

**SECOND TRIANNUAL MEETING OF NIREC
10TH NOVEMBER, 2025**

**THEME:
COLLABORATION OF INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCILS WITH GOVERNMENT TO
PROMOTE PEACE IN NIGERIA**

**AT
BARCELONA HOTEL, BLANTYRE STREET, WUSE 2, ABUJA.**

BOSS MUSTAPHA, CFR

SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATION (2017-2023)

According to Fethullah Gülen, “*Religion focuses primarily on the immutable aspects of life and existence, whereas political, social and economic systems or ideologies concern only certain variable social aspects of our worldly life.*”¹ Given that the human person is psychosomatic, that is made of Body and soul, it follows that religion and political governance must work in collaboration to promote the common good and common welfare of the citizens. When I was the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (2017-2023) working with the Nigeria Inter-religious Council made my work easy. I have worked with two sets of leadership of NIREC between 2017-2023 sometimes under very challenging circumstances, but in it all God helped us to prevail. It is on this note that I find the theme of this meeting, “*Collaboration of inter-religious councils with government to promote peace in Nigeria*” very appropriate.

From the documentary of NIREC and following the proceedings of NIREC, I am amazed about the facts that the Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC) came into being after the dawn of democracy in 1999 to serve as a platform for high-level dialogue between the leaders of Christians and Muslims in the country, thereby promoting public good. The Council is designed to promote understanding, appreciation of one another and the generation of mutual respect between Christians and Muslims. The Constitution of NIREC clarifies its role in conflict management.² ARTICLE 3 of the Constitution of NIREC articulates the aims and objectives of the council among which are: “To honestly and sincerely understand the true teachings of the two

¹M. Fethulah Gulen, *Essays-Perspectives-Opinions*, (Clifton, Tughra Books, 2011), P. 13

²Constitution of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), 2020 (As amended)

religions; promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims; inculcate moral, ethical, social and cultural values of the two faiths for the rebirth and rebuilding of a better society”.³ Therefore NIREC can reposition Nigerians to think of the common good of the nation and not the contest for supremacy between Christians and Muslims.

Since the inception of NIREC, the frequent conflicts between Christians and Muslims that often result in burning of the houses of worship has been reduced to the barest minimum except for those perpetrated by terrorists and bandits. Before NIREC, almost every conflict was perceived with the lenses of religion. With NIREC, Nigerians can now understand what is political, ethnic, economic and religious conflict. The activities of NIREC are reported in the media. When I served, the Council met four times in a year. I tried to keep up with the spirit of the government from the inception of NIREC. The idea of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council was first suggested to religious leaders by Saint Pope John Paul II during his second visit to Nigeria in 1998, for the beatification of Father Cyprian Iwene Tansi. The Christian and Muslim leaders took up the challenge in 1999 with the support of President Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR. Since then, the Federal Government has been supporting NIREC through OSGF. This explains why the office of NIREC is located at the Federal Secretariat Complex, Shehu Shagari way, Abuja.

The government needs both the Christians and the Muslims to foster peaceful co-existence and national unity. NIREC strives to reclaim the national unity and peace that can make Nigeria once more a home for all by monitoring and identifying potential hot spots for brewing religious intolerance and violence; preventing and managing conflict; Supporting people that are marginalized because of their religious identity through advocacy and capacity building; advising and empowering for the provision of legal protection for those suffering from religiously motivated violence; investigating and reporting on religious tension to legitimate organs of government for pro-active measures and working out strategies for collaboration in the support of human dignity and for freedom of religion. Since the beginning of the America and Nigeria dispute, I have been following the way the office of NIREC has been managing the situation to ensure that the narrative does not turn Christians and Muslims against each other which is the main strategy of the terrorists and bandits. In my working relationship with NIREC, we were able to mediate in the following:

³Cf. Constitution of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), 2020 (As amended). Article 3.

- Alleged demolition of Trans-Amadi Mosque in Port Harcourt
- Visit of NIREC and collaboration with the Chief of Defence Staff
- Visit of NIREC to President Muhammadu Buhari GCFR June 11, 2021
- Prayerful intervention and animation of Nigerians concerning COVID 19
- Consultative Peace forum in Jos, September 6, 2021
- Intervention of NIREC in ENDSAR
- Intervention of NIREC on the impasse between Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)
- NIREC Public Webinar – to enlighten the public on peaceful co-existence.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, the only way I could appeal to Christians and Muslims to pray and worship without going to the Church and Mosque was to carry along the leadership of NIREC in the determination of the COVID 19 guidelines.

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), collaborate extensively with the government to promote peace through dialogue, conflict mediation, social welfare initiatives, and public advocacy. This collaboration aims to leverage the moral authority and community reach of religious leaders to foster national unity and address underlying causes of conflict. It serves as an important advisory body to the government on religious matters and national stability, offering counsel on potential conflict situations.

Inter-religious Councils (IRCs) generally play active roles in dousing potentially volatile situations and mediating disputes before or during conflict outbreaks. Organizations like the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Kaduna have successfully reduced cycles of retaliatory violence through local dialogue and community programs, often partnering with government bodies and international NGOs for greater impact. Beyond theological discussions, IRCs engage in practical, joint action to address major societal problems that often fuel conflict, such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and disease.

Inter-religious Councils collaborate with agencies like the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) and anti-corruption bodies. They engage in humanitarian projects, such as providing aid to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and building essential infrastructure (schools, hospitals). Religious leaders use their platforms to advocate for peaceful coexistence,

national unity, and responsible citizenship by issuing joint codes of conduct for responsible religious engagement to prevent inflammatory rhetoric. The Councils conduct public awareness campaigns through radio programs and billboards to promote messages of peace and tolerance. The Nigeria Inter-religious council has the NIREC Youth Forum to effectively engage the youths in peacebuilding projects.

The FG-NIREC collaboration on Youth and development, was deployed in 2019 and 2023 to drastically reduce the manipulation of youths by unscrupulous politicians during elections. Prior to that, youths were exploited and made to indulge in violent acts and electoral malpractices such as thuggery, ballot box snatching etc.

The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) is a government agency that is directly under the ministry of foreign affairs just as NIREC is working with the OSGF). Other faith-based organizations can still work with government to ensure a cohesive approach to humanitarian response and peacebuilding efforts across all levels of society.

Conclusion

The inter-religious councils have been supported by government but not without challenges especially in the area of funding. This is where the government should take the work of the inter-religious councils as a priority and not as an opportunity cost or forgone alternative. While these collaborations have led to measurable successes in reducing local tensions and fostering better understanding, the attendant challenges could be overcome with renewed commitment and understanding.

The inter-religious councils should not be seen as elitist, managing the political manipulation of religious identities, and addressing deep-seated structural issues like governance gaps and resource competition that frequently cause violence. The institutionalization of interfaith platforms must provide a critical, ongoing mechanism for stability in Nigeria's complex sociopolitical landscape. The active functioning of the inter-religious councils is indispensable in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

I would like to conclude by congratulating NIREC for introducing the weekly webinars, an online conference as against physical conference. It is a 'web-based seminar' that allows an online presentation, meeting, or workshop. It allows individuals or groups to interact in real time.

This online conference became popular during the COVID when people could not travel for physical conferences and meetings. Every Tuesday, the Nigeria Interreligious council (NIREC), holds webinar at 8.30pm. The primary aim and objective of NIREC is to honestly and sincerely endeavour by themselves and through them, their followership, to understand the true teachings of the two religions – Christianity and Islam – including their peculiarities and personal mannerisms through dialogues, discussions, workshops, seminars, conference, pamphlets etc. These weekly webinars and the WhatsApp group is keeping NIREC active instead of waiting only for the statutory meetings. It is my prayers that the council will continue to enjoy government support and collaboration.

Thank you for your kind attention

God bless Nigeria.