

International Religious Freedom Roundtable Nigeria

Monday, January 28, 2019

To the Candidates for President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

We are leaders that represent diverse religious, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. We write to you today to encourage you to support the constitutional religious freedom rights of every Nigerian and to guarantee the highest international standards for our upcoming elections.

As you know, Nigerians are a deeply and diversely religious people. And as you are perhaps uniquely aware, our upcoming elections are important. Our history includes local traditional governance, colonialism, military rule, and democracy. Sadly, our elections often feature increased violence among communities.

This violence causes people to be put in fear, harmed, or even killed, and as this happens their most fundamental rights are taken away. As this violence has not just fallen on political fault lines, but ethnic and religious ones as well, cultural rights and religious freedom rights can be grievously harmed. Because often ethnic and religious identities are more deeply felt than political identity, this can cause even more harm than in other countries.

That is one reason we come together as diverse leaders who stand for people from many tribes and faiths on January 10th 2019. We know each of us, and our communities, most fundamental rights are at risk, and that by working together as citizen leaders, we can appeal to the best in Nigerians. We are inspired by the first-ever *Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom* held in Washington DC, USA in 2018, and the ways that multi-faith actors were able to come together mutually calling for every individual's rights to be honored. We stand together in that spirit. We pledge to continue working together and to call our communities and fellow leaders to the same spirit.

We do that now because we are greatly concerned that without significant action in Nigeria, violence that impacts religious and cultural fault lines is a significant risk. Especially true, since our last general election was the first peaceful transfer of power at the presidential level from one political party to another.

The Nigerian economy and population are the largest in Africa. The breadth of natural and cultural resources produced in it, from oil outputs to Nollywood films, made many world leaders understand the importance of our last general election. They stood by our country calling on the main parties and candidates to commit to free, fair, peaceful, and credible elections. We join that call at this election. We are grateful that all the candidates have signed an agreement committing themselves to peaceful and fair outcomes, but we think more could be done.

- 1) Commit their offices to advance religious freedom for each citizen as a constitutional right and consistent with international law, such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 2) Publicly and repeatedly commit their parties through written, video, and public statements to their supporters and constituencies that they support free, fair, peaceful, and credible elections
- 3) Publicly and repeatedly commit their parties and have their fellow candidates adhere to electoral regulations and international best practices
- 4) Ask political parties to shun and publicly denounce vote buying and condemn it in its entirety
- 5) Ensure that parties commit to support peace before, during, and after the election
- 6) To produce programs that are issue-based and desist from personality attacks and character assassination

We think that these actions by our leaders and those of our friends and allies could make a significant difference for the religious freedom of our nation and for an election marked by justice rather than violence.

ORGANIZATIONS:

Builders of New Nigeria

Center for Peacebuilding and Socio-Economic Resources Development, Abuja

Initiative for Peoples Rebirth

International Organisation for Peace and Social Justice (PSJ)

International Organization for Peace Building and Social Justice

Islami Movement in Nigeria

Islamic Movement in Nigeria

Ixnoteservices

Jama'atu Nasril Islam, Plateau State

Jauro Interfaith Shades Foundation

Midwest Movement

Nigeria Religious Tolerance Round-table

Plateau State Youth Council

Sanctuary of Love Ministry

INDIVIDUALS (organization for identification purposes only):

Abdurrahman Salihu Abubakar (Member, #FreeZakzaky Campaign Committee)

Henry Ayoola (National Coordinator, Initiative for People's Rebirth)

Abdallah Baikie (Director, International Organization for Peace Building and Social Justice)

Pastor Aken Bawa Tati (Clergy)

Garba Bulus (Program Coordinator, Jauro Interfaith Shades Foundation)

James Chidawa (NRTR, Nigeria Religious Tolerance Round-table)

Abdullahi Danladi (Resource Forum, Islamic Movement in Nigeria)

Stephen Enada (President, International Committee on Nigeria)

Ayokunle Fagbemi (Executive Director, Center for Peacebuilding and Socio-Economic Resources Development, Abuja)

Muhammad Ibrahim Gamawa (MD/CEO, Imam Mahdi Foundation for Global Peace)

Emmanuel Ibeshi (Board Member, International Organization for Peace Building and Social Justice)

Fabong Jemchang Yildam (Chairman, Plateau State Youth Council)

Haruna Magashi (Lawyer, Islamic Movement in Nigeria)

Halliru Maraya (Sheikh, The Young Muslims Congress)

Amedu Mark (Sr. Pastor, Sanctuary of Love Ministry)

Isa Mshelgaru (Professor, Islamic Movement in Nigeria)

Sani Mudi (Publicity Secretary, Jama'atu Nasril Islam, Plateau State)

Dinah Musa Yaro (Director, Hisab Women Welfare Development Initiatives)

Pedro Obaseki (President-General/Convener, Midwest Movement)

Adeolu Odusote (Pastor)

Jonathan Pam (Chairman, The James and Elizabeth Pam Foundation)

Yinka Quadiri (Coordinator, Builders of New Nigeria)

Julie S (Research Officer, Working Group on Peace & Social Justice in Nigeria)

Yusufu Turaki (Secretary, International Organization For Peace Building and Social Justice (PSJ))

Larry Yammai (Media and Publicity Secretary, Congress of Northern Nigeria Christians)