

## **NIGERIA INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL IN LAGOS STATE: ITS FORMATION, IMPACT AND CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract**

About two decades of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has been more than plausible in solving the problems emanating from various religious groups and personalities. This, to a large extent, puts the Council in a proper stead to stem the tide even before issues are unfolded. The Council prices well in the hand of relative Government particularly at the time when bigotry, extremism and terrorism in the name of religion bite harder. As a formation that follows the trend of events at all times and in all places the council has achieved tremendously. Lagos State Government always collaborates with the Council to ensure relative peace is enjoyed despite the volatile nature of the citizenry in the State. The aim of this paper is not only to present NIREC in Lagos State in particular and Nigeria in general has a formidable religious initiate of the government, but also to evaluate their activities as commendable noteworthy in controlling and reducing religious crises to the barest minimum in Lagos State. It was discovered, however, that this would not have been possible without constant interaction with Religious Leaders in the State. Through the Council, various policies of the Government get across the polity since majority of the residents are Christians and Muslims. It is the opinion of this paper that relative peace enjoyed in Lagos State should not be taken for granted. It is on this basis that some suggestions were offered on possible ways of strengthening the Council for better achievements. The paper however, solely adopted a library based approach in gathering all necessary information for its actualization.

**Keywords:** Inter-Religious, Interfaith, Peace, Dialogue, Lagos, NIREC

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is one of the nations where Muslims are in majority.<sup>1</sup> The population is divided among the officially recognized trio-formations namely: Muslims, Christians and Traditional worshippers. The colonial masters' arrangement that put over 250 ethnic

groups together to form a corporate entity "Nigeria" precipitate numerous agitations which culminate in self determination by each group. The above-mentioned religious divides serve as big umbrella under which innumerable inclinations abide. Post-independent Nigeria paved way for socio-cultural tendency to be subdued, nay Islam involved. This gave way to thoughts of secular outlook in Nigeria, as portrayed in some quarters even though another opinion maintains multi-religious. Whereas, secularism is a term used for a state whereby no god whatsoever is recognized.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, Islam predated Christianity in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the Imperialists' support for the latter and the purported subjugation of the former for the interest of the latter, leaves more to be desired.<sup>3</sup> It paints the picture of the two main religions (Christianity and Islam) coming in close rivalry over the instrument of governance. Traditional religionists also seldom rear head as they demand for one thing or the other. Amidst the situation, anarchy and turbulence often results when socio-religious matter is brought to the fore.

Hence, the need to preserve the corporate existence of the nation is aimed at through forming a formidable front in spite of the socio-religious background. The need arises to 'help resolve the long standing conflict and to build deeper understanding of contentious issues.<sup>4</sup> However, the "front" comes in form of dialogue which is not about judging, weighing or making definite decisions. It is all about understanding and learning. This is capable of 'dispelling stereo-types, building trust and enabling the acquisition of new perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, we discussed the advent of Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC) in the country; the meaning and instrumentation of dialogue in Islam; instrumentation of dialogue as world peace initiative; NIREC intervention in Nigeria; NIREC in Lagos State: its impacts as well as challenges; recommendations and conclusion.

#### Advent of NIREC

The idea of dialogue had been adopted as a veritable tool for solving socio-religious issues in Nigeria before the emergence of the NIREC in 1999. Seasoned scholars of Religious Studies in the nation's Ivory Towers have been contributing immensely towards mutual understanding of religious dictates in a view to foster peaceful co-existence in the polity. The Veteran Professor, Muhib O. Opeloye is a case in point.<sup>6</sup> To cement this initiative as a best avenue for arresting the spate of violence in religious circle, the Federal Government heralded fifty (50) membership organization; (25 Christians and 25 Muslims) on the 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 to serve as the mouth-piece of the two main religions in the country.<sup>7</sup> This was named Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).

The Council as it will be henceforth referred to is co-chaired by the President General, Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Administratively, the maiden National Coordinator/Executive Secretary of the Council from 1999 – 2007 was the then State House Chaplain, Rev. Professor Yusuf Obaje.<sup>8</sup> The main term of reference for the Council was its being an independent permanent body saddled with the responsibility of providing religious leaders and traditional rulers a veritable platform to engender healthier interface and understanding among the leaders and followers of the two major religions in Nigeria. This is in a way of putting in place a solid structure for lasting peace and religious harmony in Nigeria. This is in sharp contrast with the Nigeria Presidency's onerous Evangelical Summit held in 1999 which was purported to curtail the electronic media's less-coordinated broadcast of miracle episodes.<sup>9</sup> The Council had since then being playing active roles in various States of the federation.

### Meaning and Instrumentation of Dialogue in Islam

Dialogue means a conversation between two or more people. The word '*Hiwar*' (dialogue) is mentioned in the Qur'an only three times. Allah (*SWT*) in Q.18:34 relates a scene of mutual talk 'I am more than you in wealth and stronger in respect of men.' Other relative terms include *Mujadalah* –argument, *Munazarah*- sharing of views, etc. Q.58:1 relates the episode of Khawlah bint Tha'labah and her husband, when she engaged the Prophet (*SAW*) in a typical conversational terrain concerning the conduct of her husband, Aus bn As-Samit. Allah says: 'And Allah hears the argument between you both. Verily, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer.'

Apparently from the above verses, dialogue means reciprocity, exchange and giving-and-taking of speech between two sides. In the Qur'anic polemics, various definitions are provided, the best of which appears as: 'a person's efforts in preventing his opponent from refuting his speech by providing evidence or dubiety'.<sup>10</sup> Examples of faith-based arguments abound in the Science of *hadith*, philosophy, theology and literature with massive use of semantics and logic. The *Ash'arites*, *Mu'tazalites* and Philosophers of Islamic religion draw much from argumentative discourse.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the author of *Al-Misbah Al-Muneer* posits on dialogue as provision of: 'countering evidence with each other in order to show which is more preponderant'.<sup>12</sup> It employs argument which is sub-divided into positive and negative. This is mentioned in the Qur'an in twenty-nine times all of which are negative, with the exception of the two verses mentioned above. A positive argument (*Jidal*) is that intended for the right cause like finding the truth, revealing it and establishing proofs upon whoever does a wrong thing or not following Allah's religion (Islam). This must be done by a person with knowledge and insights. Scholars of *hadith* classified argument in a way that shows that it is undesirable, for it is based on dispute and tension. This is perhaps referred to in *Ibn Majah* Book of *Sunnah* under a chapter titled: 'Avoiding Heresies and Arguing'.<sup>13</sup>

Irrespective of this premise, dialogue in the Qur'an is rich with numerous examples. Typical instances of dialogue in the Qur'an context are discourse session between Allah and the Angels regarding the creation of Prophet Adam (AS) (Q.2:32-34); between Allah (SWT) and His Prophets (AS), like Prophet Isa (Jesus) (AS) (Q.5:116-117) and; that of Prophets and Messengers with disbelievers like *Fir'awn* and his cohorts (Q.40:28-44). Other argument sessions in the light of the Qur'an include the believing *Jinn's* conversation with their people (Q.46:29-32); Prophet Musa and *Khidr* (Q.18:66-82); *Fir'awn* with his chiefs (Q.26:34-37) and of course Prophet Sulayman (AS) and his *Hud-hud* (Q.27:22-28). The instances, nevertheless the rulings of dialogue as evident across the mentioned passages of the glorious Qur'an, remain significant and germane to the cause of the religion of Islam if they are done for goodwill, right cause, knowledge and evidential proof. It is in this regard that Allah (SWT) declares in Q.16:125 that ovation is given to inviting people to the way of Allah with wisdom and fair exhortation, and that, argument should be mainly on what is better i.e. monotheism. Dialogue as main instrument of religious discourse, may often lead to what could be referred to as *Mubalahah*- this is the trend of discourse where a party to the discourse refuses to listen to reason in the contest.<sup>14</sup>

*Al-Mubalahah* is used in Qur'an chapter 3:61 where Allah says:

But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our near people and your near people, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liar.

It is evident from the above that dialogue at spiritual contest is more of knowledge increase and mind-boggling solution.

### **Instrumentation of Dialogue as World Peace Initiative**

In recent time, some Inter-faith dialogues adopted relative names. Such names appear like Inter-belief dialogue, Inter-path dialogue, Trans-belief dialogue and Interreligious dialogue to refer to interaction between different Faith groups such as Muslims, Christians or Jews for example.<sup>15</sup> There are local, regional, national and international inter-faith initiatives; many formally and informally constitute larger federations. This informed the idea of the often-quoted sayings: 'There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions' as perpetuated by Hans King, a Professor of Ecumenical Theology and President of the Global Ethic Foundation.<sup>16</sup> Inter-faith dialogue initiatives have recorded varied degrees of success across ages and generations. According to scholars of dialogue, to engender understanding, teamwork or tolerance, three forms of dialogue has to be explored namely: dialogue of the head, of the hand and of the heart.

In the dialogue of the head, orders are mentally reached unto to learn from those whose thoughts are slightly different from their own. Dialogue of the hand enables us to work together to make the world a better place in which we must all live together; while the dialogue of the heart enables us to share the experience of those whose emotions are different from ours.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Inter-faith record had that after the 2001 September 11 attacks in USA, Inter-faith relations proliferated.<sup>18</sup> It further revealed that 'conversations about the urgency of interfaith dialogue and the need to be knowledgeable about the faith of others gained attraction in new ways.'<sup>19</sup>

The seed of interfaith sown across different sections of the world close to two decades ago are looked up to in yielding sustainable fruits to forestall world peace. The International Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD), the largest Interfaith Environmental Organization in the Middle East in the opinion of Wikipedia, was established in 2010. The aim of establishment among others is to bring together 'faith groups, religious leaders, and teachers to promote peace and sustainability.'<sup>20</sup> In the same vein, 2011 witnessed President Barrack Obama's challenge to Interfaith and Community Service Campus by sending letter to all Presidents of Institutions of higher learning in the United States of America. The main objective of the challenge was geared towards maximizing the education contributions of community-based organizations, faith organizations included, and, by 2015, over 400 Institutions of higher learning who had responded to the challenges of conflict resolution among people of different faiths and backgrounds in the United States were hosted for the first time by him.<sup>21</sup> In the same vein in 2012, The King Abdullah *bn* Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) was opened in Vienna, Australia. It was established with board of directors including Jews, Christians and Muslims. The prime purpose was to empower the active work of those in the field of dialogue, social activism or of conflict resolution. By extension, 'the body was to promote acceptance of other cultures, moderation and tolerance as an independent centre that would not promote any religion.'<sup>22</sup> To a large extent, the new trend of positivism in inter-faith dialogue appears to be the outcome of the Common Word of 2007 by Muslim Theologians' advocacy for large scale Inter-faith Dialogue which is relatively new in the opinion of Wikipedia,<sup>23</sup> against the background of Q3:64's call for dialogue unto the people of the Book on one hand and on the other, the relative commonality among mankind Q49:13. In the exact premise, the declaration is meant to work out moral common ground on many social issues. This is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of one God, and love of the neighbors. The views which are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

### **NIREC's Intervention in Nigeria**

Nigeria being disposed to multi-cultural and multi-religious outlook is prone to self determination by various groups' intolerance. To mend the way in-between groups would employ amorous understanding of one another. To help people resolving long-standing

issues and to heal memories and wounded hearts, dialogue is evolved to educate, create awareness and engender love which is devoid of mutual suspicion. With the abundant record of religious violence in Nigeria ranging from the Kano 1980's *Maitatsine*, the Kaduna and Jos imbroglio to the *Boko Haram* menace in the North-east, the Herdsmen nuance currently dragged into the scene of criminality and many others, dialogue appears to be a good way of working out useful arrangement for understanding, forgiving, forgetting, pacifying and tolerating one another.<sup>25</sup> The main instrument useful in the field of Inter-faith discussion is essentially dialogue.

In the Nigerian context, areas where dialogue has helped in fostering peace are many. This is evident in various kinds of dialogue such as dialogue of life, dialogue of social engagements, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of religious experiences.<sup>26</sup> Dialogue of life entails living together in the same setting as homes, schools, streets and offices peacefully in spite of variation in religious backgrounds. Therefore, when scholars of various religions organize seminars, workshops, peaceful rallies and theological discourses, better understanding of dialogue occurs. Also, dialogue of religious experience becomes evident when people of different religions share other religious experiences' knowledge and dreams which allow cross-fertilization of ideas.<sup>27</sup> To the best of our understanding this is one of the reasons why majority of our higher institutions of learning generally in Nigeria and particularly in Lagos State, have not been witnessing any serious religious crises among students. For example, Lagos State University, Department of Religions, has courses being offered by students of various faiths in 'Comparative Religious Studies', 'Interaction with the Living Faiths', 'Sociology of Religion', etc. Through these courses we believe, useful and objective lessons on how to maintain peace, dialogue, positive development and cordial relationship among people irrespective of their faiths and backgrounds are disseminated to students.

### **NIREC in Lagos State**

NIREC Lagos State chapter was inaugurated on Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2006 by His Excellency, the then Executive Governor, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, at the conference room of Governor's office, Alausa, Ikeja. In his address during the inauguration, the Governor says: ...one of the major concerns when his administration came to office was to ensure peace, religious tolerance and dialogue among various ethnic and religious groups in the State".<sup>28</sup> He stressed further that, Lagos NIREC is mandated to strengthen the existing inter | intra religious harmonies in the State; religious leaders of all persuasions are expected to sensitize their adherents on the need to respect the tenets and beliefs of other religions for a harmonious mutually reinforcing relationship.<sup>29</sup>

To say however, that, Lagos NIREC is far from achieving the main objectives for which it was inaugurated, when the peace and mutual cooperation being enjoyed by all the

adherents of various faiths in the State are considered, is a wrong statement. Close to two decades of NIREC in Nigeria, religious leaders in Lagos had benefited immensely from varieties of projects organized by the Council with the full support of various subsequent Governors of the State. Palpable impacts of the Council are being felt across the main 20 Local Government and 37 Local Council Development Areas in the State. Johnson maintains that, '...a few states have created NIREC or NIREC-like structures and Inter-faith meetings are springing up slowly throughout the country. But Lagos NIREC achievements are noticeable and thus become unprecedented.'<sup>30</sup> In Mubin's view, NIREC is carrying on very well and had organized various seminars on conflict management and resolution, international relations and terrorism. It had steadily given advice to government on ways of governing to impact positively on lives of people. Youth summit was equally organized in 2013 to sensitize young ones on the need for mutual co-existence.<sup>31</sup> At no point was Lagos NIREC excluded in these projects with meaningful impacts on the residents of the State. This is germane in the statement credited to His Excellency, the current Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode during the inauguration of newly appointed 798 NIREC members in 2017 all of whom were drawn from the 20 LGAs and 37 LCDAs of the State. In his comment he maintained that:

Lagos State had in the past years not experienced ethno-religious crisis owing to the fact that Lagos Government did not leave the religious leaders aloof and that NIREC was commended for ensuring that potential problems were always nipped in the buds.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Ambode extolled the virtues of the council when he called for enhanced peace, cooperation and collaboration by Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths at the grassroots. He maintained that the council's impact at this level is looked up to for deepening the level of religious freedom, promoting tolerance, understanding and the spirit of love. The council was also charged to maintain the tempo not only because Lagos occupies the prime position among other States in the country, but also because 'Lagos Government does not joke with the issue of spirituality content of development and in turn the spiritual leaders have not abandoned the State.'<sup>33</sup> It is in the same manner that the Governor took the advantage of the memorable launching of NIREC into the 57 Local Councils and charges them to further maintain the administration's focus of being all about the people and their welfare.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to note at this juncture however, that, the composition of Lagos NIREC membership as laid down by Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu was not changed by his successor, Mr Babatunde Raji Fashola. They both drew Lagos NIREC memberships from the five geo-political zones of the State with two representatives each, a Muslim and a Christian. But under Governor Akinwunmi Ambode, the memberships were drawn from all the Local Government and Local Council Development Areas of the State, with 14 representatives each. But their terms of reference as lay down by Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu since 2006 were not changed. These include:

1. To create a permanent and sustainable channel of communication and interaction thereby promoting dialogue between people of different faiths in the State.
2. To provide a forum for mutual co-operation and promotion of the welfare of all in the State.
3. To create channels for peaceful resolution of any friction or conflict that may arise among citizens.
4. To serve as an avenue to achieve national goals, economic growth, national unity and promotion of political stability.
5. To assist the Federal, State and Local Governments of Nigeria and the populace by emphasizing and accentuating the positive roles religion should play in nation building.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Impacts of NIREC in Lagos State**

As mentioned above, Lagos government is in the forefront in the areas of building sustainable network connecting the grassroots. This is an offshoot of the conviction that the focus of any worthwhile government is the welfare of the common man. Lagos NIREC acts in the root of various programs which directly affect the polity mainly consisted of Christians and Muslims and, this is because the traditionalists always hold their own meetings separately. Several meetings are held to ensure that no one suffers religious discrimination in Lagos, as citizens experience the best of religious freedom, practice and fraternization. This, in the opinion of the current Lagos State Commissioner for Home Affairs, Dr Abdul Lateef Abdul Hakeem, project Lagos as the only State that gives effective operation to the tenets of the Nigerian Constitution on religious freedom by fully implementing the relevant section.<sup>36</sup>

To this end, Vanguard Newspaper recorded that 'it is only in Lagos that NIREC is functioning.'<sup>37</sup> It maintained that the inauguration of 798 members (399 Muslims and 399 Christians) is a bid to continuously improve the current unprecedented level of peace and religious harmony being enjoyed in Lagos. This invariably sustains and deepens the ongoing development, modernization and infrastructural expansion in the State. The efforts so far put in place by Lagos NIREC members through their constant programmes such as meetings, seminars, workshops and public lectures on the significance of peace, harmony and dialogue among human kind, ensure not only that no religious crisis had been recorded in some years back now, but also that it will remain crisis-free as long as Lagos Government's initiatives on peace and religious harmony subsists and mutual understanding between Muslims, Christians and people of other faiths prevails.

Part of the policies implementable in NIREC is avoiding closure of roads during worship hours. The Council was able to diffuse the minds of religious leaders and their followers from the habit of obstructing the road and public space for it is not only dangerous but also not allowed by the government. In the spirit of religious tolerance and freedom, no religious group has right to obstruct the activities of others.



Another substantial impact of NIREC on the people of Lagos is in the area of celebration of festivals in all Local Government Areas. Example of these celebrations occurred during the *'id-I-Fitri* and Christmas in 2016 and 2017 respectively. This to our view is a commendable act as the gatherings always bring joy, love, unity, sense of appreciation and togetherness to the people of diverse cultures and backgrounds during religious festive periods to eat, drink, play and wine together without any form of discrimination.

In the same vein, the Council in collaboration with the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) had engaged religious leaders on possible ways of regulating the volume of noise emanating from the religious houses during worship sessions. This noise pollution before Lagos NIREC intervention had in fact reached unbearable level, where every mosque and church (big and small) always engaged in unnecessary use of public address system to disturb neighbors who are either close or far to them.

In addition, the Land Use Charge (LUC) Law of the State had been skewed in a way to exempt religious houses through the efforts of NIREC. This State Law as amended notwithstanding, the Council frowns at converting residential buildings to religious edifice under the pretext to be exempted from LUC payment. The Home Affairs Commissioner was reported to have insisted that: 'as for those who are combining their residence with mosques or churches, Lagos State will not demolish them, but noted that all residential premises are subject to LUC and so when officials of government come, do not claim there is a mosque or church on the ground floor.' He further emphasized that: 'whatever we want to do, we should keep ourselves within the ambit of the Law'.<sup>38</sup>

Following this trend, Lagos NIREC in collaboration with Physical Planning Ministry is moving to devise a new means of engaging religious leaders so that they will not unnecessarily violate the State Building Regulations. Not only that Lagos Government through NIREC recently ordered the census of religious houses in the State but also ordered reasonable distance between religious houses to engender peace and harmony in the environment.

In our view, the Council appears to have gathered momentum by becoming an avenue through which the State Government could reach people at the grassroots. With the line of thought that politics and religions are rather collaborative in a way to empower citizenry through active participation in politics, Lagos NIREC has been playing enlightenment role by making informed choices towards the collection of the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC). Not only that this would enfranchise them, but will also enable them to elect good, responsible and responsive leaders that will promote their interests and bring advancement to them individually and collectively.<sup>39</sup>

We wish to note very strongly that Lagos NIREC has done tremendously well in their intervention in socio-political activities of the State. But it must be emphasized that their

main functions as peace brokers, promoters of religious dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding, which are the main reasons for their formation, must be well focused in order not to be seen as the government stooges.

### **Challenging Issues ahead of Lagos NIREC**

Human circle is bewitched with lack of perfection strategy and in the efforts to fashion out admirable means of mutual understanding among the adherents of various faiths in Nigeria generally and Lagos in particular, many issues arise. Historically, the Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) during the Military era settled for the same business of NIREC. ACRA was criticized for mutual suspicion on the ground of probable imposition of one religion over the other. Another ground of criticism leveled against the council (ACRA) was non-compromise to concede leadership to anyone which also informed the idea of co-chairmanship of NIREC in 1999. These aspects, in the opinion of Kukah, marred the council as it rendered it toothless bull-dog which was unable to interfere in government policy.<sup>40</sup>

All the supposed impacts nevertheless, a line of thought in another quarter could not swallow hook-line-and-sinker the possible implications of plunging the religious community into party politicking. To this extent, Lagos NIREC, in order not to become a tool in the hands of politicians, should maintain its catalyst status i.e. a mother-board that would always engineer chemical reactions and would not dissolve in the reactivity process. On the other hand, the stereo-type use-and-dumb syndrome for which politicians in Nigeria are characterized should be closely watched by the revered religious leaders. Not only that, the Council should as well run an all-inclusive project that would not section certain group at the expense of others. Every recognized religious group should be carried along not only through the incubation period but also when the struggle translates into reality. Above all, it should be borne in mind that as the Muslims segment of NIREC strategizes the Christian counterparts are also into full game. Amidst of counter accusation of marginalization from both sides and hues of "Islamization" of Nigeria<sup>41</sup> that often greet the Muslims' move to better their socio-religious enterprise, a structure that could sustain the unity of all religious entities beyond the current dispensation is highly necessary to be put in place.<sup>42</sup>

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that as a human circle, Lagos State holds some peculiarities in which religiosity is not exempted. In fact, the act of religiosity in the State can be said to have played paramount role in keeping the diversity of the Lagos polity without blemish. Therefore, in order to build upon the current achievements and successes Lagos NIREC had recorded since its formation in 2006, the following recommendations become significant:

- i. All the religious groups in Lagos State should appreciate the significance of the current peace enjoyed in the city and do everything necessary to maintain the status-quo.
- ii. Owing to the cosmopolitan nature of Lagos State, the monster of religious bigotry which culminates into many nuisances such as public bus preaching among others should be tamed. The plurality nature of the State as a home for all should be jealously guarded.
- iii. It is however the view of this study that Lagos NIREC should be a launch pad to other States counterparts. By this, its membership should be skewed in such a way that would incorporate those whose doctrines and desires are rather not inimical to the majority. Neglecting this aspect creates avenues for popularizing morally repugnant theology for which Interfaith at the International level has been criticized.
- iv. NIREC in Lagos should explore all necessary avenues to harmonize religious fronts for better projection even beyond the shore of the nation.
- v. The State Government had agreed in principle that religious houses in the state are exempted from paying Land Use Charge. So, NIREC should ensure that this statement generates beyond being a 'Paper Tiger'.
- vi. The Muslim and Christian sections of NIREC should collaborate in running all inclusive programs that are capable of creating genuine platform for the progress of the nation as against the one skewed in such a way to sustain self-serving individuality and group.
- vii. Programmes like interacting with the living faiths, comparative religious studies, religious moral instructions, etc, should be made as compulsory courses at higher institutions of learning for better understanding of all religions in the State.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have highlighted the background of NIREC with respect to Nigeria in general and Lagos State in particular. Within the purview of NIREC in Lagos, some plausible arguments which put the council in a best stead for enhancing the socio-economic and politico-moral situations of the religious groups were enumerated. Lagos State NIREC appraisal in the areas of political awareness front and social contributory roles of the two religions were addressed. This is with a view to drawing a line of demarcation between positive politics and use-and-dump syndrome which unless if not checked, rather than yielding positive dividends, might tend to enslave the polity. We agreed that it is on the basis of running all-inclusive programmes, that the council may

achieve effective developmental activities in the State. On the final note, NIREC in Lagos State should as a matter of fact, stand up to its responsibilities where and whenever issues of stereotype arises through public enlightenments, seminars, workshops and lectures which are devoid of political coloration.

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