

Is Nigeria Headed for a Civil War?



Women run from the scene of a bombing at St. Finbarr's Catholic Church in a suburb of the city of Jos, March 11, 2012.

Reuters photo

Poverty, inequality and injustice are threatening to cause a broad religious civil war in Nigeria, an international Christian-Muslim task force led by the World Council of Churches said on July 11, 2012. Violence between Nigerian Christians and Muslims has already killed hundreds of people this year alone. But the root causes go far beyond religion, the group's report said.

Radical Islamist groups such as Boko Haram use these non-religious issues to encourage religious violence. When one group attacks, the other group wants revenge and attacks back. Christian and Muslim gang violence has also led many people to believe that the violence is mainly because of religion. Christian and Muslim missionaries in Nigeria have added to the

problems, encouraging anger around the world against each other, using YouTube, Facebook, e-mail, and twitter to each tell their side of the story to their supporters.

In Nigeria, three things are mixed together - religion, politics and ethnicity. All three are mixed up with corruption, poverty, and fear, according to Prince Bola Ajibola, a former judge in Nigeria.

The task force warned that blaming only religion for the conflicts would convince Nigerians that it was mainly a religious conflict, when it is not. If most people of Nigeria believe that it is a religious conflict, that belief will lead to more religious violence.

ETHNIC HISTORY & POLITICS

When Nigeria was controlled by the British, three main political regions were set up. Each of the regions handled government a bit differently, even though the British had to approve everything. In the north, people were used to being ruled directly by their



Nigeria Muslim women hurry through their destroyed neighborhood.

nigeria-displaced-presstv.jpg



The British divided Nigeria into three political regions.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Nigeria

leaders, so it was easy for the British to rule there through the local leaders. They also left religion and education to the local leaders in the north.

In the south of Nigeria, the British ruled much more directly. British Christian missionaries set up British-style schools. Many Yoruba were Nigeria's first doctors, lawyers, government workers, and other professionals.

Nigeria was really just a lot of different tribal areas the British had pushed together into one country. Because of these tribal feelings, Nigeria allowed the three big regions to break into smaller regions after the British left. This was supposed to make Nigeria more peaceful. But it made people feel even less like Nigerian citizens and more like their local tribes' citizens.

SOLUTIONS

The report identified many separate problems in Nigeria. Solving any or all of those problems could help bring overall peace to Nigeria.

BAD LEADERSHIP

Nigerian government is corrupt and does not manage money or their responsibilities well. There is disagreement about who owns what land. Victims of the violence are not getting help. The troublemakers are not being punished. The violence is worst in Nigeria's "Middle Belt" around the city of Jos, where the mostly Muslim north meets the largely Christian south. And while religious leaders could be calling for peace and calm, only some are doing that. Other religious leaders . Christian and Muslim . have encouraged the violence.

POVERTY

There is a huge difference in wealth between the mainly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south. The southern states of Nigeria control the oil, and therefore have more money. The northern states have very few resources, and are therefore much poorer. Also, there is conflict over land in the north, where the Fulani (traditional herders of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group) need land to graze their cattle, but the government has not allowed them to legally own land for grazing.

DISCRIMINATION

Several small ethnic groups have lived in central Nigeria for hundreds of years. They often resent the new Hausa-Fulani businessmen and animal herders moving down from northern Nigeria. They call them settlers. Since the local governments have so much power in Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani settlers often do not have the same legal rights to free healthcare, education, land, and jobs. To the new Hausa-Fulani settlers this seems very unfair, especially since some of their families migrated to these areas decades ago.



Nigeria has gone from three large political regions to 36 separate states, each with their own leaders.

http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4864&lang=en

According to the task force report, the Nigerian national government must use legal changes to fix many of these problems. It may even need a drastic solution such as a constitutional clarification or amendment, the report said.

HOPEFUL STEPS

A group from the task force met with Nigerian government and religious leaders from May 22 to 25, 2012, to see how they could help. The task force said they would work with organizers to publish books for Nigeria's school so they could teach children the peaceful beliefs shared by Christians and Muslims. They also said they would help start a new center to collect accurate information on the conflict. This information could help leaders understand the conflicts and start to find solutions.