

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIM UMMAH IN PLATEAU STATE

By

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### Abstract

*This paper is set to enumerate some of the challenges facing the Muslim Ummah in Plateau State and proffer solutions to these challenges. Plateau state has been one of the places in Nigeria where there have been serious ethno-religious conflicts in recent years. The researcher gives an overview of the Muslim residents in the State. The findings of the paper include disunity among the Muslim Ummah in the State themselves. The creation of Jos-North Local Government Area and the indigene settler issues are among the challenges while Unity, tolerance, morality and equality are the solutions to counter these challenges. The recommendations include the need for the Muslim minorities to unite under the Qur'an and Sunnah and to desist interference in the internal affairs of their host communities. The methodology used for the work is basically the usage of library materials.*

**Keywords: Challenges, Solutions, Islam, Muslims, Ummah, Plateau State.**

### Introduction:

Nigeria is a multi-dimensional state, highly complex with diverse multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious groups. This identity issue has made the country to be divided along the lines of religion, language, culture, ethnicity and regional identity causing violent conflicts in the country<sup>1</sup>. Though the mere existence of diverse ethnic or religious groups does not constitute conflict but the marginalization and discrimination of some groups has led to several ethno-religious conflicts in the country. Nigeria's population is over 200 million, with over 250 ethnic groups, the country is almost half Christians and half Muslims, aside from traditional religion<sup>2</sup>.

Jos, in Plateau State was regarded a peaceful settlement with a calm atmosphere of attractive fascination before violent conflicts began in the State by 2011. The state was presumed as "The Home of Peace and Tourism". The main ethnic groups in Jos are Berom, Anaguta, Afizere, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. These groups are not necessarily homogenous as there are still differences within them. The Berom, Anaguta and Afizere are perceived as the Primary Indigenous groups in Jos and Majority of them are Christians, Hausa-Fulani are referred to as "Jasawa" or "Settlers"

The term settlers, is meant to distinguish them from the Hausa-Fulani population. The term Jasawa is also used for political representation of the Hausa tribe in Jos. Since early 1990s and especially from 2001, Jos has experienced series of clashes between the majority Christian indigenes (Anaguta, Berom and Afizere) and the minority Muslim settlers Hausa-Fulani (Jasawa). The result of these clashes resulted in to ethno-religious and political violence. However, over the years efforts have been put in place by the government and Civil Society Organizations to resolve the conflict such as the deployment of Special Task Forces (STF), Peaceful dialogue amongst religious groups and setting up of probe panels to manage the persistent conflicts but in spite of these efforts the crises keep occurring.<sup>3</sup>

### Overview of Muslims in Plateau State

The Plateau Peace Conference held in 2004 officially recognized 54 different ethnic nationalities (indigenes) in the state plus a number of other major Nigerian ethnic nationalities resident in the state i.e settlers, there were namely, Fulani, Hausa, Igbos, people from South –South, Urhobos, Ijaws, etc. and Yorubas, the latter are the main settler groups, but of course there are settlers from all over the country particularly in the larger cities and towns.<sup>4</sup> The classification of some people as “indigenes” and others as “settlers” has economic and social consequences and is much contested, particularly by the Hausa/Fulani Communities of the Jos Area who have resided there for generations but are still treated as settlers.

The following table is an attempt to identify who are the Muslims by ethnic group in each of Plateau’s 16 LGAs (Approximately from North to South).

**Table 1: Muslims by ethnic group in Plateau State’s LGAs**

S/N	L.G.A	MUSLIMS BY ETHNIC GROUP
1	Bassa	Majority of Muslims are Fulani with some indigenes and few Hausa
2	Jos North	Majority of Muslims are Hausa/Fulani, followed by Yoruba and few others
3	Jos South	Majority of Muslims are Hausa/Fulani with some few indigenes
4	Jos East	Majority of Muslims are Hausa/Fulani with some indigenes
5	Riyom	Majority of Muslims are Fulani very few Muslims indigenes
6	Barikin Ladi	Majority of Muslims are Fulani, few Hausa, few Kanuri and very few indigenes
7	Bokkos	Majority of Muslims are Fulani, few Hausa and Indigenes
8	Mangu	Majority of Muslims are indigenes followed by Hausa and Fulani
9	Pankshin	Very few indigenes are Muslims and followed by few Fulani
10	Kanam	Majority of Muslims are indigenes, followed by few Hausa/Fulani
11	Quampan	Majority of Muslims are indigenes followed by Hausa and Fulani
12	Shendam	Majority of Muslims are indigenes followed by Fulani and Hausa
13	Mikang	Majority of Muslims are Fulani with very few indigenes
14	Lantang North	Majority of Muslims are Fulani with very few indigenes
15	Lantang South	Majority of Muslims are Fulani with very few indigenes
16	Wase	Majority of Muslims are Hausa/Fulani, indigenes and few others.

**Source:** Nigeria Research Network (NRN) January, 2012

The Muslims in Plateau State are predominately traders, cattle-rearers (Fulani), transporters and among the indigenes, farmers, while the Christians dominate the civil service and agricultural activities with a good number of Christian settler traders (mostly Igbos and others). Among the Muslims there are also substantial numbers of Mallams and their Qur’anic students. (*Almajirai*)

#### **Challenges of the Muslim Ummah in the State**

There are challenges that Muslims in Plateau State are facing and these challenges remains the main issues affecting them today. These challenges resulted in ugly Muslim-Christian relations, conflicts time to time, leading to destruction of lives and properties. Some of these challenges includes:

#### **Disunity of Muslims in the State**

Muslim Ummah in the State instead of coming together and remain united under the umbrella of the teachings of the Glorious Qur’an and Sunnah of the Noble Prophet (SAW), they opted to be divided in to sects. It is very difficult to give accurate number of Muslims by sectarian affiliation. However, the following are the denominations which are found among the Muslim Ummah in Plateau State.

- Sufis: Tijjaniyyah and Qadiriyyah
- Anti-Sufis: Izalah and Salaffiyyah/Yan-Madinah
- Izalah: there are Izala (I) and Izalah (II) loyalist to Jos and Kaduna Headquarters respectively.
- Neutral, mostly moderate salafis
- Shi'a
- Qur'aniyyun/Qala-Qato/Yan-tatsine.

Most of the Muslim indigenes are Sufi or Neutral, mostly Yoruba. Many of the Hausa/Fulani's particularly in Jos, where Izalah was founded, are followers of Izalah. And there are Youth from both Indigenes and the settlers that subscribed to Shi'a under the name of Muslim brothers Movement.<sup>5</sup>

### **Political Crises**

Jos lies at the Centre of the Country, predominately by Muslim North and Christian South. The majority of Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims, with almost even split between the two in the number of adherents<sup>4</sup>. The predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani together establish approximately two third of the country population of the Northern region. The Yoruba and Igbo dominate the South of the nation while they are majority Christians.<sup>6</sup>

In 1991 elections were held for the Jos North Local Government Council and chairmanship then LGA was created. Samaila Muhammed a Jasawa won the election for Jos North Chairmanship. This was exactly what indigenes had feared and what the Jasawa wanted. The elections were peaceful and there was no record of communal violence, during Samaila Muhammed's term. But the indigenes complained about him appointing other Jasawa to major positions in the local government and most especially about the fact he began issuing indigene certificates from Jos North to Jasawa. Samaila Muhammed tenure of office ended prematurely in November 1993 when Col.

Muhammad Mana, was appointed as the military governor of Plateau State.<sup>7</sup>

On April 5, 1994, there were clashes between the indigenes and the settlers for the control of Jos North Local Government Sanusi Mato, a Hausa-Fulani man was appointed the Chairman of Jos North Local Government by which will give Hausa-Fulani hegemonic control of political powers in the local government. The indigene group protested the appointment or the appointment of any Jasawa as Chairman, they feared that the federal government wanted to provide support for the Hausa-Fulani to assume political hegemony in Jos. They maintained that the position should go to an indigene. This led to a protest where four people were killed, burning down and vandalization of government properties, parts of several market areas, including Islamic Schools and Mosque were destroyed<sup>8</sup>.

### **Denial of Citizenship and Indigene Rights**

Nigerian constitution grants every citizen the right to settle anywhere within the country and prohibits the government from discriminating against citizens based on ethnicity or religion.<sup>9</sup> Non-indigenes are excluded from university scholarships, pay higher school and university fees. The Jasawa population complained that since the early 1990s, it has become almost impossible for them to receive indigene certificate, despite the fact that their community live there for generations. The traditional Berom leader stated that even if the Hausa had been in Plateau for more than 1000 years, they would remain non-indigene<sup>10</sup>.

### **Solutions of the Muslims Ummah in the State**

Muslims living in a non-Muslim majority can follow the examples of the early Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia as this would allow for much needed harmonious coexistence and assistance and create an environment where Muslim minorities can

contribute effectively in all endeavors. The migration to Abyssinia shows the serious commitment of the Muslims of their faith, because they were ready to surrender their lives and properties to safeguard the interests of the Islamic religion<sup>11</sup>.

### Unity

One of the important features of the Muslim *Ummah* during the life time of the Prophet (SAW) was unity. The people of Makkah who migrated to Madinah became unified with people of Madinah. Society was formed based on unity and peace. All ethnic divisions conflicts and sentimentalism were abolished. All Muslims became united banner of Islam. Commonwealth and brotherhood of Muslims was established.

Superiority was based on piety as portrays in the Qur'an. Allah (SWT)says:

O mankind we have created you male and female and appointed  
you races and tribes that you may know one another.  
Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the  
most God fearing of you. (Q49:13)

### Tolerance

For peace to reign between people of different background like Muslim Ummah in Plateau State with their host community, tolerance should be the key. For example, the long-lasting hostility between *Aws* and *Khazraj* was amicably resolved<sup>9</sup>. A mosque was founded and it became the Centre of religious, political and socio-economic affairs. People lived in peace and became more devoted to prayers in congregation and other religious practices.<sup>12</sup>

### Morality

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught morals. For example, he taught eloquence in speech and utterance. The companions (R.A) lived in harmony and tolerance with each other. They cooperated among themselves with goodness. There were no rampant insults and accusations during that time. Fornication, gambling, alcoholism and so on were all avoided. Discipline and human dignity were instituted. Children obeyed their parents and the parents treated their children accordingly.<sup>13</sup>

### Equality

Prophet (SAW) treated people equally. Many people from different background and places such as Salman Al-Farisi, Bilal bin Rabah Al-Habashi among others gathered around him. The problem of marginalization, racism, tribalism and so on were all shunned, and this yield a peaceful atmosphere within the Muslim Ummah and other people living with them.

### Conclusion

Plateau State was regarded a peaceful settlement with a calm atmosphere of attractive fascination before violent conflicts. The state was presumed as the home of Peace and Tourism. The main ethnic groups are Berom, Anaguta, Afizere, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. Settlers is meant to distinguish them (indigenes) from the Hausa-Fulani population in the state and majority of them are Muslims.

Plateau State has a Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board which is responsible for Coordinating the pilgrimages of Muslims to Saudi Arabia. However Muslim *Ummah* in Plateau State has challenges which includes the division of the *Ummah* in to different denominations which always lead to hatred and abuses between one denomination and the other. The creation of Jos-North LGA which led to the problem of who is a citizen and who is not, i.e citizenship and indigene rights. The way forward to these challenges are unity between the Ummah, tolerance of one another, morality and above all equality between people in terms of fair treatment.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- a. Muslim minorities should practice Islam to the best of their ability and hold fast to its teachings as contained through the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.
- b. Muslim minorities should show good understanding and appreciation especially to those who live in peace with Muslims. This will reduce the hostility to Islam and Muslims by the non-Muslims.
- c. Muslim minorities should learn how ought to act in conflict situations.
- d. Muslim minorities should learn how to deal with and communicate with non-Muslim in friendly manner.
- e. Muslim minorities should not interfere in the internal affairs of their hosts except to offer help, aid and support.
- f. Muslim Ummah should unite under the teachings of the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of the Noble Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in order to be in peace and successful here and in the hereafter.

### End Notes

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