What a Future void of Religious Freedom holds for Young People

A Presentation by the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation
“Religion is like a pair of shoes. Find one that fits for you, but don’t make me wear your shoes”

-George Carlin
What is Religion

- Set of beliefs in the supernatural
- Usually tied towards a Supreme Being that controls the physical
- Followers are strongly encouraged to gain converts
- Major part of an individual’s identity
# Religious Freedom

## Legal
- Fundamental Human Right
- Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights –
  "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of choice”
- Supported by Article 18 of 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political rights

## Practice
- Freedom to change beliefs
- Under attack all over the world especially in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East
- Intolerance of religion often government-sponsored
- Lack of religious freedom leads to violent clashes
Religion in Nigeria

• Secular state according to Section 10 and 38 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria

• Major religions are Islam, Christianity and Traditional Religion

• Deeply politicised and driver of conflict
Effects of Religious Intolerance on Security in Nigeria

- Terrorism e.g Boko Haram, ISWAP
- Banditry
- Inter-religious crises e.g Jos Crises from 2001 and Maitatsine crises of 1980
- Elections of corrupt politicians simply based on religious preferences
- Divisive statements by religious leaders and bodies
- Prevention of true unity for national development
Boko Haram militants
Victims of Jos inter-religious crises
Young People

- Massive youth bulge of over 1.8 billion youths globally (UN, 2015)

- 72% of Nigeria’s population below 30 years of age (Akanji, 2019)

- Young people under 25 are the majority of the population in fragile and conflict-affected societies (UN, 2015)
Young People and Religious Intolerance in Nigeria

- Perpetrators and victims of religious violence
- Hold fanatical beliefs about religion that could result in violent conflict
- Follow hate-inspired directives from religious leaders without critiquing them
- Could carry on religious violence into Nigeria’s next generation if not checked.
Effects of Religious Intolerance on Youth

- Internal displacement and creation of refugees e.g. North-east Nigeria
- Increase in crime and insecurity
- Radicalisation of youth for violence
- Disruption in development of the youth such as education and career
- Creation of wrong values on religion and the society
Youth Involvement in Ending Religious Intolerance in Nigeria

- UN Security Council Resolution 2250 emphasizes that youth are the key to peace in any society.
- Involve youth organisations such as the Building Blocks for Peace and Taking All Men Brothers in countering religious extremism campaigns.
- “Nothing for us Without Us”—only youth can provide innovative ideas to resist intolerance of religions.
- Engage in inter-religious dialogue between major faiths and gain their commitment to peace in Nigeria.
- Preach the gospel of religious freedom to Nigerians from all walks of life.
- Manage social media to eliminate hate speech targeted towards other faiths.
Possibilities of a Nigeria with Religious Freedom

• Accommodate different beliefs
• Avoid extremist tendencies in any religion
• Build bridges across different faiths to resist any incitement by elders to heat up the polity
• Invest in education of youths to eliminate ignorance about other faiths.