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**Title** Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Nigeria: An Analysis with Reference to Human Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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***Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Nigeria: An Analysis with Reference to Human Development in the 21st Century***

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**Abstract**

*This study examines religious discrimination against religious minorities like Muslims living in Christian populated areas in the south east, Christians are as well living in Muslim dominated areas. Minority Traditional worshippers in either Muslim or Christian majority areas, private institution, companies owned by Christians or Muslims etc. The discrimination against religious minorities has mitigated the peaceful co-existence among religious identities and other major life events which has culminated national development in all spheres of human engagement such as economic, social, political, security, etc. The researchers have tried to provide an analytical study of the empirical data as well as of the existing literature. The result of our findings shows that many religious identities have been denied of securing job opportunities, professing religion of their choice, finding it difficult to receive health care services, managing religious institutions, denied of equal rights of citizens, get political appointments, among others. The study recommends that people of different religions should embrace and tolerate one another, avoid the use of fanaticism, allow religious minorities to practice religion of their choice in order to dislodge prejudices from the society.*

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Rights, Human Development, Minorities, Religious Minorities.

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## **Introduction**

Religious minorities in central Nigeria have experienced series of discrimination and attacks coming from different religious identities. Religious discrimination in Nigeria is a serious issue and it is no more news. Christians, Muslims, and Traditional worshippers are routinely discriminated against. In most cases, adherents of these faiths are being denied of jobs, loans, housing and other similar things simply because of their choice of religious afflictions. Discrimination against religious minorities in Nigeria has far reaching implication national development and it will disrupt the important role religion has to play in social, economic and security development in the country. This erroneous attitude against fellow human has breached the oath taken by every meaning Nigerians to defend their unity in pledging out allegiance to the country. It is not a new story that most people in the position of authority today in Nigeria have deviated from the oath of office they took, where they vowed to govern with justice, equity and fairness. Some of these forms of discrimination includes and not limited to denial of marrying of people of their choices, vandalization of minorities' properties, Restriction of religious minorities' representatives from security briefing, cartoon drawing of Prophet Muhammad, demolition of the Traditional worshipper's iledi, refusal to sell land for mosques, churches and Ilenla construction etc. Many of these house of worships have some parts of Nigeria were set ablaze, destroyed which led to members being seriously injured and wounded while some lost their lives during the process.

Nigeria is a Multi Religious country housing about 250 tribes with diverse religious belief, in point of this fact, none must be compelled to practice a unified religion as this goes against the provision of the constitution that allows freedom of religious practices without being humiliated by anyone. The constitution stated that nefarious personal vendettas must not be leveled against hapless religious minorities in Nigeria. Having said that, Section 38(2) and (3) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion as one of the fundamental rights of every citizen.<sup>1</sup>

However, this study finds that some factors actually led to such attacks. Religion as a causal factor must be put in perspective and nuanced with other pertinent. "Sources of violent deaths such as issues bothering on land and territorial claims, ethnicity, politics

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<sup>1</sup>Jude Ezeankwasa, "Religious Freedom and It's Limitations Under the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria," *AJCR* 4, no.3 (2016): 55.

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and elections as well as community violence and crimes involving Muslims and Christians.”<sup>2</sup>

It will be in the best interest of national development to thrive for such a society to embrace change and objectivity for peaceful co-existence among religious adherents to manifest.

### Literature Review

There have been avalanche of research findings explored on the area of discuss but with different topics and this has given an opportunity for the researcher to capture the review of past scholars regarding the work at hand "discrimination against religious minorities in Nigeria: A hindrance to human development in the 21st Century." The researcher will try to unravel the concepts and it's menace in a multireligious society in the 21st Century as embedded in the optimistic and pessimistic of the leading scholars in the academia. Having gone through their submission, the researcher analyses their views critically and then fort his own ideas and to fill the lacunae contained in their works. One of the major reasons for understanding a review of related literature are to document what has been done in the area of the research and determine areas left untreated. This work sort to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses of the works done so far in the field of study and bringing out the lacunae.

The researcher had taken into consideration literatures that are relevant to the objectives of the present study. Yasemir Akbaba and Jonathan Foxin *Religious Discrimination Against Religious Minorities in Christian Minority Countries: A Unique Case?* Defined religious discrimination as state restrictions on the religious practices or institutions of religious minorities that are not placed on the majority religion.<sup>3</sup>

In another study, Shareef describes religious minorities “as racial, ethnic or national and religious minorities residing in a nation-state with a clearly defined majority (dominant) group”.<sup>4</sup> According to Krishnaswami, religious minorities are group of

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<sup>2</sup> Akinola Olojo, "Muslims, Christians and Religious Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Mapping," *IFRA* 4, no. 33 (2014): 1 – 44.

<sup>3</sup> Yasemirakbaba & Jonathan Fox, "Religious Discrimination against Muslim Minorities in Christian Majority Countries: a unique case?," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12 no. 4 (2011): 4449-470.

<sup>4</sup> Schaefer Richard, "Religious Minorities," in *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. James Wright, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015): 121-141.

religious people that have a faith which is different to that held by the majority.<sup>5</sup> In order to modify the views of both scholars, religious minorities are therefore certain group of religious identities who are infinitesimal in number living in a diverse religions majority state or country.

It is very germane to visit submissions of scholars regarding how religious minorities are being treated via intimidation for no other reason than they practicing a different religion from those who happens to be their boss or leaders in various institutions like workplace etc. However, these studies shown above explained the definition of religious discrimination and religious minorities including the treatment of Christian minorities living in a Muslim populated area and vice versa.

It worthy of note that most of the literatures consulted only discussed religious discrimination against Muslim or Christian minorities not specifically on religious minorities. It is also important to mention that those studies does not link it's point of discussion on how such ill treatment could undermine human development in the 21st century which is the lacunae that the present study intends to analyze.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the rights of religious minorities in Nigerian?
2. What are the causes of discrimination against religious minorities in Nigeria?
3. What are the solutions to religious discrimination in Nigeria?

### **Research Methodology**

The study explored analytical method with empirical examples citing existing literatures and considering Quranic and Biblical injunctions to support arguments being raised in the work.

### **Rights of Religious Minorities in Nigeria**

One of the major issues increasing on a daily basis in our society is the hassle of intimidating religious minorities living in various communities of the country. People with different faiths are intermingling with one another and by extension, mist of these religious identities even relate together, celebrate festivals, live as one family and attend activities organised individually and collectively. It is of no doubt that this cordial relationship is well ingrained in their scriptures and as a matter of fact, there should be no

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<sup>5</sup> Arcot Krishnaswami, *Study of Discrimination in the matter of Religious Rights and Practices*, (New York: United Nations, 1960), 20.

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cause for religious chauvinism. It is clearly stated in the 1999 Constitution that everyone is free to believe and worship anything he so wish, this should not cause religious conflict and the interest of one another must be protected and not infringed upon in order to promote harmonious environment. The constitution as well frowns at adopting a single religion in a secular state as Nigeria and give room for individuals to practice any religion of their choice. It is imperative to note that states parading themselves as a *Shari'ah* State are only doing that out of their own volition because there is no state in Nigeria that you won't find Christians, Muslims or Traditionalists living there no matter how infinitesimal it will be and for this reason, everyone must be given free hand to profess their choice of religion, engage in its rites and rituals without humiliating people of other faiths.

Therefore, no one is also allowed to declare a State as Christian State like in the case of Governor Nyesom Wike of River State did some weeks back. This statement has given room for claims from the Muslim counterpart establishing that Islam existed earlier before Christianity in the State. In other words, perpetrators of such vulnerable act should be cautioned because it could lead to another religious mayhem if it's fire is not quickly deflamed. Despite some declarations that Sharia law will be applicable to Muslims only, there have been a number of documented cases where the opposite is true, especially in cases in which religious enforcers have administered on-the-spot punishments of individuals they believed were in violation of Sharia.<sup>6</sup>

Islamic history reveals that religious minorities during the days of Prophet Muhammad (p. b. u. h) enjoyed freedom of association and religious which was the hallmark message of the Prophet and even allowed them to carry out their religious serve within the premises of his mosque. Religious minorities are formally covered in human rights protections offered under both freedom of religion or belief and minority rights—these being, in addition to human rights, standards that apply to all, regardless of these categories. Minority rights are to be enjoyed in addition to existing rights.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ismene Zarifis, "Rights of Religious Minorities in Nigeria." *Human Rights Brief* 10, no.1 (2002): 22-25.

<sup>7</sup> Nazila Ghanea, "Are Religious Minorities Really Minorities?," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1, no. 1 issue (2012): 57-79.

## **Rights of Religious Minorities**

Salisu reiterates that rights from Islamic Perspective could be seen from two angles. The first is "rights of God" (Huququllah) and "rights of man" (*Huquq al-Insan*). Apparently, the rights of men generally leaves us into looking at the rights of individuals."<sup>8</sup> Yousuf posited that "individual freedom is sacred as long as he or she does not deliberately violate the Law of God, or transgress the rights of others."<sup>9</sup> However, these religious minorities rights are well ingrained in Section 43 of Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which guarantees the rights of religious minorities to in the following ways: right to freedom of religion, right to freedom to discrimination, right to acquire and own immovable property, right to life. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was magnanimous in his dealings with religious minorities and he maintained that they must not be unfairly levied, no bishop was to be driven out, no monk was to be expelled, no church was to be pulled down, and no Christian was to be converted forcefully. The Christian women who married Muslims were entitled to enjoy freedom to observe their own religion. If Muslims be engaged in hostilities with the Christians of another territory, no Christian resident living in Muslim state be treated with contempt. Any Muslim who violates this covenant, will be accounted recalcitrant to God and Prophet Muhammad (SAW).<sup>10</sup> These rights are explained tersely.

### **a. Right to Freedom of Religion**

Every Nigerian citizen irrespective of religious afflictions is free to practice and profess religion of their choices. Freedom is the state of being able to act without hindrance or restrict, liberty of action.<sup>11</sup> The Nigerian Constitution is very clear in this aspect and enables all religious identities to exercise the freedom of religion as protected

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<sup>8</sup> Moshood T. Salisu. *An Overview of Religious Conflicts with Emphasis on the Roles of the Muslim Youth (Qur'anic Pupils) in Nigeria*, ed. Ishaq Akintola, Badmus.O. Yusuf and Salisu.T. Moshood, Correlates of Islam, (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2009), 12-32.

<sup>9</sup> Yousuf, Ahmad "Islam, Minorities and Religious Freedom: A Challenge to Modern Theory of Pluralism," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no.1 (2000): 35-51.

<sup>10</sup> Md. Thowhidul Islam "Peaceful Coexistence of Various Religious Groups in Islam: Examples from the History of Muslim Societies," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 8, no.2 (2018): 183-203.

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by section 38 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Provides: *Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.*

This provision extends protection to religious minorities that may be subject to hostility by a predominant religious group.<sup>12</sup> Owing this, therefore, the idea that religious minorities are not freely to practice their religion in secular State like Nigeria is not in addendum with provision of Nigerian Constitution.

### **b. Right to Freedom from Discrimination**

Discrimination is defined as "treating a person or group differently because of the particular belief, race, and sex. Discrimination of religious groups can form a kind of comparison where religious groups are not free in practising their faith, frustration of any form into aggression, finally leading to armed conflict, and not unlikely in the form of a religious incompatibility (Basedau 3). The right to be freedom from discrimination is well entrenched in Section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution where it provides: *Every person shall be entitled to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, circumstance of sex, religion or political opinion.*

The rationale behind the freedom of discrimination, perhaps, is for all on earth to understand that we are from one soul (Adam) and this fact has been recognized by the Nigerian Constitution. This is contained in the Qur'anic passage where the Most High says: "*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)*"<sup>10</sup>.

In other words, the above Qur'anic verse along many other verses to stress the reality of seeing all and sundry as one family who should disregard different ion between mates based on biological, racial, sexual and religious differences.

### **c. The Right to be Free from Cruelty and Torture**

Torture has been defined in the Convention against Torture as intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering on someone, including to punish, intimidate, coerce or to get information (Equality and Human Rights Commission). Being cruel or harsh to human of our kind is totally frowned at by the Section 35(2) of the 1999 constitution of

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<sup>12</sup> Al Quran 49: 13

the Federal Republic of Nigeria as it provides: *Every person shall be guaranteed the right against torture.*

This provision as a matter of fact denied religious identities who are the majority dominated persons of a verse area in Nigeria not to use their vast power influence to act inhumanly to the religious minorities. The UN Human Rights Committee has also found that corporal punishment is considered excessive under Article 7 of the ICCPR, which prohibits cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.<sup>11</sup>

Having seen few analysis of the provision of the Nigerian Constitution on rights of religious minorities, it is pertinent to note that religious fanatics played a significant role in the entire fracas. In fact, they are the machineries used by politicians and other religious bigotries to bring the country under unrest atmosphere.

### **Contents of the Study**

Religious discrimination usually stems from the perceived superiority of one's religion over the others. In simple terms, religious intolerance or fanaticism is the inability of an adherent of a particular religion to acknowledge, accommodate and accept the right of others to live by another faith different from his own. Invariably, such attitude is connected to the conviction that one's religion is the only divinely ordained path to spiritual enlightenment and immortality in heaven. Consequently, a religious fanatic believes strongly that his religion is unquestionably superior to other religions. It is good to point out that being zealous for one's religion is commendable and is to be expected, but where such zeal is wrongly channeled, it becomes dangerous for the life of the community and it is an abuse of human rights. Our findings reveals that religious minorities are facing a lot of discrimination in Nigeria ranging from denial of professing and managing religious institutions, destruction of their places of worship, discrimination in schools, workplace and denial of community rights and movement.

### **Denial of Professing and Managing Religious Institutions**

Christian minorities in some parts of northern Nigeria are made vulnerable as they were relegated to second-class status. Christians were denied outright building permits and certificates of occupancy, forced to penetrate the state bureaucracy to obtain permissions, which often required bribes and most times denied. They were being

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<sup>11</sup> Zarifis. "Rights of Religious Minorities in Nigeria," 22-25.

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subjected to Islamic rule by making the religion superior to that of the Christian minorities. Islam has also given people the right to freedom of association and formation of parties or organizations. This right is also subject to certain general rules. It should be exercised for propagating virtue and righteousness and should never be used for spreading evil and mischief. For example, On a Friday, September 1, 2003 Kano State government announced that it is compulsory for all girls attending schools run by the state government to wear the *hijab*, whether or not they are Muslims. Ishaq Mahmoud who was the then Kano State Commissioner for Education said the order for school girls to wear *hijab* formed part of the state government's efforts to uphold public morals and ensure "the teachings of Islam are applied in each and every aspects of governance." The pronouncement provoked protests from the one Million strong Christian minorities in the state.<sup>12</sup>

It is very germane to mention from the above stated abuse of religious right and establish the fact that there is no portion of the Qur'an or Ahadith of the Prophet where non-Muslims are being mandated to use hijab. This a total deviation from the teachings of Islam and an act of compulsion and imposition which is negated in the religion. Hijab is a symbol of a Muslim woman and binding on her to use to protect her dignity because it conforms the Islamic standard of modesty. Islam stated that it is a condemnable act for Muslims to enforce the use of hijab by non-Muslim women as nothing but oppression. It is within the purview of the religion that people of other faiths should be given free choice of exercising their religious practices and they must not be compelled to dress as a Muslim except if they so wish to do so.

### Religious Discrimination in Public Schools

Reports of harassment in schools, including examples based on religious identity and practices, have raised public attention and congressional interest in the issue of religious discrimination in schools.<sup>13</sup> Individual students may allege religious discrimination in schools if they are the victims of violence or other harassment that is related to their religious beliefs (e.g., a derogatory term for a religious group is painted on

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<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Danjibo and Abubakar Oladeji, "Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria," *Working Paper* 39 (2009): 31-32.

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Brougher, "Religious Discrimination in Public Schools: A Legal Analysis," *Congressional Research Service* (2012):3.

a student's locker) or if they are excluded from some school activities or groups because of their religious beliefs (e.g., a Muslim student is denied membership in a Bible study club). In the same vein, public schools generally cannot deny religious groups access to the schools or the schools' resources if the same facilities or resources are made available to non-religious groups. For example, Female Muslim secondary school students reported that testing officials from the West African Exam.

Examination Council (WAEC) ordered them to remove their hijab and/or veil before they could take a standardized examination, but WAEC officials subsequently took corrective action.<sup>14</sup>

### **Destruction of Places of Worship**

Traditional worshippers in some parts of Igbo land were denied of the right of freedom of religious assemblage. The situation was so bad to the extent that some of their members who gathered in a small group were harassed and victimized by the new converts to Christianity in those areas that just witnessed the Christian mission evolutionary. At different times and places, there were face-to-face encounter with Christians and traditionalists, because the early Christian missionaries behaved like social revolutionaries. They plunged into the condemnation and eradication of traditional religion. Traditional music and song, drama, and dance were totally denounced as bad and immoral. Statues, images, and emblems of remarkable artistic work and aesthetic merit were wantonly destroyed by some of the overzealous converts as idols and works of the devil.<sup>15</sup>

### **Restrictions on Community Rights and Movement**

This is the biggest challenge of them all in Nigeria whereby people of other faiths or individuals are restricted from going out at a fixed time and this is a common habit of the Traditional worshippers.

These groups of people are also fund of harassing religious identities in the street. For example, the Oro festival in Sabo Sagamu in 1999 whereby the Traditional

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<sup>14</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, "2015 Report on International Religious Freedom," 2016, [https://2009\\_2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2015/af/256029.htm](https://2009_2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2015/af/256029.htm), accessed on 20 June 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Okeke Chukwuma, Ibenwa Christopher and, Gloria T. Okeke "Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example," *SAGE Open* 3, no.4 (2017):1-10.

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worshippers restricted people from coming out most especially women that eventually led to clashes between the Yorubas who are actively involved in the practice and the Hausa Fulanis who are mostly Muslims. The clash became a retaliatory affair which claimed lives and left many injured.<sup>16</sup> This development created tension in the mind of the affected religious adherents and it led to the turnout of people Churches and Mosques as people were afraid to worship in their various worship centres.<sup>17</sup>

### **Discrimination in Securing Employment**

All employees need to be treated in an equitable manner without being discriminated on the basis of their race and creed.<sup>18</sup> The Constitution forbids the establishment of a state religion and guarantees the right to freedom of religion. Nigeria has a population roughly split in half, between Christians predominantly in the South and Muslims in the North, and with a minority population of traditional religion.<sup>19</sup> Despite as stated in the Constitution religious minorities are being denied of securing jobs for themselves on the account of their faith by religious fanatics who use their position of authority to profile and humiliate people of other faiths. Recently, a Muslim brother (Mahmud Muhammed Katun) who was earlier employed by the Niger Delta Power Holding Company (NDPHC) was relieved of his appointment on 1st of February, 2016 and supplanted by a Christian who was not competent to hold the position owing to the fact that he has a beard.

### **Implication for Human Development in the 21st Century**

The presence of Christianity and Islam in Africa (among others) demonstrate that religious diversity has come to stay and will arguably remain with us until the end of time—"until Jesus returns." The interesting aspect of religious diversity is that neither Christian nor Muslim theological thought regard this as an accident of religious history that took God by surprise. The Christian theological understanding of God as all-knowing renders it impossible to conceive of religious diversity as having come about without

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<sup>16</sup> Olubomehin Oladapo, "Ethnic and Communal Clashes in Nigeria: The Case of Sagamu 1994 Hausa-Yoruba Conflict," *International Multi Disciplinary Journal* 6, no. 3, (2012):135-149.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Darity William and Mason Patricks, "Evidence on Discrimination in Employment Codes of Colour, Codes of Gender," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no.2 (1998): 63-90.

<sup>19</sup> Ilesanmi Simeon, "Constitutional Treatment of Religion and the Politics of Human Rights in Nigeria," *African Affairs* 100, no. 401 (2001): 529-54.

God's knowledge. While Christians will definitely not claim that God brought about religious diversity, they will affirm that diversity came about with God's knowledge—at best with God's permission and at worst against God's will. Islam, on the other hand, states that if God had so wished, God would have made us one community but that God did not wish that to be the case.<sup>20</sup> This is evident in the Qur'an where the Almighty recognizes the reality of difference in religion saying "to you your religion, to me mine"<sup>21</sup>

"Ibn Is-haaq said, 'Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Az-Zubayr narrated that the (Najraan) delegation came to the Messenger of Allaah, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, in Madeenah and entered his masjid wearing robes and garments after he had prayed the 'Asr prayer. They accompanied a caravan of camels led by Bani Al-Haarith ibn Ka'b. The Companions of the Messenger of Allaah who saw them said that they never saw a delegation like them after that. When their time of worship came, they stood up to perform their worship in the Prophet's masjid. He, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said, 'Let them (worship),' and they prayed towards the east.'" <sup>24</sup> It should however be noted that both scriptural evidences establishes the fact that Islam is a religion that accomodates people of other faiths and enjoins its adherents to treat them with utmost sincerity and no injustice should not be meted on them in any issue of disagreement or conflict. Islam does not see any persons or group as a minority and they must not be treated as one, all human being are equal before the Almighty, this was the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) all through his life time by making sure non-Muslims are being given fair treatment in all matters of the state.

Apparently, religion or relationship have been blackmailed and castigated in Nigeria as troublemakers in the words of an observer: "It would appear that religion as a whole has failed in its mission. Religion is supposed to unify people, but instead it has helped to divide and separate them more and more..."<sup>25</sup>

It has been argued by many that the ultimate goal of the concept of human development, which is to ensure peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and love through inter personal relation may not be achieved if there persist a growing increase of

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<sup>20</sup> Chukwuma Mbilla, Ibenwa, Christopher & Okeke, Gloria. T. "Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example." *SAGE Open*, 3, no.4 (2017):1-10.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Quran 109:6

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victimization against people who does not share same belief with us. It could be a success and not effort in futility if adherents of different religions could see one another as brothers from a single soul (Adam). Human relation is a source of societal peace and tranquility which is a strong weapon for human development especially in this 21st century.

Religious peace bodies are yet to work on orientating the religious extremists on the need for loving other Faith's recipients as we love ourselves as ingrained in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) that "None of you is a believer except he wishes for his fellow brother, what he wishes for himself". They must also be told the danger in treating other people in a badly manner. This will further make them to eschew violent attitude leveled against their religious counterpart which is causing Milieu in the society at large.

### **Solutions to Religious Discrimination in Nigeria**

Apparently, many members of religious or belief communities face discrimination based on their religion or belief. They are unduly restricted in the enjoyment of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. As such, members of certain religious or belief communities suffer discrimination in their access to public education, health services or public posts. In extreme cases, some of them are also arrested or killed due to their religious affiliation.<sup>26</sup>

In this regard, States have the duty to refrain from discriminating against individuals or groups based on their religion and belief (obligation to respect); they are required to prevent such discrimination, including from non-State actors (obligation to protect); and must take steps to ensure that, in practice, every person in their territory enjoys all human rights without discrimination of any kind (obligation to fulfill).

This difference is not just a matter of religion being subject to choice, as the roots and sources of religious identity are generally more complicated and complex than this. A person's identity as Christian, Muslim, and atheist and so on might, to a great extent, be a product of culture, education, socialisation and even indoctrination of various, overlapping kinds. What really matters is not so much that the person's particular religious identity is chosen but that it has some relevant ideological content and is, to that extent, sensitive to criticism, reflection, discussion and debate.<sup>27</sup>

Religious identities in Nigeria must be aware of the fact that compulsion is incompatible with religion. It was on this basis that Islam, Christianity and African

Traditional Religion enjoins equal treatment of one another regardless of their religious afflictions. This would make the society to grow in peace and as well establish human relationship. Religious discrimination can only be solved through the following:

### **1. Understanding Religious Discrimination**

It is very necessary for adherents of religion who in one way or the other work in the same company or Ministry with people of other faith to understand the concept of religious discrimination and its forms in order not to fall prey of victimising adherents of diverse groups.

#### **a. Direct Discrimination**

This happens when someone treats you worse than another person in a similar situation because of your religion or belief. For example: a bank refuses you a loan because you're a Muslim. Discrimination can occur even where both the discriminator and the person being discriminated against hold the same religious or philosophical belief. For example: a Christian businessman interviews two women for a job as his personal assistant. One is A Christian and the other is a Traditionalist. The Christian woman is the best candidate at interview but he gives the job to the other woman because he thinks his clients (who are mainly Muslims or have no religion or belief) will prefer it. This is direct discrimination because of religion or belief

#### **b. Indirect Discrimination**

Indirect discrimination happens when an organisation has a particular policy or way of working that applies to everyone but which puts you at a disadvantage because of your religion or belief. For example: you are a Muslim and you finish early on Fridays in order to observe the Jum'at service. Your manager has changed the weekly team meetings from Wednesday afternoons to Friday afternoons and you are therefore often absent. Indirect religion or belief discrimination can be permitted but the organisation or employer must be able to show that the policy or way of working is necessary for the way the business operates.

### **2. Establish a Zero Tolerance Policy against Religious Harassment and Discrimination**

In an environment where people of different religious identities work as one family, it is important to set a zero-tolerance policy against religious discrimination

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whereby all workers maintain a work place that is free from harassment and any other form of discrimination based on religion. This would curb adherents of various religions to be wary of their actions in order not to cause religious acrimony in the work place. It is also important to launch disciplinary action on anyone that violates such policy. It is even advisable to include it in the employee handbook, create an internal system for reporting complaints on religious discrimination and victimization.

### **3. Building Relationship between people of diverse Faith**

To fight against religious discrimination, you can start by respecting religious differences, focusing on widely shared differences, and bringing together people from different faiths to build relationships with one another. This aspect does not give room for favouritism, it would allow adherents to share things together, cooperate with one another and in fact, move the society forward in all ramifications. If adherents of the three religions could explore the teachings embedded in their scriptures that preach brotherhood and neighborliness, they will see common features of their faith and live in peace and harmony, to facilitate the spirit of living happily and this would further enable them to know each other's scriptures.<sup>28</sup>

### **4. Deemphasizing derogatory statements**

Inciting statements such as “whose religion is the best” needs to be jettisoned because this will normally deteriorate the level of harmony in the society and recognizing the virtue of other religions will be of immense help. Incitement contributes to sowing the seeds of suspicion, mistrust and intolerance. In the process of running one another down it often results into crisis. Umejesi and Olanrewaju agree that religious intolerance is one of the causes of religious conflicts. So, devotees of both religions should learn how to tolerate one another to expunge conflicts from the religious environment.<sup>29</sup>

### **5. Fair Treatment of One another Regardless of Religious**

#### **Affiliations**

Treating everyone with fairness should be the hallmark of every religious group. The notion of equality between mankind implies that they are equally treated before the

law regardless of their religious, cultural and geographical identities.<sup>22</sup> In Islam, fairness and justice to all in worldly relations, even at the period of victimization. The Almighty says: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you serve to wrong and depart from justice....."(Q5:8)

This is a reflection on how God regarded being fair to one another in the human society. Human being must be aware of the fact that, Christians, Muslims and other religious identities have a single origin despite their differences in race, colour, language and none must be given preference over another for mutual co-existence and cooperation to excel. For despite the differences in countries and climates, languages and complexions, they feel the same way and they are all equally under Allah's care.<sup>23</sup> It is also evident as stressed in one of the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) where he says: ".....Indeed, there is no virtue for an Arab over a Non-Arab manner for red over black nor black over red except through piety"<sup>24</sup>. Two New Testament texts explicitly mention isotēs, the Greek word for equality, proportionality, or fairness. (In 2 Corinthians 8:13–14)<sup>25</sup> Paul urges the church in Corinth to give generously to the Jerusalem church, "that there might be equality." And in Colossians 4:1, he tells masters to grant their slaves "what is right and fair."<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It was gathered from the study that certain issues such as intolerance, denying individuals the rights to individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate, or change their religion and in most cases, some religious minorities are denied of employment, their religious houses destroyed etc. These obnoxious acts are not only contrary to the country's constitutional stipulations on freedom of religion and worship but it totally a chaos on peaceful living of religious adherents in a multi-religious society like Nigeria. However, this paper has solved the problem of discrimination by establishing the fact that

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<sup>22</sup> Falilat A. Keleni, "Critical Survey of Christian-Muslim Relations in Selected Schools in Apapa/Iganmu Local Council Development Area of Lagos State," *Ad-Dirayah International Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1(2017): 189-199.

<sup>23</sup> Yusuf. A. Ali *Modern English Translation of the Qur'an Meanings and Commentary* (Kases: Manar International Corp: 2001), 120.

<sup>24</sup> Ahmad bn Hanbal, *Musnad Imam Ahmad bn Hanbali*. (Beirut : Darussalam, 2012), 653.

<sup>25</sup> Corinthians 8:13–14

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providing equal rights to diversified religious adherents not minding their affiliations would make peace to triumph and progress in the social development of the country in the 21st century will also be ascertained.

In conclusion, religious adherents should cultivate the habit of treating their counterparts with kind behaviour, extend hand of generosity towards them, maintain socio-economic relations with them in order to advance the development of the country in the 21st century and beyond. It is very germane to also have at the back of their minds that every Nigerian citizen has the right to profess any religion of his/her choice and this must be exercised without harming or humiliating others.

Finally, both Muslims and Christians are pivoted to embrace one another, not to see one another as enemies in point of the fact that we are all mortals from same source (Adam). Hence, no discrimination in any infinitesimal way should be allowed, every persons must get whatever rights that belongs him/her, this will create means for development in every strata of the country.

The government and political gladiators should also desist from using citizens against one another in order to create rancour among them, this will not only bring discord but total unrest in sociological space and in general, good governance will not be realized.

### **Recommendations**

1. All religious identities should respect other people's views and beliefs.
2. Religious adherents should desist from being used as agent of distractions to cause instability in the nation's development.
3. Minorities should be given equal rights to voting, appointments, education, employment, to build and profess religion of their choices.
4. The religious minorities living in the majority populated areas should be given full authority to profess their own laws too in order to dense the tension of violence.
5. Religious leaders and members must be fully oriented on how to live peacefully with people of other faiths.
6. All citizens must be late abiding and holistically acquaint themselves with the provisions of the constitution of human rights.

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