

# Religious Insurgency and The Quest for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria: The Islamic Model as A Panacea

Manzoor Apenna Lawal<sup>1\*</sup>, & Kazeem Oluwaseun Dauda<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Islamic Studies Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology, Omu-Ajose, P.M.B. 2128, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Religious Studies, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi-Abuja.

\*lawalmonzoor63@gmail.com

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## Abstract

*Peace advocates, conflict analysts, security experts and academia have effortlessly analyzed and advanced various ways to contain the religious insurgency championed by the Boko Haram movement which has threatened Nigeria's quest for peace for more than a decade despite the counter-insurgency measures of successive Nigerian governments. However, recent situations depict that the insurgency remains unabated. This paper examined Nigeria's turbulent decade of religious insurgency, its position within the Islamic context, and Islamically-inclined practicable solution to the threat. It used analytical research method based on existing secondary literature and primary Islamic law sources. The paper reveals that a turbulent decade of Boko Haram insurgency has wreaked havoc on the peace and tranquility previously existing among Nigeria's diverse ethno-religious entities. The analysis of Quranic texts, hadith and opinions of notable scholars also indicates that religious insurgency associated with Boko Haram is inconsistent with Islamic doctrines. Tolerance among religionists, proper religious teachings and interpretation of divine scripture, genuine inter and intra-faith dialogues, Islamic leadership-cum-governance paradigms, among others, were the identified Islamic-modelled panacea to the insurgency. The paper concludes that if the identified Islamic model can be embraced and considered in the scheme of things by religious and political leaders, as well as their ardent followers, the current religious insurgency would be drastically curtailed, thereby advancing sustainable peace in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Boko Haram; Islamic model; sustainable peace; religious insurgency*

## INTRODUCTION

Religious-motivated insurgency since the terror attacks by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the 1990s and 2000s until recently, has been a recurring topic of discussion around the world. The discourse has mostly centered around the connection between Islam, Muslims and these attacks and related devastating acts of terrorism globally. A study conducted by Bar (2004) discovered a link between current global terrorism and Islam. However, Shehu (2020) state that linking Islām with the global trend of terrorism may be due to the actions of misguided youths, who perpetrate violence in the name of *jihad* and kill people for no just cause, thereby presenting a false perception of what Islam represents. Apparently, several groups in contemporary times have manipulated Islam to commit heinous acts, resulting in a surge in religious uprisings around the world with disastrous consequences for peace and development (Dauda, 2021). Hence, religious differences, intolerance, and extremism have arguably been at the heart of conflicts in Iraq, Syria, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and a slew of other places (Maregere, 2011).

Since 2009 and until the recent time, living in or visiting Nigeria's northeastern region has been extremely dangerous due to the religious insurgency linked to the *Boko Haram* movement, a radical religious group thereby putting the region in peril (Akinbi, 2015; Akubo & Okolo, 2019). The group has been implicated in numerous bombings, suicide bombings, kidnappings, murders, arsons, and willful destruction of property in Nigeria and her neighboring nations. Overall, its violent attacks have led to the loss of lives, increased fear and instability, vandalized property, and people fleeing their homes (Felter, 2018). Evidently, the religious insurgency had persisted for more than a decade despite various counter-insurgency measures, such as the military campaigns, joint task force (JTF) operations, intelligence gathering, non-kinetic approach, overwhelming funding, humanitarian interventions, and international collaborations, implemented by Nigerian successive administrations.

Sadly, the *Boko Haram* movement has made use of Islam as a primary identity and mobilization tool. Nonetheless, Islam outright condemns all acts of terrorism, savagery, anarchy, and devastation (see Qur'an 2:195; 5:32; 6:151; and 16:93, as well as a number of the noble Prophet's [PBUH] sayings and traditions). It promotes the acceptance of principles that help build a society that is tranquil, secure, and stable. Regardless of ethnicity, religion, tribe, social background, or political status, Islam incorporates the laws of justice, welfare, and the protection of human rights and dignity for all individuals (see Qur'an 5:8). It establishes a unique way of living for all Muslims, one that includes a set of principles, concepts, and values necessary to uphold the sanctity of life, protect property, and foster peaceful coexistence. The foregoing has made observers questioning the connection between Islam, Muslims and the group's insurgency goals.

However, various scholarly research have been conducted to investigate the evolution, causes, patterns, and impact of the *Boko Haram* insurgency, as well as the government's efforts, strategies, and interventions in containing the insurgency, but few of these studies provided theological solution from Islamic perspective that can bring about total annihilation of the insurgents' attacks on the populace and lasting peace in the affected region. This paper in an attempt to fill this gap aims to identify an Islamic-modelled panacea to more than a decade *Boko Haram* insurgency in Nigeria. To accomplish this task, the following specific objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. assess a decade of religious insurgency in Nigeria between 2009 and 2019;
2. analyze the scriptural, prophetic sayings and scholarly opinions on religious insurgency of *Boko Haram* movement; and
3. identify the Islamic model as a panacea to religious insurgency of *Boko Haram* movement in Nigeria.

To actualize these objectives, this article was organized into five sections. The introduction was covered in the first section. The second section was based

on a literature review on religious insurgency and peace. The third section identified and discussed the research methodology. The fourth section concentrated on results and discussion. The last section provided the conclusion of the study.

## **METHOD**

This article employed analytical research method. This method involves relying on data sourced from existing literature without the need to carry out fieldwork. It relied on information derived from existing secondary sources from journal articles, published and edited books, printed and online newspapers, government publications, archival and website materials, conference proceedings, as well as reports from United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Council on Foreign Relations' (CFR), Statista, among others. The primary sources of Islamic law, including the holy Qur'an in translated form and *Ḥadith* or *Sunnah*, as narrated in *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhari* and *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, were also used. The information obtained from these sources were analyzed using content analysis approach. The analyzed contents and identified themes were appropriately applied in this work. The rationale for choosing this research method is because of its relevance to the current study and its cost-effective nature.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **A decade of Religious Insurgency in Nigeria, 2009-2019**

*Boko Haram* as the deadliest terrorist group in Nigeria was formed by a radical Muslim preacher, Mohammed Yusuf, around 2002 in the suburb of Maiduguri in Borno State, North-East Nigeria. Until recently, the group's official name is *Jamā'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihād*, which means, "Brethren committed to the propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Holy War". By 2015, the group was factionalized into two, with a faction known as Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by Abu Musab al-Barnāwi after he

reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), while the other faction, which retains the name “*Boko Haram*” is under the control of Abubakar Shekau (Amao, 2020).

Omenma, Onyishi and Okolie (2020) traced the emergence of the group to the late 1990s when it existed in various forms primarily with religious motives and subsequently utilized low-intensity violence. In respect to the context, character, strategies and motivations for terrorism and insurgency, they considered *Boko Haram* as both a terrorist and insurgent organization. Based on General Rodriguez’s report that established links of “communications, training and weapons” (Guitta & Simcox 2014:6 cited in Omenma, *et al.*, 2020:3) between *Boko Haram* and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, al-Shabab in Somalia, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the group was designated a terrorist organization by the national governments, such as United States of America (2013), Canada (2013), Australia (2014), United Kingdom (2014), and international organizations, including United Nations and European Union in 2014 respectively. Following the pronouncements, Nigeria proscribed it as a terrorist group in 2014 (Omenma, *et al.*, 2020).

Since 2009, *Boko Haram*’s notoriety has transformed into a high-intensity group of assassins, suicide bombers, kidnappers, with sophisticated weapons, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and arms and ammunitions of varying degrees, to carry out its deadly acts of bombing, killing, conscription and territorial occupation in the North (Omenma, *et al.*, 2020). The onslaughts by the group have mainly targeted government infrastructures, especially security agencies’ facilities and stations, United Nations’ building, churches, mosques, schools, motor parks and markets, while countless number of security agents and innocent persons have borne the brunt of *Boko Haram*’s acts of devastation (Akubo & Okolo, 2019).

However, there are counter-insurgency measures put in place by successive administrations to contain *Boko Haram* activities. These measures include

promulgation of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act (2011) (as amended in 2013), use of specialized anti-insurgency organizations, such as South Africa's Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP), military campaigns and Joint Task Force (JTF) operations, and Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Others are failed dialogue, negotiations, enactment and adoption of the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) in 2014 (amended in 2016), intelligence gathering, overwhelming funding, humanitarian interventions, and international collaborations. There are also de-radicalization and peace-building programmes and initiatives through the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), the Presidential Initiative for the NorthEast (PINE), the Presidential Committee on the NorthEast Initiative (PCNI), among others.

Unfortunately, most of the aforementioned counter-insurgency strategies have been ineffective in curtailing the religious insurgency. This is confirmed in the series of studies and reports by scholars and experts of note. For instance, Omenma, *et al.* (2020:3), in their contemporary overview of a decade of *Boko Haram* activities averred that *Boko Haram* has created situations where violence has dominated the political landscape, but the military campaigns have failed to end the threat. This is equally established in the reports published by Global Terrorism Index (GTI) between 2013 and 2020. The impact analysis of *Boko Haram* attacks from 2013 to 2018 as done by Omenma, *et al.* (2020) shows that the year 2014 recorded astronomical rise in the number of terrorism attacks (22.13%), fatalities (38.17%) and injuries (27.96%).

Similarly, in a CNN report, which reveals that *Boko Haram* in 2015 overtook ISIS as the world's deadliest terrorist group with 6,644 deaths in 2014, an increase of 317 percent from the previous year, while ISIS was responsible for 6,073 deaths (Pisa & Hume, 2015). The two groups share similar ideology (i.e. *Salafi Jihādism*) and were responsible for more than half (51%) the deaths attributed to terrorism in the world in 2015 (Pisa & Hume, 2015). Available data from the Council on Foreign Relations' (CFR) Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) documented 2,021

incidents involving *Boko Haram* in which 37,530 people were killed; the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project recorded 3,346 incidents in which 34,261 people were killed from June 2011 to June 2018 (Campbell & Harwood, 2018).

Furthermore, Amao (2020) analyzed a decade of terror of Nigeria's interminable *Boko Haram* insurgency employing a historical approach. The scholar asserted that successive Nigerian governments have failed to nip the insurgency in the bud. Although, he attributed this failure to the emergence, growing and unchecked influence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad region, and the unresolved ill-equipped state of the Nigerian military. This can explain the reason why in 2019 alone, 1,493 people lost their lives in terrorist attacks of *Boko Haram*, while over two million people have been internally displaced between 2009 and 2019 (Varrella, 2021).

Equally, investigations carried out by Onuoha, Nwangwu and Ugwueze (2020) on counterinsurgency operations of the Nigerian military against *Boko Haram* insurgency highlighted the successes recorded by the Nigerian military in the dislodge of *Boko Haram* terror activities. Particularly, the achievements were made in the areas of recovery of some previously seized territories, freeing of captives, and interdiction of the group's logistics. As noted by these scholars, cases of shortages of arms and ammunition at the battlefield due to the embezzlement of huge allocations to the defence sector had invariably induced cases of soldiers' low morale and by extension, battlefield absconds. Consequently, *Boko Haram* remains irrepressible and continues to launch daring attacks on military personnel, armor tanks and bases (Onuoha, *et al.*, 2020).

It can be deduced from the foregoing that *Boko Haram*'s turbulent decade of religious insurgency had unfortunately succeeded in destroying the lives and property of the people, and wreaked havoc to political and socioeconomic stability and development hitherto enjoyed by the people, as well as daunted the peace and tranquility that previously existed among diverse ethno-religious groups in

Nigeria. The suicide bombing attacks by the group might have been drastically reduced as various reports (such as Amao, 2020; Omenma et al., 2020) have shown, but the group continually terrorizes the populace around its camps with worryingly increasing proportion of deaths.

### **Analysis of Scriptural, Prophetic Sayings and Scholarly Opinions on Religious Insurgency of *Boko Haram***

It is a commonplace fact that the way Muslim scholars perceive religion is different from non-Muslims. Islamic jurists derive their conceptions of religion from the sources of Islamic guidance: *Qur'an* (the Holy Book), *Hadith* and *Sunnah* (the sayings/traditions or known practices of Prophet Muḥammad [Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him]), *Ijma* (opinion consensus), and *Qiyas* (analogical reasoning). From the Islamic point of view, religion denotes the absolute belief and total submission to the will of Allah, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and all that are within and between them; emphasizing the absolute Unity of God in His Being, in worshipping Him and in His Attributes; and to believe in His Divine Justice, Command, the Divine Revelations, the Angels, the Messengers, the Judgment Day, and the Predestination.

The word “religion” is mentioned ninety-two (92) times in the holy Qur’an, in addition to different derivatives found in three verses, mainly with these meanings: Islam, obedience, law, worship, unity, *Sharī’ah* (regulations), limits (put by Allah), tradition, punishment, accountability, and nation (Bayram, 2010). Religion is also perceived as a “source of goodness and happiness in this world and the hereafter,” “divine law,” “being accountable to the Creator and creature,” “total reliance on God,” “treating people with love, compassion and fairness,” and “source of peace”. This suggests that religion is more than bowing, prostrating, surrendering, and worshipping; it is a complete code of understanding ways of living a perfect and peaceful life and not otherwise, as recent events related to *Boko Haram* movement, have shown.



However, the religious insurgency of *Boko Haram* has brought about unprecedented killings in the nation's trajectory, and it remains one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world. The terror campaigns by this group in Nigeria had claimed thousands of lives, and left many people injured and property worth Billions of Naira wantonly destroyed. The group's increasing bombing attacks had resulted in heightened tension, anxiety and a sense of insecurity hitherto unknown in this part of the world (Muzan, 2014). The group had laid siege on mosques, churches, government facilities, schools, security institutions and forces, and killed worshipers, Islamic clerics and Pastors, students, security officials, traditional leaders and innocent souls. It has equally carried out abduction of girls, female students and women from their various schools, homes and on the streets.

The group is vehemently opposed to western education. Much as this thesis may look attractive, it lacks substance because this cannot be justified within the tenets of Islam, which emphasize on education and knowledge acquisition irrespective of place. The following *hadith* justifies this position:

Narrated Anas ibn Malik: that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." (Sunan Ibn Majah 224).

In another narration,

Narrated Abu Hurairah: that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him." (Jāmi' at-Tirmidhi 2646).

However, the fanaticism of the group is represented in its claims to advancing the teachings of the Prophet [PBUH] and a just cause of Islam, whereas in all intents and purposes, Islam strictly forbids unjust killing, forceful conversion, extremism, radicalism and insurgency. Allah, the Almighty, in Qur'an 5:32 warns against killing a soul unjustly in the following verse:

...whoever kills a soul unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.... (Yusuf Ali trans., 1985)

This verse states that unlawful killing of a human being is *akin* to killing the entire people in the world. This verse is used in Islamic jurisprudence to condemn and denounce unjust killings. This means that every soul is important, and loss of one to any form of violence, such as religious insurgency of *Boko Haram*, is quite unacceptable. Human life is sacred and for this reason, God Almighty deems saving a life a virtue as supreme as saving all humanity and considers ending a life a crime as serious as killing all human beings, because a single human represents their species. In the glorious Qur'an, Allah [The Almighty] warns that: *Do not kill a soul which Allah has made sacred except through the due process of law* (Qur'an 6:151).

Likewise, Islam cherishes when one desires or provide shelter rather than killing innocent souls. Muslim Jurists agree that the lives, blood, wealth and honor of non-Muslims living among Muslims are sacred which means it is prohibited and unlawful to kill them without a just cause (al-Qaradawi, 1985). Moreover, the holy Qur'an forbids any coercion. For instance, Qur'an 2:256 says: *Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from Error....* This verse emphasizes that people should not be forced to accept religious beliefs. In other words, embracing Islam as a divine faith cannot be imposed by compulsion. That is, people cannot be forced into accepting the religion. Similarly, Qur'an 16:93 provides that:

Had Allah so willed, He would have made you all one single community. However, He lets go astray whomsoever He wills and shows the Right Way to whomsoever He wills. Surely you shall be called to account regarding what you did (Ali, 1985).

The above verse reveals that God does not command or enjoin Muslims or any *Jihadist* to possibly whether by use of force, threat or sanction to convert any other person to Islām. This also means that it would be wrong for any champion

of Allah's [SWT] religion to arrogate to himself the use of every sort of method and means irrespective of whether they are right or wrong to propagate Islam or try to destroy opposite religions.

No doubt, *Jihad*, i.e. strive in the cause of Allah [SWT], is duly encouraged in Islam. It is the individual and collective duty of Muslims to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny, oppression and even unbelief committed by or against Muslims or non-Muslims (Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, 2009). It was divine justice to allow Muslims to defend themselves against the injustice, oppression and aggression of the infidels. Qur'an 2:191 states that: *And kill them wherever you find them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you...*, and verse 193 which provides: *And fight with them until there is no persecution, and religion should be only for Allah...* (Qur'an 2:193), have been misinterpreted by religious bigots, extremists, and terrorists, to perpetrate violent attacks against non-combatants and the state.

As Rashid (2017) has observed, the "them" in Qur'an 2:191 are those terrorists (such as modern-day ISIS or *Boko Haram*), who persecute people for their faith, exile them from their homes, and pursue to kill them dishonorably. However, the above verses were revealed in Makkah during the time when Muslims were persecuted and expelled from their homes (Makkah) on account of their faith. Moreso, Qur'an 22:41 reveals that war is permissible for those who have been driven out of their homes due to their proclamation of Oneness and Unity of God. Allah [SWT] ordered His Messenger [PBUH], and by extension all Muslims, to perform *Jihad* with the holy Qur'an itself, by using wisdom, good admonition and gentle persuasion, and not by coercion. In view of this, Allah [SWT] says:

Invite [call] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best (Qur'an 16:125).

This implies that calling to the True Path (Islam) with wisdom and using texts and evidence from the Qur'an, is the most precious kind of *jihad*. This is why

Rashid (2017) argues that Islam has only justified fighting against those who wage war against Muslims. The permission to fight is established on clearly outlined rules of self-defense. God Almighty enjoins Muslims to accommodate peace and harmony in their family, neighborhood, community, socio-religious, business or political organizations, local government, state, nation, and the world at large (see Qur'an 2:208). The Prophet of peace and mercy, Muḥammad [PBUH] is reported to have said:

O people! Do not aspire for a war with the enemy and pray to Allah for peace and security in the world. If perforce you have to fight the enemy, then adopt patience and perseverance and then remember that Paradise is under the shadow of the sword (*Saḥiḥ Bukhari*, 2861; *Saḥiḥ Muslim*, 1742).

The above Prophetic admonition shows that amicable resolution of conflict is better than taking up arms against the enemy. In fact, patience and peace are emphasized in both the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* as one of the greatest virtues Muslim must imbibe (see Qur'an 3:200; 103:3). Silah reported that 'Ammar ibn Yasir [may Allah be pleased with him] said:

Whoever has three qualities has completed the faith: a sense of fairness in yourself, spending in charity despite difficult circumstances, and offering peace to the world (*Musannaf ibn Abī Shaybah*, 30440).

Al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib reported that the Messenger of Allah [PBUH] said: *Spread Peace and you will receive Peace.* (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 18059). Similarly, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr reported that the Messenger of Allah [PBUH] said:

Verily, the worst transgressors to Allah are those who kill in the sacred Mosque, those who kill whoever did not fight him, or those who kill with the vindictiveness of ignorance (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 6643).

These Prophetic sayings have clearly shown that *Boko Haram* which made its religious duty to bomb mosques and churches, and kill thousands of Muslims and Christians, among other innocent persons, are not in tune with the teachings of the Prophetic *Sunnah* and Qur'anic injunctions. Any war waged against the enemy that is not within the Islamic doctrine leads to hellfire. This equally implies

that the claim by *Boko Haram* is far from truth. It can be deduced from the foregoing that the activities of the extremist group cannot in any possible way represent the doctrine of Islam or the character of Muslims. In Qur'ān 3:110, Allah [SWT] describes Muslims as:

Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors. (Ali, 1985).

In the above verse and related verse: Qur'ān 9:71, Allah [SWT] specifically refers to Muslims as the Best of Mankind because they are meant to encourage people towards doing the right thing and refraining from doing bad, and most importantly, the belief in Allah. Raza (2013), opines that enjoining what is right includes good and righteous conduct and deeds; forbidding what is wrong is to avoid all unlawful acts of vice, evil and transgression; and believing in Allah [SWT] is to fear Him in every dealing and relationship with fellow human being and other creatures, obey Him and His Messenger, establish five compulsory prayers, and give alms to the poor and the needy.

Thus, forbidding evil in the society does not in any way imply that people take up arms against their governments, because this is purely against the letter and spirit of the holy Qur'ān and Prophetic teachings, while part of good deeds is to encourage religious tolerance and maintain good relationship with followers of other religions, and avoid religious militancy or insurgency. The foregoing shows that terrorizing the civilian population, whether by individual extremist or radical group, such as *Boko Haram*, can never be termed as “legitimate war” and cannot be reconciled with the teachings of Islam.

### **The Islamic Model as a Panacea to Religious Insurgency of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria**

In light of the foregoing, the following is the Islamic model to curb religious insurgency of *Boko Haram* and prevent resurgence of related conflict in contemporary Nigeria.

## ***Religious tolerance***

Religious tolerance signifies mutual respect for other faiths and peaceful harmony between followers of other religions. Islam is the religion of mercy, kindness, compassion, tolerance and ease. It supports religious tolerance at its optimal level and basic dignity of all human beings. If the Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] ought to have exhibited intolerant behavior towards other faithfuls he encountered in Madinah, the ability of different ethno-religious entities – the Jews, Christians and Muslims – to live together peacefully in such a larger civilizational context, would have been difficult if not impossible. His message would not have widely been accepted, and the genuine motives of gaining new converts would have been grossly defeated.

The underlying message of the Qur'an is that mankind was created in different communities in order to coexist peacefully, and to acknowledge, recognize, love and respect one another, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or race. The holy Qur'an itself acknowledges religious diversity (see Qur'an 16:93; 109:1-6); humanity created out of one soul so as to live together in tranquility (Qur'an 4:1); recognizes individual differences (see Qur'an 6:165; 43:32); creation of all human beings and their God-given qualities (see Qur'an 2:31; 17:70; 23:14; 32:9); and warns against conversion of others using force (see Qur'an 2:256).

When the Prophet [PBUH] migrated to Madinah, distinct laws of governance (otherwise known as the Charter of Madinah) was designed to ensure harmony, stability and peaceful coexistence of Muslims with the Jews, Christians and polytheists, hence the lives of the practitioners of other religions were given protective status (Abdulsalam, 2020). The Prophet [peace and blessings of Allah be upon him] warned against any maltreatment of people of other faiths as follows:

Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muḥammad) will complain against the person on the Day of Judgement. (*Abu Dawud*).

The above traditions aided adequate protection of non-Muslim rights and welfare, religious freedom, and effective leadership in governance. No wonder the Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] is described as the mercy of God to all of creations (see Qur'an 21:107). Therefore, Muslims' concerns should focus on how to peacefully coexist with other religious groups in Nigeria.

### ***Proper religious teaching and interpretation of divine scripture***

The holy Qur'an is the divine revelation containing divine messages and a central religious text of Islam with promulgated codes and laws, that Allah [SWT] ordained for Muslims and mankind in general. Wrong interpretation of the holy Qur'ān and other religious texts by religious leaders and preachers, has influenced some adherents to embrace extreme or radical religious views and ideology. Extreme interpretations of the Qur'anic texts, and the movement of Islamic Revivalism, have significantly influenced the emergence and progression of violent *Jihadism* in the contemporary world, including *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. These insurgents oftentimes legitimize their actions as *jihad* permitted by God in the holy Qur'an to preserve the will of God in establishing Islamic communities (Venkatraman, 2005). To guarantee peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, religious leaders and preachers should focus on the need to encourage religious tolerance and proper interpretation of religious scripture, and shun religious bigotry in their deeds and actions.

### ***Genuine inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue among the youth***

Youths are an essential component of advancing the culture of peace in a multi-religious society. Inter-faith dialogue refers to cooperative effort, and deliberate and planned interaction between people of different religious traditions (e.g. Muslims-Christians). On the other hand, intra-faith dialogue involves deliberation and negotiation that occurs among people of different sects or denominations of same religion (e.g. *Shi'a-Sunni*, *Ahlus Sunna-Izāla*, etc). From the Islamic point of view, intra-faith and inter-faith dialogues enable the youth to

distinguish between the lawful and forbidden acts in Islam, identify dissenting views about monotheistic religions, remove misunderstanding and accept religious differences, and improve their knowledge on inter-faith relations with the aim of generating a positive climate of peaceful coexistence and harmonious relations.

The essence of dialogue in Islam is to provide amicable solutions to the problems affecting people living in multi-religious communities, and by spreading the message of peace, justice and safety to all (Meraj, 2019). The increased level of religious intolerance and violence in Nigeria today, calls for urgent need for genuine intra-faith and inter-faith dialogues among the youth with the aims of inculcating in them the need to shun being recruited into extremist or terrorist group, avoid youth militancy, embrace tolerance, peace and harmony, good neighborliness, good character, good will for one's country, and build sense of belongingness, leading to a deeper understanding of one's faith and the beliefs of others. The religious leaders in the two dominant religions in Nigeria - Islam and Christianity - should be the conveners and moderators of such dialogue in collaboration with the government at all levels.

### ***Islamic leadership and governance paradigm***

Islam is against bad leadership, tyranny, dictatorship and bad governance. Qur'anic wisdom, and the life, deeds and sayings of Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] offer the most essential leadership principles that if followed by contemporary Nigerian leaders would translate to good leadership, good governance, and encourage sustainable societies devoid of insurgency. Islam emphasizes on faith (*iman*) as one of the greatest leadership principles as commonly shared by all Muslim great leaders. Without this quality, a leader will become hollow, empty and endangered species, who may be overwhelmed with darkness (see Qur'ān 2:257).

Fear of God (*at-taqwa*) is another virtue of a good leader. Possessing the quality of *taqwa* will restrain a good leader from behaving unjustly, arrogant and



act immorally. Accountability (*iḥtisab*) must always be the watchword of our leaders as commanded in Qur'an 59:18-20. Mutual consultation (*shura*), as emphasized in Qur'an 42:38 and Qur'an 3:159, is one of the critical ingredients of Islamic leadership models. Other Islāmic leadership models, include adequate knowledge of governance (*'ilm*), wisdom to rule (*hikmah*), modesty in the position (*tawadu'*), patience (*sabr*), justice (*'adalah*), trust (*amanah*), compassion (*aaḥmah*), and sincerity (*sidq*) (Lawal & Dauda, 2016).

Be that as it may, if Nigeria is to achieve sustainable peace and tranquility, the political and religious leaders must see themselves as the vicegerents of God (*Khalifah*) on earth before Whom they will render an account of their stewardship on the Day of Judgment. 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar reported that Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] said: *Each one of you is a Shepherd. And each one of you will be asked about your flock...* (*Saḥiḥ al-Bukhari*, 893). This reveals that every leader will be questioned about the people they are privileged to govern. Therefore, Nigerian leaders should be sincere, responsible, responsive and accountable to the people being governed. They should also encourage mutual consultation in their decision-making process and government policies and embrace useful advice in regards to the decisions pertaining to the affairs of their subjects.

### ***Reducing extreme rich-poor gap (inequality)***

Unequal distribution of wealth has unfortunately assumed a negative narrative in Nigeria. Islam identifies that Allah [SWT] is the Ultimate Owner of Wealth (*Amwal*) and the Best Provider and recognizes that He bless whosoever He wishes (see Qur'an 2:30, 20:6; 34:40). According to Qur'an 16:71:

And Allah has favored some of you over others in provision. But those who were favored would not hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess so they would be equal to them therein. Then is it the favor of Allah they reject? (Ali, 1985).

The above verse explains that while some are fortunate and favored with more wealth, others are less privileged. But the problem is that the rich who are

favored have refused to give to support the poor to improve their wellbeing with the fear that their wealth may diminish. The wealthy citizens are therefore enjoined to contribute towards alleviating sufferings of the poor masses to reduce the extreme inequalities in Nigeria.

### ***Workable poverty alleviation program***

Poverty (*faqr*) is a calamity; it is a test as well as a blessing from the Almighty. Qur'ān 16:71 shows that human beings are of two classes – the rich (*aghniya*) and the poor (*faqir* or *fuqara*). Some individuals are destined as poor, while others are favored with wealth. Those who are favored must acknowledge the fact that they are only favored by God above others (which does not mean that they are the Best in the sight of Allah), and as such, should spend their wealth to please God [the Owner of wealth], and help others in need [the less privileged] in order to solve the problems of poverty and starvation in the society. Thus, Islam advocates for effective strategies towards alleviating poverty. One of such is for Muslims to pray against the menace and its consequences. The Prophet [PBUH] stated that poverty is a threat for both individuals and societies, hence enjoined every Muslim to protect him/herself by praying against it thus: *O Allah! I seek refuge in you from evils of disbelieve, poverty and the punishment in the grave, there is no other god except You (Ibn Mājah 4; Ibn Ḥanbal, II/231, 250).*

However, Islam frowns at illegitimate acquisition of wealth, abuse of power, corruption, greed, extravagance, pride, arrogance, stinginess and oppression of the poor. It encourages that wealthy individuals should help, protect and provide shelter for poor people. The poor are also encouraged to work hard to meet their daily needs. Dignity of labor is given propriety in Islam (see Qur'an 4:32). The government at all levels must prioritize institutionalizing anti-poverty measures at both the urban and rural communities to ensure that poor people have access to short and long-term palliatives to ease their sufferings and improve their standards of living.

## ***Youth empowerment and employment***

In Islam, youthful age is seen as the most challenging phase of life that if directed properly, can be a means of immense positivity and good, misdirected can be of destructive and tragic consequences for self, family and nation as a whole. Youth engagement in social vices and security-threatening activities, such as cultism, ritual killing, cybercrime or internet fraud, etc, in the recent time, is not only dangerous, but harmful and unhealthy for peaceful coexistence. The noble Prophet Muḥammad [PBUH] took cognizance of the potentials of the youths by empowering them, teaching them how to be immensely useful to themselves and their societies, and expanding their abilities toward occupying leadership roles and piloting religious advancement.

Few of these youths were ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib, Zayd ibn Ḥarithah, Zayd ibn Thabit, Mus'ab ibn ‘Umar, and Usamah ibn Zayd. The Prophet [PBUH] empowered the young Zayd ibn Thabit with scholarship having known him to have possessed sharp intellect. Zayd later became an expert in the holy Qur’an – interpreter and scribe for the Prophet, and a scholar of the highest calibre. The Prophet [PBUH] entrusted young Mus'ab with enormous responsibilities. He became the first Muslim Ambassador to Yathrib (modern day Madinah), and succeeded in converting many Arabs to Islam. Young Usamah was appointed by the Prophet [PBUH] to lead a large army to Syria. Although some people felt uncomfortable with his military leadership, but with his bravery, confidence and a sense of direction, he was able to develop and raise the generation of youth that propagated Islam throughout the world (Ahmed, 2019).

With the level of unemployment rates in Nigeria, one can conclude that youth empowerment programmes of successive administrations have failed due to politicking, lack of continuity in government policies, ineffective coordination, poor monitoring, embezzlement and corruption. N-Power was birthed by the current Buhari-led administration in 2016 and since then over 500,000 youths have been empowered. However, it later came to show that after spending more

than two years, the government could not offer the beneficiaries permanent jobs after their abrupt disengagement in June 2020 thus compounding the unemployment woes in Nigeria. No doubt, adequate provision of employment opportunities for Nigerian youths cannot be ignored if the government is to rescue the nation from abyss of rural banditry, cybercrime, ritual killing, ransom kidnapping, insurgency, extremism and terrorism. Moreover, providing gainful employment for the teeming youth will make them love their country, protect her name and territorial integrity, promote peaceful coexistence and build a long-lasting relationship imperative for sustainable development and well-being of citizens.

## CONCLUSION

Religious insurgency has indeed assumed a dangerous form of conflict that is ravaging the world, including Nigeria. It is established that the religious insurgency by the *Boko Haram* movement has threatened not just the lives of the people in Nigeria, but also their peace, coexistence and general well-being for over a decade. Hence, killing in the name of defending one's faith or perpetuating violence in the name of God, as the analysis of *Boko Haram* insurgency in this work has revealed, do not represent the doctrines of Islam or the character of Muslims. This article subscribes to the view of Chief Edwin Clark, who submits that Islam preaches peace and lays much emphasis on "the sanctity of human life, the chastity of peace and love, and above all, the fear of God. Those terror mongers do not know God, do not love God and do not fear God" (Clark, 2012:48). This statement affirms the teaching of Islam and refutation of various postulations of some non-Muslims about Islam and generality of Muslims that the activities of the religion and its adherents encourage *Boko Haram* terrorism in Nigeria's Northeast. Therefore, the identified Islamic model serves as potential and practicable solutions to the current insurgency and resurgence of related conflicts if they are taken into consideration by religious and political leaders,

their ardent followers and other stakeholders critical to the quest for peace in the affected regions.

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