for by taxpayers' money, but never delivered or were implemented at substandard levels. His work is to unearth, collate and present information that propel citizens towards enlightenment and organized fora to demand for delivery of public services. He has served as facilitator in different training workshops and made presentations on budget tracking and monitoring.

Barr. Lanre Ogundare representing Dr. Babatunde Oni (Associate Professor of Law, University of Lagos)

Babatunde Oni, an Associate Professor of Law, obtained his LL.B (Hons) from Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. He won the Idowu Sofola (SAN) prize for best results in Nigeria Legal System and Research Methods, the Akinola Adaramaja (SAN) prize for best results in Nigerian Land Law, Equity and Trust, Commercial Law, as well as other academic prizes from Ogun State University. He obtained his LLM from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and his Ph.D. from University of Lagos. He was also a coordinator of the LLM Programme from 2011 to 2013. Dr. Oni is an international scholar of repute with several publications both in local and foreign journals, and has won several international awards. He is the coordinator of Wills Clinic of the University of Lagos, Faculty of Law and a consultant to numerous clients in Nigeria and abroad. He is also a member of Peace Advocate of HWPL based in South Korea.

Mr. Adams Oluwafemi Akewula representing Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu Ph.D (Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan)

Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu is a Professor at the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His specialization straddles Middle Eastern and North African Studies. He equally has competence and expertise in Literary Criticism/Pragmatics, Islam and Gender, and Islamic Law and Jurisprudence. He was once a Bill Gates Scholar and Fellow, African Scholar Program, University of Massachusetts. He has also previously worked as a visiting scholar at the International Islamic University, Malaysia, among others. He is presently a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana and a board member of National University Commission (NUC).

Dr. Joseph T. Atang (Nigeria Country Expert for KAICIID Dialogue Centre)

Mr. Joseph T. Atang is currently the Nigeria Country Expert for KAICIID Dialogue Centre, an international intergovernmental organization for interreligious and intercultural dialogue established by Saudi Arabia, Spain, Austria and the Vatican, with headquarters in Vienna, Austria. He also doubles as the Technical Adviser to the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) in Nigeria, an interfaith dialogue platform for Nigerian Christians and Muslims established by KAICID in 2017. He was a member of the Kaduna State Peace and Reconciliation Committee (2011 – 2012) and a member of the Kaduna State Committee to Stem the Incessant Killings in Southern Kaduna, 2015. Mr Atang is a recipient of the Donald Paulson Award of the Department of Conflict Resolution, Human Security and Global Governance at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, U.S.A. He is a certified mediator of the District Court of the State of Massachusetts, U.S.A. He was the Secretary, Dispute Resolution Graduate Students Council, University of Massachusetts in Boston from September 2007 – May 2008. He is equally a member of Discussion Group on Conflict in Africa, Program on Negotiation (PON), Harvard University, Boston, U.S.A (September 2007 to date).
The Freedom of Religion, 2019, conference, was opened on the 26th of June 2019 with the recitation of the second stanza of the national anthem of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which served the dual function of an opening prayer. The chairperson of Taking All Men Brother (TAMEB) declared the conference open by delivering a welcome address, in which she stated the reason for organizing the Freedom of Religion 2019 conference. In her own words, “As we are all aware, Nigeria is a multi-religious country where freedom of religion is enshrined in the constitution, but is hardly practiced by the adherents of the different religions. This has therefore led to bigotry, fanaticism, extremism, violence and terrorism in their various shades in the country”. She further said this conference was organized to enable experts from Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religions, Economics and Sociology, Law, Youth Advocacy and Civil Society Organizations will take the center stage and educate us on the problems that have plagued us; focus groups will be formed among the participants to discuss the problems and proffer solutions to the problems.

The first speaker was Very Rev. Segun Babalola, who spoke on the Christian perspective on Freedom of Religion. He noted that Nigerians have little knowledge about the core issues of religion, and are, therefore, overzealous concerning their religion, which has led their abuse of freedom of religion and lack of respect for human dignity. He suggested inter-religious conferences such as this, where proper understanding and practice of religion would bring about an enlightened just society where there is respect for human rights and dignity.

The second speaker was Mr. Yusuf Olayode, who represented Mr. Rafiu Lawal of Building Blocks for Peace in presenting the youth perspective. His paper presentation was titled “What a Future void of Religious Freedom holds for Young People”. During his presentation, he posited that lack of education and politicizing of religion has led to the abuse of freedom of religion. He also noted that politicians have used their religious affiliations as their only manifesto and often incite the youths against their opponents by appealing to their religious inclinations. He further spoke about the effect of religious intolerance on the youth, which includes creation of wrong values of religion and the society, radicalization of youths for violence etc.

The third speaker, Awise Olakunle Oligbinde, spoke about African Traditional Religions (ATR) and how freedom of religion has affected it. He noted that African Traditional Religions has been grossly misunderstood and therefore twisted out of context, such that all evil things have been attributed to ATR. He suggested that the government should recognize ATR as one of the state religions and the misconception that traditional rulers were representative of the traditional worshippers should be done away with.

The fourth speaker, Dr. David Akeju, presented a paper titled “A critical analysis of long years of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria”. Dr. Akeju, a sociology expert, identified the acceptance of alien religions (Christianity and Islam) over our own indigenous beliefs as one of the problems facing freedom of religion in Nigeria. He stated that this acceptance has divided us along religious lines and has destroyed the fabric of who we were before colonialism. He also identified lack of religious tolerance as a problem facing freedom of religion in Nigeria. He suggested that government must show commitment to creating new social values and Nigerians should focus on what unites us more than what divides us. He also suggested that families should teach religious tolerance and inculcate the right values into the younger generation.

The fifth speaker, Mr. Adewole Ađejola from BudgIT spoke on the effect of freedom of religion on the economy. He noted that division along religious lines has blinded us to the excesses of our elected representatives. He suggested active interest in our national budget which can be done by using the Tracka app by BudgIT. He said the Tracka App can help Nigerians monitor and report development activities within their constituencies. He further stated that such active participation in the economy will hold our elected officers accountable, thereby alleviating poverty and reducing the human resources available for exploitation, religious violence and crimes against humanity.

The sixth speaker, Barrister Lanre Ogundare, who represented Dr. Babatunde Oni, presented a paper titled “Right to Freedom of Religion as a Panacea for Peace in Nigeria”. He suggested that practical upholding of the fundamental human rights, especially the right to freedom of religion, is the only way to attain freedom of religion. He also suggested that religion should be used as a tool for unity rather than unrest and violence.

The conference continued on the second day with the presentation by Dr. Adams Akewusola, who represented Prof. Afis Ayinde Oladosu. The theme of his paper presentation was “Terrorism under the guise of "Islamic Jihadist" movement: do these represent the teachings of Islam?” He identified lack of understanding and minimal comprehension of the Quran on the part of the Muslims as a big threat to freedom of religion in Nigeria. He also noted that most Muslims were not practicing Islam, because they were not living in peace
with their neighbours. Thus, he suggested that Islam should be rescued from the ill-informed Muslims. He also suggested that a war should be waged against ignorance so that everyone will be enlightened. Finally, he suggested that religion should not be compulsory, and that dialogue should be embraced rather than violence.

The last paper presentation was by Dr. Joseph Atang, a representative of KAICIID, whose paper focused on the "Realities in Communities Fighting Religious Wars". He cited misinformation, lack of values and the need for a sense of belonging as the leading causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria. He also cited socio-economic injustices, politicization of religion, language and linguistic diversity, as well as government’s use of force to stop religious uprisings rather than dialogue, as the challenges facing interfaith dialogue in Nigeria. He suggested legislation against hate speech and violent extremisms as a way of promoting interfaith dialogue. He further suggested government’s funding for organizations that are involved in interfaith dialogues.

After the presentation of the final paper, participants were divided into seven focus groups, namely: family, educational institutions, community, parliamentary, religious leaders, Mass Media and public/private sector focus groups. Each focus group was tasked with the responsibility of explaining the role different stakeholders have to play in promoting freedom of religion in Nigeria.

Afterwards, the representatives of each focus group were given the floor to present their resolutions. Thereafter, Mr. Omoyemi Oni and Mr. Ugochukwu Amadi, representatives of Taking All Men Brother, officially adopted the different resolutions as part of TAMEB’s advocacy tool for freedom of religion in Nigeria.

Following the official adoption of the resolutions, Ms. Iyabo Ogundiran (the TAMEB Board Chair) presented awards to distinguished individuals for their remarkable contribution towards the success of the event. Awise Olakunle Oligbinde gave an appreciation speech on behalf of all the awardees.
REFLECTION ON PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION

1. General impression of the reflection and learning among the participants.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the participants confessed that they were ignorant of the concept of freedom of religion or belief before attending the conference, and that they were now well enlightened by the experts, particularly on the implications of freedom of religion or belief for peaceful co-existence at all levels of the Nigerian society.

2. Review on participation in the exercises and discussions

The question and answer sessions made the conference highly interactive such that many participants were able to actively share their opinions, experiences, fears, challenges, and solutions to the problems of religious intolerance and conflicts in Nigeria. Opinions on group and personal hostilities, particularly the African traditional religions and its adherents, were particularly moving and thought-provoking. The participants welcomed with excitement the opportunity to voice their contributions on how freedom of religion or belief can be promoted in Nigeria. Therefore, the focus groups were very engaging and the contributions represented the participants’ various demography.

3. Interactions across demography (i.e. how did hierarchy/structures, religious differences, age and gender affect the interaction and learning environment?)

The atmosphere was cordial; attendees were relaxed and confident enough to express themselves without inhibitions. Participants interacted regardless of status, position, gender or age. Although most of the attendees comprised of Muslims, Christians and African Traditionalists, issues of religious differences had no negative impact on the conference. They interacted freely among themselves, especially during the focus group discussions. Furthermore, new contacts and relationships were established across various divides.

4. Content Review

The presentations received positive review by the participants. They opined that more of this type of conferences is needed to enlighten the ordinary citizens. They also stated that in future, there is need to organize conferences for policymakers and people in government.

5. Some Matter that arose from the Conference

Emerging hot issues highlighted during the conference include the disturbing level of discrimination and stigmatization of adherents of the African traditional religions, problems and prospects of inter-religious marriages, religion as criteria for employment and job promotion, and forceful inter-religious conversion. There was also ethical debates on admission into private and public schools, use of religious headwear, accessories and other regalia as attachment to school uniform (e.g. hijab, Ifa beads); the use of public roads by Muslims or Christians for prayers, thus denying others of their right to free movement until the religious program ends. Appropriate resolutions and recommendations on these issues were made by the focus groups.

6. Some observations and changes in the attitude of the participants during the conference.

Changes were observed in the following areas: knowledge about human rights, knowledge about freedom of religion and its challenges, and knowledge about ways and methods to promoting freedom of religion or belief at all levels of the society. In addition, at the commencement of the conference, participants chose to seat next to people of similar religions and there was little or no interaction with others that they had no affiliations to. As the programme progressed, seating arrangements changed and therefore there were more interactions across divides. Nonetheless, two female Christian participants opined that they cannot allow their daughters marry Muslims. One young female participant asserted that she cannot marry a Muslim. These people appear to retain their hardline beliefs despite the orientation provided by the conference.

7. Reflection on how participants plan to use their new insights and skills to promote freedom of religion or belief

Seventy-four percent (74%) of the participants opined that they are willing to promote freedom of religion or belief in their individual social context, starting with their immediate families and then to the larger society. They are willing to domesticate the tenets, principles and values of freedom of religion or belief in different social context in order to make Nigeria a better country. Many also indicated their interests in the organization and desire to become active members.
8. A summary of TAMEB's concrete action plan developed to further promote freedom of religion or belief.

i. Organize more workshops in other parts of the country on freedom of religion or belief for employers of labour, religious and community leaders, and parliamentarians.

ii. Take the message of freedom of religion or belief to the primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

iii. Use the social media to propagate the concept of freedom of religion or belief.

OTHER COMMENTS

Most volunteers, who were students from the University of Ibadan, decided to forego their stipends for transportation, citing the fact that they had been enriched by the program and were also grateful for the opportunity to serve their country as their reasons.
THE FOCUS GROUPS RECOMMENDATIONS

Family Focus Group

The Role of the Family in Promoting Freedom of Religion

1. Relationship between the Family and Religion:
   - They are agents of socialization. They share the same goal of integrating the child in a particular way.
   - What the family prepares is what the religion works on.
   - Basically, every human being is obliged to morality and these two (family and religion) address this.

2. How important is the Family in Our Understanding of Freedom of Religion?
   - If the family is peaceful, the society reaps from this.

   - Anchored on principles of self-interest and prejudice which is natural in human beings.
   - According to Thomas Hobbes in “The Selfish Will of Man”, “Man is Wicked”.

4. How Does Family Orientation Affect Freedom of Religion?
   - Authoritarian and Liberal orientations, the laissez-faire is dangerous either to have choice or not affects the individual’s way of relating with other religions.

5. What is the Place of Peer-Group Influence in Freedom of Religion?
   - Evil communications corrupt good manners.
   - Temperament

6. How can the Family be an Instrument in Ensuring Practice of Freedom of Religion as well as Peace and Harmony in Nigeria?
   - By adopting principles of liberal approach in child upbringing and socialization.

Educational Institution Focus Group

The Role/Contribution of Education to Freedom of Religion to Ensure Peace and Harmony

1. What They Do Wrong
   - Addressing the curriculum (Inclusion of CRK/IRK/African Traditional Religions)
   - Discriminating against other religions.
   - Admission Policy
   - Dress Codes: Institutions are allowing people to dress without considering the standards in the name of Freedom of Religion, there should be a uniform dress code.
   - Institutions are allowing people to misinterpret.
2. What They Do Right.
   • Allow time for prayers (in some institutions)
   • Freedom of Dressing
   • Tolerance
   • Provision of Worship Places
   • General rules to prayers for the religions.

Recommendations:
   • Parents Teachers Association should be involved in designing the school curriculum.
   • General course on Inter-Religious Discussions should be included in the curriculum.

Community Focus Group

The Role of the Community in Promoting Freedom of Religion

The first thing to be done is Ideological Change: There is the need to pursue an ideological reorientation in the community. It can be done in three stages:

1. Community: What is the world’s view of that community? If there’s the need to change it, it should be done.
2. Religion: How the people perceive or know religion? A warped knowledge of religion will definitely bring about religious conflicts.
3. Personal: Each individual needs to be made to have good knowledge of themselves and the society.

Practice Ideological State: There’s the need to practice what has been changed ideologically.

Enforcement of Values: Institutions should be put in place to ensure that these values are instilled. Also, committees can be set up in communities to look into interfaith matters.

Advocacy: The leaders of the community need to be consulted for support.

Enlightenment: There has to be a sensitization on interreligious reorientation.

Tolerance: Take on other people and tolerate their excesses.

Co-Habitation: We should be able to live amongst ourselves without fear or discrimination.

Point of Convergence: An avenue for all forms of faith to meet and discuss socially.

Use of language/emotional intelligence for everyone.

Understanding of community background.

Allow more things that unite than divide us.
Stop religious favoritism

Attitude:

- Avoid Conflicts
- Consider the attitude of the people in the community
- Be good citizens

Parliament Focus Group

The Role of the Legislators in Promoting Freedom of Religion

1. The teaching of interfaith dialogue should be included in all school curriculums from primary to tertiary level.
2. All media houses should be mandated to dedicate at least an hour daily to the broadcasting of interfaith dialogues.
3. Parliament should legalize interfaith groups and communities in public and private institutions.
4. Parliament should legislate to remove all physical structures for religious activities from all public institutions.
5. They should legislate against disturbance of public peace by religious bodies i.e. noise pollution through the use of public address systems, spill over from places of worship onto public roads.
6. Sanctions and penalties for religious killings, maiming and inciting gatherings or speeches should be clearly stated.
7. Parliament should legislate the government and private bodies to reward moviemakers that promote interfaith contents.

Religious Leaders Focus Group

The Role of Religious Leaders; what should be Their Contribution to Freedom of Religion.

1. Religious leaders should know their faith: they should let the people under their faith know what they stand for and remove any form of bias.
2. Religious leaders should not adore the rich people ignoring the fact that they should teach peace with no form of bias.
3. Leaders ought to live in line with what they are preaching, knowing that they are the representatives of God.
4. Religious leaders should always speak objectively whenever they are in public knowing that we are not all on the same level of understanding and background.
5. Religious adherents should relate with followers of other religions bearing in mind that no religion is superior or inferior to another. We should be culturally aware and tolerant, leave behind any form of culture or religion prejudice and learn to collaborate with people we don’t have same opinion or common value. Therefore, leaders should be able to collaborate with one another with no segregation based on religion or belief.
6. Leaders have to look into fundamental issues: All religious leaders should pay more attention to salvation rather than material issues.

ii. Poverty in the community can sometimes bring up religious issues and unfortunately some religious leaders build on the ignorance of people. Under normal circumstance, no reasonable and responsible leader should organize a general program for their congregation during working hours on a weekday, nor should a productive individual be found attending such programs at hours they are supposed to be at work.

iii. People believe prayers are the only way out. It is the job of religious leaders to enlighten them on the truth “heaven help those who help themselves”.

7. Leaders should preach to their followers about freedom of religion, they should not see adherents of other religions as inferior or superior to them in any way. They should not see their religion as the only way to salvation. Only God has a say and final judgement, therefore we should not play God or arrogate unto ourselves the power of God.

ii. Leaders should not fuel the bias or disbelief of their followers by preaching false doctrines and practices. They should teach the truth about freedom of religion.

8. Leaders should teach followers to be tolerant of other religions; religious practices different from ours doesn’t mean they are wrong or right.

9. Religious leaders should be knowledgeable, be properly informed and be up to date by attending refresher courses and conferences such as this one organized by TAMEB.

	Religious leaders should:

	- Allow inter-marriage
	- Stop discriminating
	- Stop elevating one religion over another
	- Engage in religious education
	- Stop persecuting adherents of other religions.

10. Religious leaders shouldn’t coerce people to accept or reject a religion; they need to educate people on freedom of religion.

11. Leaders should not mislead or take advantage of their followers’ gullibility by saying negative things about other religions.

12. Leaders should be trained and they should lead by example.

13. Religious leaders should not be politically polarized.

**Mass Media Focus Group**

The Role of Mass Media in the Promotion of Freedom of Religion

The mass media is very important in the propagation of freedom of religion. Any nation or organization that thrives always has strong media influence. Believes and ideologies that have thrived have been propagated through media. Mass media cut across different platforms (television, radio, print, social media etc.). However, the media has, unfortunately, sometimes been used to propagate hate and negativity on freedom of religion.
First of all, the media needs to stop the propagation of false information. Also, individual need to abstain from publishing unverified news.

Secondly, the media needs to be unbiased in their dealings with religious information. Equal opportunities should be giving to all religions to propagate and enlighten people on their point of view without being criticized, insulted or looked down on.

Furthermore, the media should be given opportunity and freehand in their dealings with religious institutions, but this should be done under proper monitoring and regulations.

The media should document and disseminate (for the education of the public) incidences where media has been used negatively under the guise of religion. This would enlighten people on how Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions are being misused to suit personal gain.

Also, the government should get actively involved in the propagation of interfaith and enlightenment on religious tolerance in order to foster harmony in the country.

**Public and Private Sector Focus Group**

**Role of Public and Private Sector in Fostering Freedom of Religion**

People should be respected according to their faith and there should be equal treatment of employees irrespective of their religion. It has been noted that if there’s religious division in an organization, it could hinder its productivity.

When taking up a job, people should know the nature and religious inclinations of the job. Furthermore, there should not be discrimination in dressing; employees should understand and oblige by the rules and policies guiding the workplace.

Employment should be by merit; positions should be alternated between religions; and equal opportunities should be giving to all regardless of religion.

There should be flexibility and balance such that individuals will be able to cope under different religious settings. The government should make clear policies to guide public schools and institutions.

Organizations like National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) should be cautioned on use of offensive language and violence. The government should also desist from using pressure groups such as NURTW for political gains.

Greetings should be official and not religious

The government should find lasting solutions to religious crises across the country.
CONCLUSION

At the end of the Freedom of Religion 2019 conference, the conclusions of the participants are as follows:

They agreed that all human beings are from God and that religion serves the same God in various ways. Based on this, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humankind were strongly affirmed. Consequently, they agreed that we should accord everybody the right to adopt any religion of their choice and practice it without any infringement to freedom of religion or belief and social hostilities. They affirmed that everybody has the right to his/her own views on matters of religion within the ambit of the law and that we should respect other people’s religion or faith perspective. We should not interfere unlawfully and unduly in other people’s religion. We should desist from castigating or destructively criticizing of other people’s religion. Participants also resolved that they would uphold the secularity of the Nigerian state by letting everyone know that they have the right to practice their religion in their own ways. They condemned the acts of pressurizing or persecuting anyone on the basis of religion. Believing that no religion allows anyone to shed another person’s blood on the basis of religious differences, they resolved to lead by example in the promotion of Freedom of religion in their respective domain, starting with their immediate family to the larger society.

It was widely recommended that more conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized to educate the masses on the concept of freedom of religion. It was suggested that everyone should begin the practice of freedom of religion from his/her immediate family and lead by example. TAMEB was urged to organize more dialogue on the concept of freedom of religion, as well as partner with similar interfaith and peacebuilding organizations. Participants also suggested that government should be neutral in matters of religion. Participants urged religious leaders to intensify efforts to educate their adherents on the concept of freedom of religion. They recommended that that freedom of religion is a fundamental human right which everyone must respect and uphold. Thus, the family, school and community, mass media, parliamentarians, religious leaders, employers of labour should stop infringing on the fundamental human right of others.
APPRECIATION

Firstly, we thank God for making the conference possible and for providing all the resources needed. Special thanks to all the attendees for taking time out of their busy schedules to partake in this program. To all our resource persons, we are immensely grateful to you for enriching us with your deep insight and vast knowledge on issues affecting freedom of religion or belief. Without your participation, the conference could not have been a success.

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Finally, big thanks to all TAMEB members and volunteers, as well as Dr. Oludayo Ogunbowale (the conference moderator) and all the welfare staff for your hard work and dedication.
APPENDIX

Links to the paper presentations


Terrorism under the guise of “Islamic Jihadist” Movement: Do these represent the teachings of Islam? by Professor Afis A. Oladosu: https://www.slideshare.net/tameb/terrorism-under-the-guise-of-islamic-jihadist-movement-do-these-represent-the-teachings-of-islam-by-professor-of-afis-a-oladosu


The Role of Interfaith in Peacebuilding (The KAICIID example in Nigeria) by Mr. Joseph Atang: https://www.slideshare.net/tameb/the-role-of-interfaith-in-peacebuilding-the-kaiciid-example-in-nigeria-by-mr-joseph-atang
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