

# What a Future void of Religious Freedom holds for Young People

A Presentation by the Building Blocks for Peace Foundation

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“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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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.