

Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Quest for Unity of Muslim Ummah in Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of Islamic organizations during the colonial era caused disunity among the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria. The quest to coordinate the affairs of these organizations and to unite the Muslim Ummah nationally under one umbrella led to the establishment of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) in 1973. This study, therefore, examines the role of NSCIA in addressing the challenges of disunity confronting the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria. Data were collected from oral interviews, questionnaires, and secondary sources. A multidisciplinary approach was adopted using a combination of historical, phenomenological, and sociological methods of data analysis. The theoretical framework is built on the theory of Asabiyyah by Ibn Khaldun and the theory of structural functionalism. The study discovered that the need to protect the Islamic faith from colonial influence gave rise to the emergence of Islamic organizations in Nigeria. It is also discovered that Nigerian Muslims are divided along ethnic, regional, and organizational lines. The study shows that despite the establishment of NSCIA in 1973 to foster unity, there are still issues bothering disunity among the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria. Perpetuation and nothernization of the council's leadership are discovered to be a factor responsible for the inefficiency of the Council in uniting the Ummah. This work recommends a review of the constitution of NSCIA for effectiveness. It also suggests rotation of its headship and that serious effort should be made by the Council to cultivate the spirit of unity among Muslims Ummah.

Keywords: *Nigerian, Supreme, Council, Islamic Affairs, Unity, Ummah*



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INTRODUCTION

Islam predated colonialism in Nigeria, and in fact, Islam had penetrated and gained a strong foothold in the very region of the Country before independence in 1960 (Ayandele, 1966). However, the presence of Colonial Masters had some negative influence on the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria. Muslims were apprehensive of the negative influence of colonial rules on their faith and their Islamic identity. To checkmate the influence, a number of Islamic organizations sprang up. Unfortunately, the negative effect of these splinter organizations was disunity among the Nigerian Muslim Ummah during and after the colonial administration. Nigerian Muslims became disintegrated along the organizations. In efforts to unite the Muslim Ummah, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) was formed in 1973. The ultimate questions now are; has NSCIA been able to unite the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria? If No, what are the problems Militating it? How can these problems be surmounted in order to restore the Ummah's identity and unity in Nigeria? These will be the focus of the rest of this paper. Nevertheless, there is a need to contextualize these by taking the historical reconstruction of the Islamic organizations in Nigeria.

REVIEW

A Historical Survey of the Emergence of Islamic Organizations in Nigeria

The Islamic *Ummah* had been firmly established and well spread all over the Northern and Southern parts of the country several centuries before the arrival of the Colonial Masters and their Christian protégés (Kilani, 2008). Doi (1979) and Clarke (1982) explain that at that time, Kanem-Borno Empire had trade links with Tripoli in North Africa via Kowar and Fezzan, which was the entry route for Islam to penetrate into Kanem-Borno Empire. It was the Muslim traders and early settlers in the region that initiated and consolidated the spread of Islam in the community as early as the 11th century. Islam became the state religion of the region. It then changed the socio-economic and political structures and paved the way for the rise of Hausa states as Islamic states (Sulaiman, 1986). By the 15th century, Islam had penetrated most parts of South-West (Yorubaland), and the aftereffect was the growth and consolidation of the *Ummah*. Unfortunately, the expansion of the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria was hindered by colonial rule (Kilani, 2008).

Colonialization was instrumental to the Christianization agenda. Colonialism and missionary propaganda led to the loss of the religious-cultural identities of most Muslims in Nigeria. With the introduction of missionary schools, some Muslim children were converted to Christianity, while some were forced to change their Islamic names either to English or native names and, by implication, lost their Islamic identity. Hence, Christianity was used to subdue and supplant Islam (Ayandele, 1966). In order to revive the Islamic teachings and instill Islamic identity, different Islamic organizations were established at different levels- local, national, and international (Suberu, 2011).

The pioneer Muslim organizations in Nigeria were as follows: (i) *the Ahmadiyyah* Movement of Nigeria, also known as *Anwar-ul Islam* Movement of Nigeria, established in 1916, (ii) *the Ansarudeen* society of Nigeria formed in 1923, and (iii) *Ansarul-Islam* Society of Nigeria. These organizations began their activities with the establishment of schools and hospitals in Nigeria (Okene&Ishak, 2010). They fought doggedly to prevent the conversion of Muslims to Christianity and provided avenues for social interaction for the Muslims by building Islamic schools. Their curriculum blended both Western and Islamic contents without sacrificing their faith.

Other organizations that emerged within this context were: The Ijebu Ode Muslim Friendly Society (1927), *Isabatul-Deen* (Bound of Religious Enthusiasm) (1950), Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (M.S.S.N.) (1954) (Kilani, personal interview, August 3, 2017). Within this period, the *Tijaniyyah* and *Quadriyyah* Brotherhood operated simultaneously and gained momentum before the subsequent emergence of *Jama'at Izalat al-Bid'a Wa Iqamat as-Sunnah* (Association for the Removal of the Innovation and for the Establishment of the Sunnah), *Jama'atu Nasirul Islam*, Muslim *Ummah* of South/West Nigeria (MUSWEN) and Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. With these organizations, Islam witnessed a resurgence. There was a high level of consciousness among Nigerian Muslims, which was expressed through the formation of a number of other pressure - groups- Muslim organizations with the primary aim of propagating and defending Islam from internal and external influences. Unfortunately, the multiplicity of these organizations undermined the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria.

Crises and Disunity among the Muslim *Ummah*

The proliferation of many Muslim organizations was counterintuitive. Rather than unifying and uniting the *Ummah*, it soon resulted in in-fighting over issues of supremacy and power tussle. This resulted in disunity and the propagation of irreconcilable ideologies and heresies. (Kilani, 1996). Untold crisis looms the *umma*. It was within this context that the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) was formed in 1973. The most profound crisis was between the *Tijanyyah* and *Quadiriyah* Sufi orders between 1940s and the 1960s. Perhaps this was what Roman L (1997:16) had in mind when he said there was a "multitude of controversies, quarrels, and jealousies among series of networks (*Sufi* orders)" in Nigeria. These networks competed among themselves over influence, doctrines, followership, and power. Some of these crises led to open confrontations between the followers of the two Sufi orders until the establishment of an anti-Sufi group, *Jam'ah Izalatu Bid'ah* (also called *Izalah*). Hence, the establishment of *Jamatu Izala* marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Islam in Nigeria (Quadri, 1985). The conflict between *Sufis* and *Izalah* was one of the most contested crises in Nigerian Islamic history.

The crisis between *Izalah* and *Tariqa* (*Sufi* orders) represented one of the sharpest thorns in the flesh, the worst pain in the neck, and the greatest calamity that ever befell the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria. Olayiwola (2007:120) lamented that "*abinitio*, corollaries of the conflicts were visible in the North only, but gradually, they were transmitted to the West, South, and Eastern parts of Nigeria". The ugly event escalated to physical assaults between Muslim individuals and groups, leading to the loss of lives and property. It caused so much disunity among the *Ummah* leading to the division of *Masajid* (Mosques) and congregation, the accusation of infidelity (*Takfir*), and discrimination in social amenities like abattoir between members of *Tariqah* and *Izalah*. This scenario led to the canalization of public and private properties and huge financial losses (Olayiwola, 2007, Lakin Akintola, personal interview, August 5, 2015).

Several attempts were made by different bodies to resolve the crisis. For example, the Sokoto State Government set up an Islamic Preaching Board to certify preachers to avoid unguided and provocative statements. Other State Governments followed the example of the Government of Sokoto State. At the National level, attempts were also made to reconcile the members of the *Tariqah* and the *Izalah* to ensure peaceful co-existence and aid the unity of the *Ummah* (Quadri 1985; Noibi, personal interview August 02, 2015). Yet, the feuding parties continued their clashes. Up till today, grudges are still embedded in the activities of these groups.

The Nigerian civil war (1976-1970) also affected the fortunes of the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*. The civil war was given some religious and ethnic connotations – the North versus South dichotomy. Each defends and gives priority to an ethnic alliance against the Islamic brotherhood. The *Ummah* was disintegrated locally and nationally, and the established Muslim Organizations became threats to one another. The disintegration featured both the North and the South. *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* was created in the North and for the Northern Muslims alone and while the Western State Joint Muslim Organization (WESJOMO), which is the present Muslim *Ummah* of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN), was created in the South for the Southern Muslims alone. It was the attempts to reunite the Muslims in Nigeria under one umbrella that Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was established in 1973.

The Establishment of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs

Prior to the establishment of NSCIA, a number of Muslim organizations proliferated. In the Northern part of Nigeria, for instance, *Jamat Nasril-Islam* (JNI). However, JNI could not achieve the task of uniting the Northern Muslims. It only succeeded in bringing together the Emirs and Traditional *mallams* (local scholars) (Ahmad-Rufai, 2011). In the South, the internal crisis that greeted the formation of Action Group, a political party, exacerbated the problem of disunity among the Southern Muslims. Subsequently, the challenge was supplanted with the emergence of the Western State Joint Muslim Organization (WESJOMO) in 1972 through the instrumentality of a Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Justice, Dr. Lateef Adegbite (Ahmad-Rufai, 2011). Although, the organization was not a politically motivated Muslim organization (Noibi, personal interview, August 02, 2015).

The South viewed JNI with suspicion, seeing it as an extension of Hausa –Fulani hegemony under a religious cover (Hassan, 1993). These two organizations (JNI and WESJOMO) were operating differently for their respective region. NSCIA was set up ostensibly as an umbrella for the unity of all Muslim groups and organizations in Nigeria. Its establishment reflected a crucial overture in the political calculation of Muslims in Northern Nigeria in particular and the rest of Muslims in general beyond the contours of the caliphate (Hassan, 1993).

Several factors are attributed to the eventual establishment of NSCIA. However, the major contributory factor that facilitated the quick formulation of NSCIA was the failure of Nigerian Muslims to speak with one voice at an international Islamic Conference held in Libya earlier in 1973 and to which various Islamic organizations from Nigeria attended. Every Nigerian delegate at the conference rose strongly to protect the interest of his own organization and not that of the generality of Nigerian Muslims. At the same time, participants from other countries found no strain in making common presentations. Back at home, a quick move was made towards the fulfillment of the need for a central Islamic body Ahmad-Rufai (2013), and AlhajiHafeez Abu (personal interview, August 05, 2015) asserts that.

The ugly situation, together with the age-long feelings for the need for an apex body to coordinate the affairs of all Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*, propelled the noble establishment of the Council (NSCIA). After their arrival in the country, an assembly of all Muslim leaders in Nigeria was convened in the city of Kaduna. The main issue meant for discussion at the historic assembly was the fulfillment of the long-felt need for an all-embracing central Islamic Council for Nigerian Muslims. The idea originated from a consensus of feelings from the Muslims in the South and North (Noibi, personal interview, August 02, 2015, Ahmad-Rufai, 2013).

The organization was established and charged with the responsibility to foster brotherhood, unity, cooperation, and progress between the Muslims in Nigeria and other parts of the world. NSCIA is also charged with the responsibility to cater to and protect the interest of Islam and Muslims throughout Nigeria. NSCIA was established to develop a closer link between Muslims throughout the Federation for the common good of Islam nationally and internationally.

The Major Challenges of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs

Over time, many wondered about the reason behind the inactiveness of NSCIA owing to the mandates and the goals of its establishment. Its ineptitude has been attributed to so many factors. Some people, the overlapping functions of the Sultan of Sokoto as the President-General of NSCIA are considered to be responsible for the docility of the Council. The Sultan of Sokoto functions as the Sultan (Traditional Ruler) of Sokoto State; he functions as the Chairman of the Sultanate Council and also doubles as the President-General of NSCIA and *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI) simultaneously (K. K. Olosu, personal interview, August 02, 2015, and D. Noibi, personal interview, August 02, 2015).

However, some believe that the incapacitated nature of the Sultan of Sokoto as the leader of the Muslim *Ummah* is a result of him being a government appointee. In the process of his appointment, the final selection is the prerogative of the Sokoto State Governor. The Governor has the power to remove the Sultan from the throne in the exercise of the power conferred upon him in Section 6 of the Cap 26 of the laws of Northern Nigeria (I. L. Akintola, personal interview, August 05, 2015). This sweeping power to hire or fire the Sultan has completely robbed the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* of its efficacy as an indivisible *Ummah* (Akintola, 1998).

For instance, Sultan Abubakar III (1938-1988) ascended the throne by colonial fiat. The Sultanate Council (kingmaker forum) had recommended Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, out of six contenders, but John Carrow, the British Officer, turned the recommendation aside and picked the second-best candidate, Abubakar III. Mayhem followed. This, according to Akintola (1998:37), "is the *raison d'etre* of the political schism within the sultanate," which consequentially dampens the morale of the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*.

Another similar example surfaced in the Dasuki- Maccido (d. 2006) tussle. Alhaji Maccido excelled at the Sultanate screening. His name had even been announced on Rima Radio, Sokoto, before Colonel Ahmed Daku, the then Military Administrator of Sokoto State, annulled the kingmakers' decision and gave the throne to Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki. War drums sounded in Sokoto, and Rima River turned red. Sokoto citizens witnessed three days of uninterrupted blood-letting before law enforcement agents coerced the populace into submission (Chiedu E, 1999). Eight years later 1996, Sultan Dasuki was deposed from the throne, banished from Sokoto to Jalingo, placed under house arrest, and charged before the failed banks tribunal. Maccido was installed in his place (Akintola, 1998). These and many others had far-reaching implications not only for the Caliphate but also for the entire Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* and NSCIA:

Firstly, it exposes the fragile nature of the Sokoto dynasty - as weak, unreliable, unstable, and highly vulnerable. The Sultanate has become a satellite of the government of the day, an unwilling puppet hired by the government or fired. "He who pays the piper dictates the tune". Secondly, the Sultanate has inadvertently played into the hands of the government with its house divided between the disciples of Abubakar III and Ahmadu Bello. Thirdly, the Nigerian *Ummah* is the loser in the emerging scenario because the same Sultanate, which is a pawn in the government chess game, heads the NSCIA, whereas its counterpart, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), is headed by a senior clergyman freely chosen by his colleagues in the pastorate without recourse to any government, state or federal, for approval. No government can remove him. He operates in a free atmosphere. Such is the immense advantage that CAN have over NSCIA. Hence there are two sides in favour and against Sultanate domination of the NSCIA (Akintola, personal interview August 05, 2015, and Alhaji Hafeez, personal interview August 05, 2015).

Regarding the NSCIA's Constitution that gives permanent leadership to the Sultanate, any constitution of an Islamic organization of the caliber of the NSCIA which contains any clause that contradicts the Qur'an and Sunnah is an exercise in error. It simply means the NSCIA's constitution needs urgent amendment. That is why Nurudeen Asunugei (personal interview, August 18, 2015) emphasizes that the NSCIA has a constitution, but it is only honoured in preaching, and that alone constitutes a serious problem for the *Ummah*. Islam, as a revolutionary and dynamic religion, cannot brook a succession system that encourages such conservative sit-tight syndrome.

The Sultan as a traditional ruler, has limited power and scope. The Nigerian government has little or no respect for traditional rulers, and unless the NSCIA leadership is severed from the apron of the Sultanate, the Nigerian *Ummah* will continue to suffer in the midst of plenty. The individual Muslim will remain a second-class citizen. His fundamental human rights will be constantly and flagrantly violated, all because the NSCIA has been weakened by feudal elements, and it cannot demand its rights with any seriousness that commands a positive response.

Sultan Dasuki's dethronement is another reason for wanting changes. It exposed the NSCIA as a one-legged wrestler whose crunch (and only means of remaining on his single leg) is in the hands of his opponent. The government's policy of *divide et impera* is easily implemented under such a system. NSCIA constitution must be amended to allow liberality (Akintola personal interview, August 05, 2015). Anybody who qualifies should be allowed to head the NSCIA. Sultans, Emirs, Obas, and Obis who wish to occupy the post must abdicate, while government functionaries interested in it must resign. There is an obvious divided interest and loyalty. Whose interest should the Sultan-President consider? Islam or Pecuniary interest? The Muslims or the government? If he makes the wish of the Muslims, he may be deposed, arrested, and jailed. So why should he care? He, therefore, follows the way of his master. But who suffers the consequences? It is the *Ummah* as a whole. Therefore, traditional rulers should be excused from the leadership of the *Ummah*.

The Sultan already has a lot of responsibilities in the Sultanate and has little or no time for the NSCIA job. It is believed that most Sultans who love to combine both offices do so because it is fashionable to do so or because it is the family's right to do so, or because of the pomp and pageantry in them and not because they believe that they can uplift Islam if they are there.

Finally, the cleavage within the Sultan's royal family, which often results in intrigue, violent clashes, and embarrassment for Muslims in general, makes the combination of the traditional stool with the NSCIA presidency cumbersome, unwholesome, and anachronistic (Akintola, 1998).

All the above put together are responsible for the ineffectiveness of the Council, and it also explains why a number of people have said the office of the presidency of NSCIA must be divorced from that of traditional stool to allow for whatever the kind of vibrancy and dynamism that one finds in CAN that is managed by clergymen who are not appointees of the Government.

The Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* and the Contemporary Challenges

Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) was established to integrate the disintegrated Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*, but unfortunately, it has not been able to effectively do so for reasons that are legion. Nigerian *Ummah*, according to Asunugei (personal interview, August 18, 2015), is not one monolithic and homogenous *Ummah*. Thus, Nigerian Muslims of different regional and ethnic backgrounds see themselves as different peoples, depending on their places of origin, without considering the bond of Islamic ties. In Islam, there is a wider concept of relationship among Muslims than a bond built on a blood relationship or similar background and ancestry despite that Allah says in Qur'an 49:10

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The believers are but a brotherhood. So make reconciliation between your brothers, and have Taqwa of Allah that you may receive mercy.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was recorded to have said that: «المُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ لَا يَظْلِمُهُ وَلَا يُظْلَمُهُ» «The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim, he is not unjust with him nor does he forsake him (Sahih Muslim 2580). The Prophet also used the parable of the human body to describe the Muslim nation. If one part suffers, the entire body will suffer (Sahih Muslim Book 1, Hadith 224). The aim of the unity of the *Ummah* is to direct all the racial and tribal differences in a constructive direction. One of the greatest achievements of the Messenger of Allah was the ability to unite hundreds of fragmented Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula into a single, strong nation. Under this philosophy, the Muslim nation was a powerful nation in the past, and only with this understanding will the *Ummah* be able to return to this respected position among the nations of the world and have the same significant role that it did in the past.

Contrarily, in Nigeria, the Muslims from the South/West (the Yoruba extraction) first see themselves as Yoruba and subsequently as Muslims, not as Muslims who are Yoruba. Those from the Hausa extraction (North) see themselves first and foremost as Northerners before they see themselves as Muslims. Those from the South-East and South-South see themselves in the same way. That is why Asunugei (personal interview, August 18, 2015) posits that there is skepticism with which the average Nigerian Muslim who does not fall into one of these major ethnic groups is perceived. Therefore, the Islamic bond of brotherhood is not religiously solid. Placing the level of relationship that exists among Nigerian Muslims on the scale of the Iqbal theory of *Ummah*, the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* is far from being addressed as an *Ummah* (Raji Abiodun, personal interview, March 19, 2017).

'Northernization' and 'Sultanization' of the leadership of the Council is considered one of the major causes of disunity among Nigerian *Ummah*. The leadership of the *Ummah* is a family affair. As earlier posited, the leadership of the Council is permanently and ethnically situated in the North. It is immutably done so without definable criteria. The Sultan of Sokoto from the Northern part of Nigeria, regardless of his commitment to Islam, constitutionally becomes the President-General of Nigerian Muslims (D. Naibi, personal interview August 15, 2015). In addition, there are two Deputy-President generals; the first Deputy-President General permanently goes to the Emir of Kanuri, also from the North. Hence, the Chairmanship or the presidency and the first Deputy are permanently allotted to the Sultan of Sokoto and Emir of Borno, irrespective of their religious disposition. "It may not be out of place to say that this arrangement could be responsible for the inability of the Council to address the myriad of

challenges confronted by *Ummah* in Nigeria" (Raji Abiodun, personal interview, March 19, 2017).

Hence, historically the first President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Sarikin Muslim of Nigeria was the late Sultan Abubakr Siddiq II (d. 1988), who was the then incumbent Sultan of Sokoto while Deputy President-General was constitutionally reserved for the Shehu of Borno. The Secretary of the Constitution Drafting Committee, who later rose to the position of Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, was chosen as the Secretary-General on account of a request by the Sultan of Sokoto. By then, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki was acting in the capacity of President-General of *Jama'atu Nasril Islam*. This pattern of northernization and sultanization of the leadership of Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* remained unabated up till the present time.

The issue of moon sighting for the commencement of Ramadan fasting has generated a lot of misunderstanding among the *Ummah* generally and between the Council and the Leagues of Imams of the Southern extraction specifically. Issues that are pedestal would be brought to rubbish and discredit the leadership of the Council. The leadership of the Council is sometimes challenged by the Leagues of Imams, especially those from the Southern part of the Country. Consequently, some Muslims from the Yoruba (South) axis would start their fasting and break a day after and when the Northerners have concluded theirs.

A lack of cordial relationship exists between the scholars of Islam. Consequently, instead of the mandate of assertive authority given to the Council, the council has only succeeded in exercising persuasive authority over the Nigerian Muslims, and those members who identify with the Council do so on the basis of perceived immediate benefits that are mundane and not spiritual (Kilani, personal interview, March 20, 2017). The Leagues of Imam, the Council of Ulama and Imams, the Federation of Muslim Women Association Nigeria, and all other Muslim organizations are supposed to come under the leadership of the Supreme Council. However, in a number of states, that does not happen (D. Noibi, personal interview, August 02, 2015). N. Asunugei (personal interview, August 16, 2015) submitted that the divisions are orchestrated by the political class to enhance the division and bifurcation, as it were, of the Muslim *Ummah* because the further bifurcated the Muslim *Ummah* is; better for the political class.

Poverty and illiteracy are rife and among the major contemporary challenges of Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*. Even though poverty is defined relatively, however, it is demonstrated in uneven opportunities among people; inability to competently contribute to society; lack of enough to feed and clothe (oneself and dependents); inaccessibility to sound education, information, health, clean water; powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities; and to a great deal, is living on minimal or delicate situations (Sani, 2019). The statistics of the poverty rate in Nigeria revealed that the Northern zones (the predominantly Muslim area) of the country had been rated with more poverty compared to other geopolitical zones. The North Central, North East, and North West have 42.53%, 76.04%, and 80.96%, respectively. Compared to other states in Nigeria, Zamfara state has been recorded as the highest impoverished state within Nigeria, with a rate of 91.9% (Fasiku, 2017). That is why Sani (2019) explains that in some parts of the North:

...three out of every four persons and over 91 percent of the population live in extreme poverty, respectively, as compared to Lagos State, whose poverty accounts for only 9 percent. As a result, part of the worst human development indicators-unemployment, widened

inequality, hunger, ignorance, diseases, violence, and youth restiveness, to mention but a few- bedevil the North and, in effect, pose a great threat to security and stability.

Therefore, Muslims parade the highest number of beggars anywhere in Nigeria today simply because they are the poorest. Consequently, Muslims remain minorities in the education sector. Taking a sensor of the number of professors in Nigerian Universities, one would find out that Muslims are sometimes an infinitesimal minority (Akintola, personal interview, August 5, 2015).

Toward Achieving the Desired Unity among the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*

The Islamic *Ummah* today, locally, nationally, and internationally, is distributed into many divisions and sects. In Nigeria specifically, each one has severed its relations with the other. However, since the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* is imperative, the *Ummah* must find the best ways of accommodating their differences and forging a true and lasting unity. The Qur'an says:

And know that this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So take Me as your Protector (Q23:53).

To achieve this, firstly, the *Ummah* must be made to understand that Islam is not founded on race, nationality, locality, occupation, kinship, or special interests but rather on the spirit of unity and affinity that transcends national borders and political boundaries. The Islamic community has a historic mission far beyond mere survival, sheer power, breeding, or psychological continuity. Solidarity, cooperation, and standing together are important and basic elements for constructing a sound, united Islamic society. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) initiated the concept of *Ummah* in the Madinan society integrating individuals of different colours, races, ethnicities, and social classes with equality into one united brotherhood. As the Islamic dominions expanded, this *Ummah* assumed a greater diversity and included a variety of people knitted together into common bonds- the likes of which the world has never witnessed, generating an open society for all to excel and where the only criterion worth consideration was human righteousness.

Therefore, enlightenment and campaigns aimed at promoting better inter-communal relationships such that all Muslims would regard one another as true brothers and sisters should be mounted. The objective would be to put into practice the Islamic brotherhood and, in the process, sink ethnic and tribal prejudices which engender discriminatory treatment and feelings of ethnic superiority as well as the tendencies to want to take undue advantage over others (Adegbite; nd.). Allah warned against disunity of the *Ummah*:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

And be not as those who divided and differed among themselves after the clear proofs had come to them (Q3:105).

In this verse, Ibn Katheer stated that Allah forbids this *Ummah* from imitating the division and discord of the nations that came before them. Therefore, the unity of the ummah is non-negotiable. The practical steps for the campaign and enlightenment would be that Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) should organize regular conferences and

seminars by Muslim intellectuals and scholars with the aim of bridging the gap between the Muslims of North and South.

There are different loopholes affecting the unity of the *Ummah* globally, and Nigeria is no exception. Muslims need to be united for so many chances available for them to be united. A modern example that Muslim countries should examine is the European Union, in which several states of different languages, cultures, ethnicities, religions and political agendas have unified one monetary system, economic agenda, and political front. The Muslim governments could be similarly united if they so choose because Allah says in Qur'an 61:4 that He loves those who strive in His part. Muslim *Ummah*, nationally and globally, can achieve this with strategic planning.

In addition, the States Councils and Local Committees of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs that are dormant and inactive should be made functional. In some states, particularly, South-South and South-East, the council members are ceremonial, political, and money-making officeholders. Islamic activities and activism in those regions are docile. Certain adjustments are needed for the impact of NSCIA to be felt.

As a national body that embodies the spiritual and communal leadership of this *Ummah*, it is believed that the Council needs to be at the head of making decisions and carrying out actions and activities that would make all Muslims in Nigeria more conscious of the role Islam plays in the Nigerian Society. For instance, the Council does not control or have its own share in the media. The media, either owned or controlled by Muslims, is very paramount to enabling Muslims to show and tell their own stories by themselves. This is especially needful because of the various distortion and convolutions of Islam and Islamic affairs. The media reaches the masses with any kind of information. The Council will achieve greatly in setting up media outlets across the country, perhaps starting with the establishment of radio and television stations in the 6 geopolitical zones of the country. Further, programs to be aired would be consciously designed to teach Islam and show its virtues and how the *Ummah's* aspirations are met, and also how non-Muslims can be endeared to the religion (RajiAbiodun, personal interview, March 19, 2017).

The level of poverty and illiteracy among the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah* is very high. Nigerian Islamic Development Fund (NIDF) should be established for Nigeria Muslim *Ummah*. The proceeds of the fund would be expended on the promotion and sustenance of Islamic unity, financing economic and social programs of material interest to Islam, as well as the funding of extensive *Dawah* activities. It is envisaged, too, that less privileged Muslim minorities in some states of the federation would receive direct financial support from the fund. The NIDF should be used to create Islamic schools, hospitals, and orphanage homes and cater to the less privileged. NSCIA should establish a synergy with the Arab Countries to offer scholarships to vulnerable and brilliant Muslim children locally and abroad. The Council should build a strong relationship with the Arab world and seek full support from organizations and philanthropists to establish more Islamic lower and higher institutions of learning.

Another area of concern is the 'Nothernazation' and 'Sultanization' of the leadership of the Council as enunciated as part of the challenges. The Muslims in the southern part of the country have long ago been questioning the *raison d'être* behind the leadership of the Council being an exclusive preserve of the family of Sultan of Sokoto in the north and at the same time, the office of the first and permanent Deputy President-General is also reserved exclusively and

constitutionally for the family of Shehu of Borno both in the North. The south was only considered for the office of the Secretary-General after much pressure. This, according to Ahmad Rufai(2013), explains why a relationship of hostility has persisted between the Council and the League of Imams and Alfas operating in the southwestern part of the country. Therefore, the leadership of the Council should 'denorthernized' and 'desultanized'. Traditional rulers must not be allowed to head the *Ummah* any longer. At the same time, the leadership should be rotational between North and South. NSCIA cannot function effectively when the traditional rulers are the sole decision-making persons. They cannot guide the organization to oppose the Government if and when Muslims are being victimized or marginalized. Hence, there should be a review of the constitution to create room for the adjustment of some of the clauses forbidding any neutral person from heading the NSCIA as currently contained in the constitution.

It is suggested that a national congress of Muslims should be convened to review the affairs of NSCIA and address some of the pertinent issues as they affect the organization and the Ummah. Congress should be an all-inclusive one, having in attendance representatives from various Islamic organizations and key individuals from Local Areas and the States. An independent Muslim leader who would emerge at the congress should be allowed to head the NSCIA. Any traditional ruler that is interested in the post must abdicate before assuming the leadership of the *Ummah*. To achieve this, a national *Shurah* Committee should be formed by the NSCIA to take care of emergency vacancies. In the alternative and in recognition of the historical significance of Borno and Sokoto, the traditional rulers of both places may hold ceremonial posts with advisory roles.

Muslims in Nigeria, especially women and female children, are unjustly humiliated and persecuted for wearing *hijab* (veil) and adhering to their faith, as witnessed in the case of the caning of teenage female students in a public secondary school in Lagos, Ibadan, Ogun, and Ilorin, etc. the case of Fridaos Amasa and Aisha Zubair of Nigerian Law School were both denied the call to Barr for a whole year for wearing *hijab*. Therefore, the Council should voice out to defend the constitutional rights of the *Ummah* against any form of attack and humiliation.

Some sections of the Nigerian press have apparently adopted it as their stock-in-trade to peddle and relentlessly publish campaigns of calumny against Islam and Muslim *ummah* in Nigeria. A conscious effort should be made to engage such media houses or individuals involved. There is a high level of stereotyping, profiling, and stigmatization of Muslims by the media due to Boko Haram and the herdsmen-farmers clashes as if all herdsmen are Muslims and all farmers are Christians. These and some other issues must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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