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**Daily Independent (Lagos)****Nigeria: Bauchi And Recurring Religious Crisis**

Godwin Egbara

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When in December 2007 Yelwa religious crisis occurred and the subsequent intervention of the various stakeholders including President Umaru Yar'Adua, the Sultan of Sokoto and National President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) it was generally believed that this singular setback to the development of the administration of Malam Isa Yuguda would never reoccur again.

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However, in quick successions, crises with religious colourations have continued to frustrate the administration. Following the Yelwa crisis, came that of Shira Local Government where houses, police stations, business premises and places of worship were affected in the crisis.

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From there, the angel of destruction moved rapidly to College of Education Azare, where it took the prompt intervention of authorities to nip another crisis in the bud, by ordering the immediate closure of the institution. Besides these were pockets of other religious disturbances in the state.

Before the General Sambo Ibrahim-led Administrative Panel of Inquiry into the Yelwa crisis could submit its finding, another crisis occurred in Ningi Local Government Area in the Central Senatorial District leading to the destruction of the magnificent Emir's palace, churches and business premises owned by non-indigenes.

Police described the Ningi incident as very unfortunate and high-level of religious intolerance in contemporary Nigeria.

Bauchi Police Commissioner, Adanaya Gaya, told newsmen that two girls of Igbo extraction, Mary, 11 and Uche 12, alleged that their guardians were maltreating them and in order to liberate themselves from this slavery, decided on their own to change their religion, without informing their guardians.

As a step to achieving their motive, the two girls took refuge at the Emir's palace. When their guardians got wind of this development, they decided to appeal to the Emir that since they were only guardians to the two girls, there was the need for the girls to consult their biological parents before converting to the new faith. Upon this request, the Emir, Alhaji Mohammed Yunusa Danyaya, released the girls to their guardians with a view to getting their biological parents' consent before converting to Islamic religion.

The panel set up by the government to study the recommendation was still on the job when the latest crisis of Friday February 21, came calling, which led to the destruction of lives and property worth several millions of naira. Till now, the police are yet to ascertain the extent of destruction that took place at Railway, Federal Low-cost Housing Estate, Morocco, Gudun and Bayan Gari areas.

But the source of crisis was traced to religion. Eye witnesses said what started as a mere disagreement between two Islamic sects on that day over worship period triggered off the mayhem.

The account said the leadership crisis occurred in one of the mosques. The two sides to the dispute were said to have resolved to set up different times for Friday worship period. Under the agreement, the first sect was to observe their prayers by 1.00 p.m. while the other would conduct theirs by 2.30 p.m. However, the first sect worshippers were said to have prolonged theirs, which eventually led to disagreement.

By the next morning, what started as a purely Muslim problem spread to other parts of the state. Places of worship belonging to Christians, business

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premises, cars and properties of non-indigenes were destroyed. Figures from the Nigerian Red Cross Society, has since confirmed 11 people dead, while many others sustained various degrees of injuries during the mayhem.

Yuguda, palpably disturbed by the development, had to step into the matter. He urged adherents of both religious faiths to abide by the teaching of their religions, which encourages them to love one another and to live in peace. He noted that his administration was poised to finding solutions to the recurring sectarian crises in the state.

According to him, the crisis that engulfed the state had political interpretation and that religion was merely used as cover-up by the perpetrators to achieve their objectives.

Yuguda, who pointedly blamed his political opponents, said they were bent on destabilising his administration, said the source of the crisis could not have led to such wanton killing and destruction of lives and properties, if it were not linked to politics. He warned perpetrators to desist from such act or face the long arm of the law.

The governor's statement appears to have become controversial too. Yakubu Dogara, a member of the House of Representatives representing Bogoro, Dass and Tafawa Balewa Federal Constituency, does not see any politics in the crisis, saying it was basically a religious affair because no party office or political structures were pulled down. He observed that the state government should be blamed for this crisis.

Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bauchi State chapter, Bishop Musa Tula, equally disagreed with the governor, admonishing that politics should not be introduced to the mayhem. According to him, it was a religious war aimed at eliminating Christians in the state. He added that burning of churches was a planned action targeted at Christians.

A Bauchi-based community leader who does not want his name in print, blamed the state government for the frequent occurrence of religious crisis in the state. According to him, Yuguda's administration had ushered in an era of frequent crisis, regretting that within two years of his administration, the state had witnessed four serious religious crises that had claimed several lives of people.

He observed that the governor's attempt to please everybody was the beginning of leadership failure in the state. He opined that the governor's refusal to step on toes was the reason why some people were using his weakness to foment trouble. The community leader pointed out that the beginning of failure of any administration was to attempt to please all people. "For any government that adopts this approach of leadership, failure is inevitable," he said.

He wondered where the state was gradually drifting to under the present governor, saying Yuguda had lost focus by allowing frequent religious fracas to become the dividend of democracy in the state, with evident slaughtering of innocent souls.

Alhaji Aminu Garba Sidi, chairman of Christian and Muslim Peace Movement, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) championing peaceful co-existence among different religious beliefs in the state, observed that security men should be blamed for their inability to rise to the occasion of maintaining law and order.

In a telephone interview with Daily Independent, Sidi, explained that when they got early warning signal of the impending crisis, a meeting was summoned with all security personnel in attendance. At that meeting, according to him, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, who stood in for his boss, was briefed on the development, and he had promised to put security in place during the Friday Jummat, to forestall any breakdown of law and order.

Sidi pointed out that if security men were deployed to the area on time, the crisis would have not arisen.

He, however, commended the state government for deploying armed military men to maintain law and order in the affected places.

He equally blamed the government for its inability to implement previous recommendations on how to curtail religious crisis in the state, adding that this inability was because certain vested interests was responsible for the constant recurrence of such unwholesome incidents, and that more would still happen if these reports were not implemented.

Observers agree that the latest crisis may not be the last in the state, arguing that the solution lies with government's willingness to address the issues that trigger them squarely. "Without determination by the government to address the issues, all the various committee reports will only occupy spaces in the cupboard and their effort a wasted exercise," they say.

For instance, they cited the Yelwa and Ningi

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episode, where Sabo, the chairman of the committee reportedly made profound recommendations to remove the state from the list of hotbeds of religious crises.

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Observers are worried at the latest development, especially against the backdrop of the recent World Bank report, which described the state as one of the friendliest investor states in the country.

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