



Africa

July-Sept 2012

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Religious Freedom: Reflections on Nigeria

By Aniedi Okure, Executive Director

On September 12, 2012 Aniedi Okure made a presentation at International Religious Freedom Conference: An Imperative for Peace and the Common Good. The following is a summary of the conversation.

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The bombing of numerous churches and killings of Christians in Nigeria by Boko Haram, a fundamentalist Islamic group, has raised questions about religious freedom in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom to propagate ones religion, beliefs, practice and observance publicly or in private (CFRN Chapter IV #38). As such, Nigeria has no official state religion. The state recognizes and declares as national public holidays, the major religious holidays of Christians and Muslims: Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas for Christians and Id-El-Fitri, Id-El-Kabir, Hajire and Id-El-Maulud for Muslims. However, religious freedom understood as the liberty to practice ones faith openly and freely without overt or covert restrictions is hampered in parts of Nigeria by certain constitutional provisions and customary practices:



Young woman receives communion in a Catholic Church in Congo. Photo: Bahati Jacques

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Sharia Court & Land Use

The constitution provides for the Federal Sharia Court of Appeal (CFRN Chapter VII, Part I # E) and the State Sharia Court of Appeal (CFRN Chapter VII, Part II # B) as a form of customary law. Although in theory the Sharia applies to Muslims, its constitutional provision elevates a religious law to the status of the laws of the state, and thus creates a dual legal system in parts of the country. Secondly, whereas a Muslim can acquire land and build a Mosque anywhere, Christians cannot do the same in most northern states of Nigeria. Christians need a permit to build a church. The process is long, cumbersome and in some cases almost impossible. In some northern Nigerian states this practice creates an environment that makes exercise of reli-

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Hazardous Oil Exploitation of the Niger Delta

By Stefanie Merki, Intern

Since the late 1950s the ecosystem of the mangrove and rainforest in the Niger Delta has diminished slowly. The destruction stems from oil extracting companies that have been in place after oil was discovered on the territory in 1956. The rich ecosystem that provided the local people with food and a means of income has been gradually losing its biodiversity ever since.

Nigeria is a country that unfortunately suffers from the resource curse. The country is full of rich resources such as oil and natural gases; however, a large number of Nigerians are still suffering from poverty. Even worse, these natural resources contribute to the hardships of many people residing in the Niger Delta. For example, people who make a living in agriculture and fishery, which is a large majority, see their revenue shrink due to oil spills and gas flaring. Additionally, not only did the oil industry bring environmental issues that led to the vanishing of fisheries and fertile soil, but their actions also had adverse impacts on the health of the local population.

The Niger Delta is a perfect example of the exploitation of sub-Saharan countries by the West. Multinational oil companies are solely concerned with profits, without any regard for the local people and their environment; furthermore, these companies are allowed to exploit with impunity.

Oil companies usually burn natural gases, rather than storing them to reclaim them for future use. In the short term, burning these gases is cheaper for the oil companies. Nigeria is the country with the highest rate of flared gases in the world, even though gas flaring has been ille-

gal in the country since 1984. In the gas flaring process, gases are released into the atmosphere, which then becomes toxic when it comes in contact with rain. The so-called acid rain changes the pH composition of water and soil, thereby killing off the fish population and decreasing productivity for farmers.

Furthermore, the acid rain pollutes the drinking water of the local population, which results in severe health issues. Locals are not only at high health risks due to the acid rains, but also through direct contact with gas flares. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, being in close proximity to gas flares leads to breathing disorders including aggravated asthma, coughing and difficult or painful breathing, chronic bronchitis, and decreased lung functions. Moreover, cancer and premature death are also associated with gas flaring. Acid rain also has disastrous effects on agriculture. The harmful toxins released during gas flares will ultimately end up in the soil and vegetation. Land degradation is a severe issue in regions where the majority earns their

living from agriculture. Land degradation has led to a drastic augmentation of unemployment and poverty in the Niger Delta.

For over 5 decades international oil companies have been leaving their devastating footprints on the Niger Delta. This region used to be so rich and bio-diverse that it could have grown enough food to feed the entire population of West Africa. Sadly, today the inhabitants of the Niger Delta struggle to provide food for themselves. Many people, institutions, and governments are aware of the exploitation occurring in these regions; however, international corporations still operate business as usual. The U.S.

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Acid rain can kill fish--an important diet staple. Photo: CRS

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relies heavily on Nigerian oil; nearly 40% of the U.S. crude oil stems from the Niger Delta. As consumers we have the power to change the situation by boycotting companies like Shell, Chevron, and Exxon-Mobile; use your dollars to vote “no” to hazardous extractives in the Niger Delta. This issue goes beyond what I can mention in a one-page report. Therefore, a more in-depth research will follow shortly, examining the consequences of the oil extractive business on the local people, and who is reaping the benefits. •

Religious Freedom from page 1

religious freedom difficult for minority religious communities.

Beyond the Sharia Law and land use, the restrictive environment found in the northern part of Nigeria is rooted in (1) Islamic influenced indigenous feudal system, (2) Nigeria's colonial political culture and (3) nurtured by the Islamic principle that makes no separation between religion and the state as found in Western liberal democracies. These factors exacerbate the mental & ideological divide between the far northern and southern parts of Nigeria.

Feudal System, Direct & Indirect Rule

Nigeria came into existence as one country in 1914 when the British amalgamated the protectorate of northern Nigeria and the protectorate of southern Nigeria into one country. Despite the merger, the British maintained two systems of governance within the same country, namely direct and indirect rule. Direct rule was maintained in the south which meant a more intrusive colonization and administration in the south, and indirect rule in the north whereby the colonial administration indirectly governed the north through the Islamic influenced feudal system. The British propped up the feudal system, using the indigenous Muslim elite as surrogates for colonial administration. Besides they saw the feudal system, which was akin to the British Monarchy at the time, as civilized

“These practices contribute to creating an environment that makes Christianity appear as an intruder.”

compared to the southern areas where majority had participatory systems of governance which the British dubbed “village democracy”.

Indirect rule made easy governance and taxation of the vast territory in the north through the traditional Muslim rulers. Over time, the system entrenched Muslim elite as political surrogates for the colonizers, creating a mentality of their divine right to governance of the country.

While we note that Nigeria achieved “independence” more than fifty years ago, it is also true that old habits die hard, and habits that are integral to the socio-political and economic systems and ingrained in the mind over many decades cannot be easily ignored.

Government Practices

Since independence, certain practices have contributed to nurturing the Muslim governance ideology including the registering of Nigeria in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference), government subsidy of pilgrimage to Mecca, and internal political deals within the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party), currently the majority political party. PDP leaders enter into agreement to rotate its presidential candidate between the north and the south. While these may seem harmless, they do matter. When located in the context of Islam that makes no separation between religion and the state as understood in modern western democracies, these practices contribute to

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Recognizing Innovation of Young African Leaders

By Rita Murphy

In 2010, the African leadership Academy and the MasterCard foundation initiated the Anzisha prize. The prize is awarded to young entrepreneurs in Africa who show promise of transforming their communities and the continent. In 2011, eight Anzisha prizes were awarded to a pool of 180 young entrepreneurs in 23 African countries.

One of those who receive the award was Nadege Iradukunda, an 18 year old senior at St. Emmanuel secondary school in Rwanda. She was selected for a project she developed that transforms human waste into electricity. Her project is a creative solution that uses a proven technology to save energy used in schools, and thereby cut down fees charged to students. Her idea has spread to schools, serving over 15,000 students.

creating an environment that makes Christianity appear as an intruder, a guest so to speak and makes an average Muslim see Islam as the religion of the state, the Muslim elites as the legitimate rulers of the country and Christians as intruders. Besides, the Qur'an states that "There is no authority of infidels over the Muslims" (Qur'an 4. 41). While this can be interpreted in various ways, for the Muslim fundamentalist, it is clear. A non-Muslim president is an illegitimate ruler.

Linking Christianity with the West

Most Muslim fundamentalists link Christianity with the west and consequently with the shortcomings of the west. When for example civil liberties from the west are tested in Africa in ways that infringe on local religious moral code and cultural practices, it reinforces Boko Haram mentality that western ways are an abomination. They extrapolate this guilt to Christianity by association. With no central Magisterium, the Qur'an can be interpreted and carried in any direction for a hostile environment or for the good of the society. We must note however that most Muslims in Nigeria are not hostile terrorists waiting to impose Islam on the country.

A Climate of Impunity

Boko Haram thrives in part due to corruption and the manipulation of religion, the lack of the rule of law and the impunity by politicians and law enforcement agency. The lack of the rule of law and accountability on the part of politicians; extra judicial killings by law enforcement and failure of state governors to act in timely manner or take appropriate action to bring crime perpetrators to justice have contributed to creating a hostile religious environment. For example, Boko Haram's initial conflict was internal to the Muslim community and targeted moderate Muslims they felt supported Western values. The extra judicial killing of its leader by the police contributed to increasing the violence by his followers. Besides acting with impunity and extra judicial killings, other factors such as corruption, the imbalance in income distribution; the opulence of the political elite and the poverty of the masses lead fundamentalist Muslims to erroneously think that the injustices are a result of western values and understood the bearer of Christianity conclude that strict Islam is the answer. For those eager to assist Nigeria address religious freedom and the threat of Boko Haram, it is imperative to understand the deeper ideological issues at work. One cannot stamp out an ideology with guns and bombs. •



Cardinal Highlights role of African Laity in Politics

By Mike Murphy

The Pontifical Council for the Laity sponsored the Pan-African Congress for the Catholic Laity in Yaounde in Cameroon from Sept 4-9. The theme of the congress was *"Being Witness of Jesus Christ in Africa Today: Salt of the earth ...light of the world"*. The congress was held at the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC) in Yaounde and drew participants from around the continent.

Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, president of the Pontifical Council for the laity, addressed the Congress. He said that the African Catholic laity has an important role in building the kingdom of

God in the world, including public life, politics and culture. He pointed to the challenge in the "depreciation of politics", which the cardinal described as a consequence of "incompetence, arrogance and widespread corruption", which makes the political class lose credibility. *"However, despite its limitations and weaknesses, politics continues to be an important component of civic life in the democratic system. Hence criticism and denunciation of evils and abuses is not enough. Imposed on today's laity is the urgent task to discover the right and duty of active and responsible participation."*•

Massive, irresponsible lease of African farm land threatens Africa

By Bahati Jacques, Policy Analyst

Since 2008, foreign investors, some of whom are private banks and pension funds, have acquired farm land in Africa resulting in the displacement and loss of livelihood of many families. Africans cannot financially afford to entrust their food security to foreign large-scale commercial agriculture multinationals.

Foreign investors' central objective is not to ensure food security of African people, but to grow their wealth by targeting the demand to feed the planet's growing population and meet the increasing demand for biofuel.

While some African governments see this as a model of development, Africa Faith and Justice Network is one of many organizations which believe that land grabbing will create more problems than it solves. First of all it is a fact that African governments, many of which are corrupt, are leasing people's farm land for decades not to benefit the people, but to have another revenue source to finance their luxurious and privileged lifestyle. Prior to the rush for farm land, many governments signed mining and oil exploration contracts with foreign investors; but the revenue is in the bank accounts of presidents, their children and a few elites.

In late 2009 the US-based company *SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SG SOC)* obtained land rights from the Cameroonian Government to 73,086 hectares (180,599.4 acres, 282 square miles) of land in the Ndian and Kupe-Manenguba Divisions in Southwest Cameroon for a 99-year lease. According to the contract the government will collect \$1.00 per hectare (2.47 acres) for state land that is developed, and US \$0.50 per hectare (2.47 acres) for state land that is not developed. With the 2% yearly increase and for developed

land, the state will collect \$1.22 per hectare after 10 years, \$ 1.48 after 20 years, \$ 2.69 after 50 years and \$ 7.10 at the 99th year. But none of this money will compensate the Cameroonians who

have lost rights to their land in a country where small-scale agriculture is key to survival.

In Liberia, Sime Darby Plantation, a Malaysian based company has signed a 63-year agreement with the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to develop 220,000 hectares (849 square miles) of land to grow palm trees. According to a report by the Guardian, Sime Darby, paid \$200 compensation to a local farmer, Ms.

Fatu Kamara, for the land she grew her cassava on. This is the equivalent of \$3 for every year Sime Darby occupies her land. Without any doubt Ms. Fatu made more than \$3 each harvest season.

In Africa, land grabbers promise to create jobs, bring development and guarantee access to food in areas where they acquired land: these are the same broken promises made by oil and mining companies and their African facilitators. There is overwhelming evidence from operational land leases showing that only few short term jobs are created, wages are low and work conditions are bad.

Without denying that the African agricultural sector needs to be improved, there are certainly many challenges that have to be addressed in order for African nations to successfully and fairly incorporate large-scale foreign agricultural investment into their development plan. Governments leasing people's land without due process is a recipe for more conflict.

Unless serious governance reforms are made, investors

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“Land grabbers promise to create jobs, bring development and guarantee access to food ... these are the same broken promises made by oil and mining companies .”

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should not seek land lease contracts from weak and undemocratic governments. In part, given the state of governance in Africa, it is a huge mistake to let foreign multinationals own Africa’s farm land and mining and oil concessions they have.

Only strong democratic government institutions can ensure contracts are fair, people’s resources are protected, and companies are held accountable for pollution, and all other anticipated abuses can be addressed. Only responsible governments can set up proper processes to obtain a contract and manage revenues. The bottom line is that the rule of law is lacking a method to facilitate responsible land lease which benefits both investors and land owners.

In the meantime, AFJN supports OXFAM in its call to freeze the World Bank's large-scale land acquisitions pending investigation into their practices. AFJN is also working with a DC-based coalition of organizations to halt the spread of land grabs in Africa. •



Fr. Camille Piché (second from left), OMI, Director Oblate JPIC in Rome Italy with AFJN Staff during his visit in August.

SPOTLIGHT ON NIGERIA:

Profile of an Inventor

Dr. Ezekial Izuogu is a Nigerian electrical engineer and lecturer at the Federal Polytechnic in Owerri, Nigeria. In 1997 he completed a prototype of the first ever all-African car, which he named the Z-600. Some 90% of its parts were local. For example the horn was a doorbell. As planned, it would have been the cheapest car on the planet with a cost of about \$2000. He set up a factory in South Africa to manufacture the cars. Unfortunately the factory was raided by armed men who stole equipment, molds and design materials. And so to date, the Z600 car has still not been mass-produced.

Dr. Izuogu has been working at the same time on another major research project. This resulted in the invention of the Izuogu machine, an electric motor that draws energy from the nuclei of permanent magnets and therefore requires no input power to operate. One version of the machine is self-sustaining, and should be able to run for up to 40 years. A prototype of the machine has been built and demonstrated. The machines are designed to drive electric power generators with no noise, no pollution and zero energy input. •

Nigeria to Give 10 Million Cellphones to Farmers

The federal government of Nigeria has set up a program under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to distribute 10 million mobile phones to farmers across the country. Dr. Akinwumi Adesina announced the initiative at the opening of a two-day workshop on Youth Employment in Agriculture.

Adesina said: “Today we have launched the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme through which farmers now receive their fertilizer and seed support through their mobile phones.”

The distribution of the phones will begin in 2013. Nigeria is the first country in Africa to use this system to reach farmers. •

Africa Faith & Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

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