

COMMUNIQUÉ

FIRST TRIANNUAL MEETING OF THE NIGERIA INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL (NIREC) HELD AT ROCKVIEW HOTEL, GOVERNMENT HOUSE ROUNDABOUT, OWERRI, IMO STATE, FROM 29TH APRIL TO 1ST MAY, 2025

PREAMBLE

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), under the leadership of the Co-chairmen, His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, CFR, mni, and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), His Eminence, Archbishop Daniel C. Okoh, held its 2025 First Triannual Meeting at Rockview Hotel, Owerri, Imo State, from the 29th of April to the 1st of May, 2025. The theme of the meeting was "Building Mutual Trust for National Unity".

The Opening Ceremony, which was held at the venue of the meeting, was attended by government functionaries, religious leaders, traditional rulers and distinguished members of NIREC. Dignitaries at the ceremony included the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF); Senator Dr. George Akume; the Governor of Imo state; Senator Hope Uzodinma, the Governor of Abia state, Dr. Alex Otti, represented by the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs Abia State; Prince Uzo Nwachukwu, the Permanent Secretary, General Services, OSGF, Dr. Maurice Nnamdi Mbaeri and top government officials of Imo state led by the Deputy Governor of the state, Lady Chinyere Ekomaru. Also present, were the religious leaders from the South East geopolitical zone.

The meeting was declared open by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF); Senator Dr. George Akume who addressed the meeting on behalf of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Ahmed Bola Tinubu. The SGF, Senator George Akume called on Nigerians to support the policies and effort of the Federal Government towards improving the challenges of the nation emphasizing that the Federal Government is committed to developing all sectors of the nation. The Governor of Imo state; Senator Hope Uzodinma noted that the incidents of religious conflicts have reduced in Nigeria and praised NIREC for its work. He enjoined Nigerians to embrace love, which is at the heart of Islam and Christianity, as a way of defeating the devil.

In their opening remarks, the Co-chairmen and the Executive Secretary of NIREC, Rev. Fr. Prof. Cornelius Afebu Omonokhua, noted that national unity cannot be achieved without trust and Nigerians should desist from profiling criminals with religious and ethnic labels. He stressed that the natural resources endowed to Nigerians by God have become sources of conflict and insecurity. He added that without mutual trust, peace becomes an illusion, they urged the political leaders to work for the common good and welfare of the citizens.

In his good will message, Most Rev. Dr. Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji, Metropolitan Archbishop of Owerri and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) appreciated the efforts of NIREC and stressed that a sincere attempt to building mutual trust among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria should "lead us to adopt an attitude of heart and mind which moves us to relate with one another with *respect, understanding and hope*". The good will messages of Rev. Dr. Eches Divine, Shiekh Barrister Suleiman Yusuf Njoku, the co-chairmen of the NIREC Youth Forum, Abubakar Akande and Enwere Belusochukwu stressed the need for mutual trust and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Two papers were presented on the theme of the meeting by Alatare Sulyman Musa and Nze Ozichukwu Fidelis Chukwu projecting the need for religious and community leaders to understand their roles in building trust among members of the communities. Highlights of the well-attended Opening Ceremony included the inauguration of NIREC chapters in South Eastern states.

RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

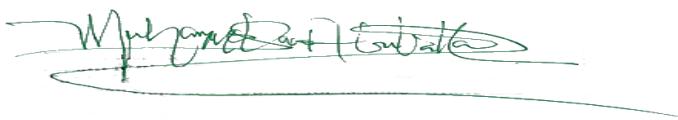
After deep reflections and extensive deliberations on the theme of the meeting and the State of the Nation at the plenary and closed-door sessions, the Council:

1. **Called on** governments at all levels to promote inclusive governance as a way of strengthening mutual trust and inter-religious unity in Nigeria's diverse society;
2. **resolved** that no nation can survive without justice, therefore, the Federal Government must strengthen the rule of law and justice by ensuring that justice is not manipulated for religious and ethnic purposes.
3. **Advocated** for the strengthening of NIREC for civic education and intergroup dialogue in order to demystify stereotypes and douse ethnocentric and extreme religious sentiments that often breed mistrust in the polity;
4. **urged** the Federal Government to implement genuine fiscal federalism as a way of promoting economic self-reliance and independence with the advantage of empowering the sub-national governments to deliver public services more effectively;
5. **encouraged** all Nigerians to imbibe the values of integrity, honesty, sincerity, justice and fairness along with consciousness driven by deep respect for the sanctity of human life;
6. **appealed** to government to retool education to serve as an instrument of promoting national unity, advancing security and entrenching sustainable development;
7. **tasked** the Federal Government to give the military and the security agencies the marching order to address the various attacks on communities in every part of the country by taking the battle to the hideouts of the insurgents;
8. **stressed** that the upscale in violence and insecurity in some parts of Nigeria is due to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and such proliferation should be stopped and the arms mopped up immediately;
9. **charged** the security agencies that it is time to take the battle to the criminals, and not waiting until they attack and leave as Nigerians have condemned the repeated killings of citizens sufficiently without end;
10. **decried** the use of the social media to cast aspersions on leaders and called for decisive action against fake and fabricated news;
11. **cautioned** preachers against using their pulpits and platforms to incite their followers against each other and the government.

12. **sympathized** with the Government and people of Plateau State on the attacks and sad incident of fire outbreak that led to major losses;
13. **recommended** that the Federal Government increase education budget to a significant percentage of the national budget to achieve desired impact in the society given that education is the foundation of development;
14. **acknowledged** the commitment of ASUU to academic stability by ensuring smooth activities for over two years and urged the Union to continue to adopt dialogue as a means of achieving its goals;
15. **commended** the Federal Government for opening more access to educational opportunities for Nigerians through the approval of 22 new universities, 33 new polytechnics and 12 new colleges of education in Nigeria within the past two years while emphasising that quality should not be compromised at the altar of tokenism.
16. **Approved** a proposed course on Interreligious Dialogue and National Integration as part of the General Studies courses to be taught in the Nigerian tertiary institutions and **directed** the Secretariat to follow up with the National Universities Commission, Tertiary Education Fund (TETFUND) and other approving agencies on the processes of getting approval for the project and support for its publication;
17. **appreciated** the Co-chairmen of NIREC for their astute leadership that has assisted the Council in achieving its set goals and objectives.

APPRECIATION

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) immensely appreciated the support of the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, towards the success of the meeting. The Council commended the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Dr. George Akume, for his support and for attending the opening session of the meeting. The Council equally thanked the Governor of Imo state, Senator Hope Uzodinma, for his hospitality; the Guest Speakers, for their thoughtfulness; and other stakeholders for their goodwill messages. The Council ultimately expressed its unalloyed gratitude to its members, including the NIREC YOUTH FORUM, for their cooperation towards making the first triannual NIREC Meeting of the Council in 2025a memorable experience.



His Eminence Alhaji Muhammed Sa'ad Abubakar CFR, mni
 The Sultan of Sokoto and President-General,
 Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA)
CO-CHAIRMAN



His Eminence Most Rev. Dr. Daniel Okoh
 President, Christian Association of
 Nigeria (CAN)
CO-CHAIRMAN



Rev. Fr. Prof. Cornelius Afebu Omonokhua
 Executive Secretary

