

**REPORT OF THE ONE DAY NATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE ON ETHNO-  
RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE  
ORGANIZED BY AFRICAN YOUTH INITIATIVE ON CRIME PREVENTION IN  
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE U.S. CONSULATE  
VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS, 15TH AUGUST, 2018.**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The One Day Dialogue was organized by African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention (AYICRIP), in partnership with the U.S. Consulate, Lagos, in response to the numerous challenges of ethno-religious intolerance in Nigeria.

The Dialogue, which was anchored by Mr. Samuel Eytayo (Director, American Centre) started by 1:30pm and ended at 3:30pm created huge opportunity for youth participants to interact and share ideas and experiences on the best way to address the challenges of ethno-religious intolerance with a view of finding practicable solution that will usher in peace and unity among Nigerians irrespective of their ethno-religious affiliations.

**DECLARING OF THE DIALOGUE OPEN:**

The U.S. Consulate's Public Affairs Officer, Mr Kelvin Krapf delivered goodwill message after which he introduced the Consul General, Mr John Bray who declared the dialogue open through his opening speech.

The Consul General thanked all the participants especially Hon Ibe Christogonus C, Executive Director and Founder of African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention and his team for the laudable initiative and he reaffirmed the US's commitment to supporting initiatives that promote peace and admonished Nigerians to ensure that cyclical communal violence does not threaten national unity.

He went ahead to say that it is in hands of Nigerians to ensure that this tragic violence does not descend into broader ethnic and religious fighting, and a cycle of reprisals. In his words, "We must all make sure that the fighting does not eat away at the fabric of Nigeria, the multi-religious and multiethnic tolerance that makes the country a great and unified nation," he stated.

Furthermore, he stated four points of the U.S. government regarding the situation in Nigeria; according to him, the United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the violence that has claimed innocent lives in Plateau State and across Nigeria. In his words, "The killing of innocent people is simply unacceptable, and our condolences go to the families and communities who have lost loved ones."

He further stated, "Those who commit these crimes must be caught and prosecuted.

We must break the cycle of impunity that fuels grievances on all sides, and leads to reprisal attacks. We call for effective law enforcement to arrest and prosecute these criminal actors. It is absolutely essential that those arrested promptly face charges in court. Bringing criminal actors to justice is the first step to ending the violence. Communities on all sides must know they can get justice without taking up arms themselves.”

Following his prior statement, the consulate general further added, “But that will not be enough. The third point is that we must work towards addressing some of the long-term drivers of tension and conflict in Plateau and across the middle belt. The competition for land and resources here will get more intense in years to come, not less. Nigeria’s population is expected to double in the next thirty years, from about 190 million today to more than 400 million people by 2050. Nigeria will need serious solutions to these underlying problems. And that will require different groups – farming communities and herding communities alike – to work together with government to find solutions that provide a future for everyone.

Finally, he called on every participant and leaders across Nigeria, to speak out for peace and help prevent reprisals. According to his statement, “Our words matter. Each of us has a role to play in tamping down tensions between communities of all kinds. It is in your hands to ensure that this tragic violence does not descend into broader ethnic and religious fighting, and a cycle of reprisals. We must all make sure that the fighting does not eat away at the fabric of Nigeria, the multi-religious and multiethnic tolerance that makes this a great and unified nation. There is a saying on the seal of my own country, the United States: E Pluribus Unum. Out of many, one. Out of many ethnicities, many religions, many groups and tribes and creeds, we form one nation.”

### **WELCOME ADDRESS:**

Mr Ibe Christogonus C, Executive Director and Founder, African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention, AYICRIP welcomed all participants and guests on behalf of the Board, Management and Members of African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention. He thanked the U.S. Consulate for their numerous commitments in supporting developmental initiatives especially approving the dialogue to be hosted in the Consulate. He decried the inhuman killings going on in the Nigerian states of Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Taraba and Sokoto lately, which are traceable to ethno religious intolerance thereby reducing the meaning of life.

According to Mr. Ibe, the unwillingness of government to prosecute the perpetrators has further left the victims and other citizens with no hope of justice. He went ahead to say that the 2019 general election is by the corner and heavily pregnant with uncertainties, thereby leaving many citizens guessing as well as predicting civil unrest during and after the election. Having identified the importance of tolerance, peace and the youths as critical stakeholders in the coming 2019 general election, the

need to work together for a peaceful and violence free election devoid of ethno-religious sentiments has become germane.

Furthermore, he said their role as non-governmental organization is to create an enabling platform that will usher in a cordial and harmonious relationship across board amongst youths irrespective of their ethnic or religious divide. With the heated and volatile nature of the country, the youths must be engaged and educated to support violence free society, most importantly as the country prepares for the 2019 general election which has been identified as another thing that may further put us in crises.

He promised to replicate the dialogue to other parts of the country to further educate and enlighten more youths to understand the consequences of ethno-religious intolerance to the overall development of Nigeria.

### **THE KEYNOTE SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR SAM BROWNBACK:**

The US Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom and Keynote Speaker, Ambassador Sam Brownback, who spoke through live video streaming from Washington, expressed happiness to see young people coming up with initiative like the dialogue which gives young people the opportunity to discuss and share ideas and experiences on how to find lasting solution to the many ethno-religious crises bedeviling the country. He also expressed sadness on the developments in Nigeria especially in the Middle Belt states and he cautioned Nigerian political office holders, representatives of civil society and religious leaders against amplifying ethno-religious tension in the country. Instead, he charged them to focus on peace-buildings, adding that “we need to truly care for each other.”

Ambassador Brownback, commended increased inter-faith engagement and dialogue in Nigeria, but noted that the country could do more to protect citizens’ right to religious freedom and bring perpetrators to book as well as give justice to the victims. He also narrated how he met with communities from all different faiths located all over the country and heard about how interfaith groups and people from every religion have come together to begin stopping the violence at the community level, which is a great starting point.

He advised, “We need to do better than just achieving tolerance; we need to truly care for each other. The people, who stand for peace, do not do this because they are from the same ethnic group, or because they share a common religion. They believe the lives of everyone are sacred,” He further reconfirmed the U.S. Embassy’s commitment to continue to partner with initiatives of this nature.

### **INTERACTIVE/DIALOGUE SESSION:**

The participants were given the opportunity to interact and ask Ambassador Sam

Brownback questions and also to share their experiences regarding their works on ethno-religious freedom and tolerance and this was done through live streaming video chat.

Eze Eluchie, an Attorney who also chairs a Network of Civil Society Organizations working on attaining societal advancement, first appreciated the Government and People of the United States for their continuing friendship and support for the people of Nigeria as exhibited by the interests shown by the United States in matters of utmost importance to the peace and development of Nigeria.

Eluchie further suggested that the US should consider imposing punitive sanctions (such as economic forfeitures and travel-to-USA bans) on persons, particularly high-placed politicians, who instigate and benefit from ethno-religious crises.

Amb. Barrister Philips Obuesi in his remarks observed that partisan political office holders are strong enablers for ethno religious conflicts. He further stated that ethno religious champions and partisans seeking ethno religious superiority are responsible for fanning ethno religious rivalry. These political leaders exploit the instruments of their high political offices for the benefits of their ethno religious leanings ahead of the country. Amb. Obuesi Phillips urged political office holders to remain nonpartisan to arrest widespread ethno religious conflicts. According to him, "we are a third world country and we need aid from western powers like the United States of America, because that is the only thing that can influence the actions of when we see it, we can possibly change."

Mrs Toyin Iziomoh asked what the U.S. Government was doing in holding accountable those politicians who are responsible for instigating crises.

In his response, Ambassador Sam Brownback said the U.S. tries to push the management of the American diversity across races and religion and they have achieved a lot in this regard. The U.S. government is saying that if you are a political person/ambassador in your country and you promote intolerance, you will not be allowed in America. He said they are imperfect but they try to push tolerance and diversity and encouraged participants to always complain if they have any complaints regarding politicians who promote ethno-religious intolerance. The U.S. Ambassador Sam Brownback gave response saying that they host weekly religious roundtables where they talk about religious tolerance and agree on religious freedom issues without name-calling or backbiting.

Furthermore, he said they have had problems similar to those of Nigeria before and now Nigerians are going through that as well and they have fought it and are ready to assist Nigerians to overcome theirs. He also said he has been to Nigeria and he look forward to seeing Nigerians pass through this challenge and he wishes participants all the best because Nigeria is a great place for the world and for Africa.

## **GUEST DISCUSSANTS:**

### **PASTOR BELLO SUNNY OSIGWE:**

Pastor Bello Osigwe Sonny of Redeem Christian Church of God (R.C.C.G) and Imam Bolawole Tayowoe of Ansar Ud Deen Mosque, Lekki were the two discussants representing Christianity and Islam. In his discussion, Pastor Bello said the reason for his coming is because of the topic which is very important especially to our youths. The major reason why ethno religious intolerance persists in Nigeria is lack of truth in the land. According to his research all the 105 terrorists groups in the world today belong to one religion and that is Islam. He referenced the story of the 83 year old Imam who saved over 300 of our Christian brothers and sisters which shows that religion is not the issue rather our ability to be truthful to ourselves and not be ignorant and hypocritical.

In his concluding statement, he stated that whether we like it or not we still need the American Society to help us if we must come out from these problems because politicians are playing politics with the lives of citizens through ethno-religious intolerance. According to him, “we pray to God but sometimes God sends us people to help solve our problems and that is the role the U.S. should be playing today.”

### **IMAM TAJUDEEN BOLALENLE:**

In his discussion, he said the Muslim community has realized that it is literacy that is the major problem of ethno-religious crisis and thus the need to learn how to value lives...human lives. In his words, “We do not do that (value human lives) in this country, we value money more than lives. The politicians are part of the problem during campaigns especially, the Muslims and Christians will share the ‘booze’ and all but when push comes to shove, and they will start pointing fingers about who is a Muslim or a Christian.” He quickly added that, “The issue of dogmatism and fanaticism is another reason, believe you me the so-called Boko Haram are not Muslims because their acts are not allowed in the Quran. Most Muslims do not even have much idea about their religion, even the ones in Saudi Arabia.

In summary, Islam does not tolerate killing of your neighbor. Jihad does not mean killing, Jihad means Struggle and Strife. Ethno religious intolerance does not stand with Islam but ignorance and illiteracy.

### **OUTCOME OF DIALOGUE:**

- Participants were able to share ideas especially from the U.S. experience on how to manage diversity and the role of citizens in the fight against ethno-religious intolerance.
- Participants were able to learn and understand that peace begins with them and they can start small peace building programmes in their communities.
- Participants pledged their commitment in building peace through ethno-religious tolerance programmes.

- On the sidelines of the Dialogue, the participants collectively agreed to set up the Network on Ethno-Religious Harmony and Peace (NERHAP) a national network to champion ethno-religious freedom and work towards the eradication of ethno-religious intolerance. The inaugural meeting of NERHAP is scheduled for the first week of October as part of activities commemorating Nigeria's 58th Independence anniversary

### **PARTICIPATION:**

The Dialogue had in attendance the U.S. Consul General, Mr John Bray, Mr Kelvin Kreft, Acting Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Consulate, Lagos. Mr Samuel Eytayo, Director, American Centre, U.S. Consulate, Hon. Ibe Christogonus C, Executive Director and Founder, African Youths Initiative on Crime Prevention, AYICRIP, Barrister Eze Eluchie, President, PADDI Foundation, Barrister Phillips Obuesi, Executive Director of Community Agenda for Peace (CAP), Mr Felix Iziomoh. Executive Director, International Centre for Leadership Development in Nigeria, Pastor Bello Sonny Osuigwe, Zonal Pastor of Redeem Christian Church of God, Imam Imam Bolawole Tajudeen of Ansar Ud Deen Mosque Lekki and 29 other participants who represented different Civil Society Organizations.

The Keynote Speaker, Ambassador Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador at Large on Religious Freedom participated through live video streaming from Washington.

### **VOTE OF THANKS:**

Mr Christogonus C. Ibe, the Executive Director and Founder, African Youth Initiative on Crime Prevention thanked the U.S. Consulate for partnership and support in making the dialogue a success and also thanked everyone who participated in the dialogue.

He went further to urge all who participated in the Dialogue to work together in their communities to fight against ethno-religious intolerance and he also promised that the Dialogue will be replicated in other states and zones.