

## **“BOKO HARAM”: BEFORE AND BEYOND**

While we Christians Awareness Initiative of Nigeria (CHAIN), a Kaduna based NGO, join our voice to the choruses of sorrow, indignation and rue occasioned by the nefarious “Boko Haram” issue, we would as a part of our duty as Nigerian based Christian NGO make public our 7 point report on the entire affair. It is our hope that this report will fill in the gaps in the international media versions and help to shed more light on the build up to the explosion, the prevailing sentiments and the long term implications of the recent disturbances on the Nigerian national front.

When the hue and cry is all over we will have to examine all the facts involved dispassionately to create a valid base on which progressive decisions can be taken by stakeholders in forestalling the recurrence of these arson and wanton destruction of lives and property. Factual records will show that the designated leader of the sect in the person of Mohammed Yusuf had lived for 16 years in Maiduguri community before the recent troubles. In the month of May 2009 one of our representatives had filed a report on the stirrings in that camp and the possibility of a mayhem. Prior to the explosion, the sect was reported to have signed in approximately five hundred and fifty thousand (550,000) followers. If the statistics of losses quoted by the Nigerian Press is taken into consideration, (about 950 across the state affected),it would mean that more than 90% of the sect followers are still active and are at large.

1. On a first count we would like to highlight that the sect tagged “Boko Haram” is by no means an isolated entity on Nigerian soil. A quick survey of Islamic fundamentalist sects of similar bent would reveal the existence of nothing less than 25 such thriving sects. Example of these group may include; Darel Salam in Mokwa area, Maitatsine of Gurara and Tafa local government areas all in Niger State, etc. Contrary to the prevailing assumptions, the spread of such sects has taken an international and national out look rather than limiting it to a northern Nigerian phenomena. In fact, cities as far as Ikorodu in Lagos State, Iwo, Port Harcourt and Afikpo all in eastern and western Nigeria have been recorded as having training centres for fundamenlists.

2. On a second count we would want to observe the failure of authorities in the affected states which failed to act timely following reports from Security Services on the imminent threat to peace by this sect but were coloured by sentiments which hindered them from averting the unfortunate destruction. Kaduna State can be used as an example. Most people do not realize that a “Boko Haram” outpost was shut down in Kaduna State

by the quick action of the State Security Services and the Stakeholders in the State. Reports have it that the sect had been operating from a school premises in Rigasa area of Kaduna city but the prompt intervention of the State Security Services in Kaduna which engaged the opinion of the residents of that area who rose to demand the closure of the terrorist camp. It is also on record that a lecturer named Mallam Tanko Ya'u alias Aroza resigned his teaching position in the College of Education, Zuba-Abuja to train militants in *Kario* of *GodoGodo* chieftdom of Jema'a local government area of Kaduna State. Aroza is alleged to have taken seven (7) youths to fight in the Maiduguri crisis and sadly non of these returned and this has further put their community in serious tension. Again the nation is quick to forget the political hiatus that followed the actions of Governor Jonah Jang of Plateau State when the Security Services routed similar training camps in his State. The records show clearly that youths that were abducted from Jos metropolis were transferred to Maiduguri for training.

3. Our third observation is centred on the reporting styles that tend to fit all things into 'western styled templates' The emphasis on reporting has been made to highlight the sect's denunciation of Western education while ignoring the central theme of the sect's objective which was the erection of a Taliban style government on all territories of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The sects' call for a total *Sharia* State all over Nigeria has been under reported both locally and internationally. On the local front a good portion of those who are denouncing the sect at the moment had shared their sentiments in that common goal. This tacit approval of the authorities for the sect's objective was demonstrated openly and it is no secret that one of its adherents was highly placed in the Government of Governor Ali Modu Sheriff Of Borno State. Until the complicity in high places is unveiled the threat to peace remains.
  
4. We have the open admission of Northern State Governors that these groups were being funded by foreign sources. What is not so clear is the position of the Governors on the less popular objective of these radicals. The world is yet to realize that the primary target of the radicals was not the Police but the Christian population of their areas of operation. An incident in Maiduguri the epicenter was the factor that changed the rules

of engagement. Prior to the explosion the group of “Boko Haram” militants had been apprehended at a Police check point. The militants demonstrated unreasonable aggression in the encounter and some of them were slain when they attacked the Police men on duty. A similar twist of fate in the Russia-Congo area of Jos in the 2008 debacle was what saved the lives of the original targets by pitching the Police force against the militants. Even in the event of the attacks on Police stations the sects still went after their original targets in the States affected and reports have confirmed that a total of 20 churches were burnt down to ashes in Maiduguri, Borno State while 12 Christians were killed among them 3 pastors namely; Sabo Yakubu of COCIN, Sylvester Akpan of National Evangelical Mission and Rev Orji of Good News of Christ Church. Rev George Orji was reported to have been abducted with other Christians by the sect and made to renounce their faith and their refusal resulted in their brutal death.

5. We will take a brief look at the enabling factors that aid the breeding of these sects. There is a vanguard among people in position in authority and especially by most northern Governors that is quick to finger poverty as the root cause of these well planned and well funded sects but the question that is never answered is the reason why equally poor citizens of other faiths scattered all over the nation never take up arms in this same manner as the boko haram machinery.
6. Many citizens were shocked by President Yar’ Adua’s handling of the matter and the Brazilian jaunt he took while Nigeria was ablaze and lives were being lost to Islamic fundamentalism but few remember that he was the presiding Governor in Katsina State when Amina Lawal was sentenced to death by stoning. While no one will go as far as fingering the serving President as a closet terrorist, the well known zeal of himself and one of his wives in Islamic affairs encourages a daring in the militants who believe that they share some common grounds.
7. The summary execution of Mohammed Yusuf without trial by the Nigeria Police could never have been done without some back up in high places and it’s a shame that the defiant youth was not permitted to speak his piece. Going by the pattern of similar but less notable strikes through the years, it is clear that Nigeria has a severe terror problem replete with sleeper cells and collaboration in high places.

In conclusion it would be delusional to conclude that we have seen the last of these explosions. The nation will never know peace until we stop misdiagnosing a global terror problem as a local skirmish. With the records amassed over the years it is clear that there are terrorism facilitators in high places. The ancient method of blanketing information and falsifying casualty figures as inherited from the military era is further fanning the flames of terror. The nation needs energetic and wise leadership that can table the desire of millions for *Sharia* rule on a democratic platform, where it can be examined and discussed by the non Muslim alike. Instead of reinventing the wheel we can revisit the Willinks Commission report of 1956 on minority fears. We can also call for the notes made by Professor J. N. Anderson in 1958 when the panel of jurists assembled by the regional government of Northern Nigeria fashioned the document that paved the way for Nigerian unity. It is time that the colonial foundations of mistrust and rivalry were revisited with maturity to level the playing field. The Christian leadership of Nigeria has to take responsibility for elevating the value accorded to human life across the nation whether they be “Boko Haram” youths, Niger Delta militants or Christian victims of Islamic fundamentalism. Finally the international community has to appreciate the real challenges that we have concerning human worth and access us as a people of dignity even in the face of poverty instead of aiding and abetting corruption with one side of their mouth while rebuking the local victims with the other.

**CHRISTIAN AWARENESS INITIATIVE OF NIGERIA**