

AGENDA ITEM 3: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AND ATROCITY CRIMES

Intervention presented by: Professor Bem Angwe – Executive Secretary, National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria.

The Chairperson,

Nigeria is not immune from violent conflicts being experienced around the globe. Like many of these conflicts in other parts of the world, the situations in some parts of Nigeria have religious and inter-communal colorations with dire implications on the religious and identity rights of many minority groups in Nigeria.

ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

First, the diverse nature of the Nigerian society which is multi-cultural is not necessarily a disadvantage but it constitutes a security challenge within the country's political environment. There are at least four forms or patterns of conflicts in the country:

Resource-based conflict as is evidenced in Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa and Delta States; conflicts around the control of the state and its institution as is the case with Delta, Nasarawa and Rivers States. Identity-based Conflicts in Benue, Delta and Nasarawa and Conflicts associated with the political economy. These patterns of conflicts most times are accompanied with direct or indirect religious colorations as is the case with "Boko Haram" in the North-Eastern parts of Nigeria, Borno, Yobe and Adamawa.

Second, there is significant evidence to indicate that these conflicts are also about livelihood, access to land and human survival, pitting pastoralist and sedentary populations against one another in the context of evolving ecological conditions and land use pressures as is the cases in Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue and Kaduna States.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Section 14(2) (b) of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution which explicitly states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of Government". Squarely obligates government to protect and guarantee the livelihood, well-being and security of all people in Nigeria. In a bid to discharge this responsibility to protect, government established institutions and structures to cater for the victims and survivors of these conflicts. One of such institution is National Emergency Management Agency (N.E.M.A), which have presence across the three levels of government as well as the National Commission for refugees and internally displaced persons. Beyond shelter, food and other necessities of life, the victims and survivors of these situations equally deserve reassurance, truth and justice. They also deserve reconstruction of their destroyed communities and other palliatives to enable them resume peaceful co-existence. While government efforts in this regard are commendable, there is room for

improvement and the Nigerian government is been encouraged by the National Human Rights Commission to improve on existing structures.

In addition to assurances of justice to the victims of violent conflicts, government is encouraged to upscale "security, political, human development, economic and investment incentives" necessary for reconstituting inter-community life of affected communities. Such efforts must address the relationships between government at federal, state and local government levels on the one hand and communities on the other. The roles and limitations of Judicial Commissions of Inquiry as well as how to sequence the measures proposed and enlist community support for them strengthened.

CHALLENGES

The quest to gain and continue perpetuation of political power by some group of people, like in Benue, Plateau, Rivers and Delta States often leads to conflict and degenerates into violence. This is mostly triggered when elections are not free and fair thereby truncating the wishes of the minorities who feel perpetually marginalized through political intimidation and harassment.

ROLE OF STATE INSTITUTIONS

The National Human Rights Commission has been deeply concerned and as such taken steps to address the situations of violence and atrocities committed against minorities. It has since established department of Conflict prevention, Ethics and good governance as well as a Human Rights Crimes and Mass Atrocities Unit with a focus on these situations. The Commission had also proposed to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to establish Minorities, Gender and Human Rights Desk in all Federal Agencies.

At the national level, the Office of the National Security Adviser has similarly been engaged with programs to address these situations. There is evident reduction in the intensity of violations in some areas in the Northern States of Nigeria particularly the Middle Belt States like Plateau and Kaduna over the past 18 months. However, in the North-eastern States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, a lot of efforts are being made to calm the situation of insurgency which has a religious colouration unlike the others. With modest success achieved in some parts of north due to the combined efforts of the security agencies and community leaders indicate that when communities are fully mobilized a lot could be achieved.

Quite clearly, more must be done not only to address the grave human rights implications of mass atrocities and violent crimes against minorities, but also to rebuild peaceful co-existence in our dear country, Nigeria.

Thank you.

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