Executive Summary on Exploring Negotiation and Mediation Prospects, Options and Strategies in the ‘Boko Haram’ Conflict/violence in Nigeria

A special roundtable discussion on the above theme was held on April 26, 2014, at the conclusion of the 23rd Annual Africa Conference at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) under the sponsorship of the Center for Africa Peace & Conflict Resolution (CAPCR) at CSUS. Approximately 50 people attended the session, 9-11am, including African scholars, Nigerian community leaders from the Sacramento area, among other visiting conference guests from various parts of the US and Africa and local –Sacramento- participants. The panel was convened and moderated by Prof. Ernest Uwazie, Director of CAPCR.

Premise (Convener/Moderator)

The Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria has become too violent and protracted to warrant critical discussion and search for ideas for negotiation and mediation of the current stalemate. Much has been documented about the loss of lives and property, sources of the conflict, and the grave challenges the conflict poses for the Nigeria nation state. The recent kidnapping of over 300 young schoolgirls in northern Nigeria suggests hardening of the conflict. The key assumption is that the current predominant and controversial military response may not fully solve the problem, nor address the needs of restoration of the aggrieved communities and victims from the conflict. The panelists and guest contributors addressed directly the theme of the roundtable, specifically the *nuts and bolts* of negotiation and mediation and their related prospects and strategies; i.e. How/when/who/what/where of any negotiation and mediation? – based on a firm commitment to dialogue and non-violence in way that is inclusive of all, and the critical role or need of culturally competent facilitators and neutrals.

Panel Highlights & Recommendations:

The Boko Haram issue, however condemnable and indefensible the indiscriminate violence, is a reflection of poor leadership and corruption in Nigeria; a point emphasized by the admission of several of the country’s leaders that Boko Haram might have infiltrated the government. The conflict *triggers* are complex and interwoven with/in politics, economics, religion, ethnicity and poverty as well as sub-regional development or conflict dynamics in the neighboring countries. Although the conflict theatre is primarily in certain parts of northern Nigeria, it is a serious national security issue with both present and wider potential spillover effects beyond the current conflict locales. The Boko Haram tactics seem deliberately violent and calculated to achieve certain outcomes or objectives. A literal grab of the English translation of ‘Boko Haram’ as “Western education or law is sinful/prohibited” may be misleading and could limit a proper analysis of the conflict and the important nuances embedded in the name as well as the group’s positioning. A sincere commitment to inclusive dialogue and non-violence by all parties is a *sine qua non* to a lasting peace in Nigeria’s diverse culture. Previous attempts at reconciliation have proved futile due to many reasons, including the lack of confidence and a credibility gap among the parties as well as missed cues.

Long term, durable resolution of the fundamental issue requires a scaled up coalition of youth with the vision of building a nation of common/collective interests under the rule of law; a nation that recognizes and supports the critical role of human relationship building, promotion of citizen engagement, inclusion and collaboration at all levels of *service and just governance*, both public and business. Further, long term investment in good education and youth development, including robust employment opportunities, in every region and community in the country (irrespective of ethnicity or religion), will drain the large pool of talents, treasure and time for violence and instability, given the country’s population of 170 million people and about 60% being under the age of 30 years. Under current environment, efforts aimed at public awareness and community empowerment about collective human security are critically important, consistent with human rights values. The best security is achieved by effective community engagement and collective efficacy.

Peace processes cannot be “governmental” alone. Rather it should be in parallel with simultaneous, citizen-driven and face-to-face “public peace processes” based on authentic and sustained human relationships. For example, beginning to communicate with "Boko Haram" is likely not to begin with those at the center of its power -- in government, or in Boko Haram -- whose identity, importance, and egos are maximally invest-
ed. Rather, creative relationships and learning about one another are more likely to begin with people at the edges of the structures and a bit freer to engage as individuals.

For any negotiation and mediation to succeed and ultimately produce reconciliation, there is need for competent, neutral facilitators as well as proper conflict analysis, with the utmost respect to all underlying interests and sensitivity to the need for face saving by the disputing parties, coupled with accountability. In this regard, proper/careful research is necessary that aims at stakeholder/conflict analyses (including the “deal makers”, “breakers” and “influencers”), interest identification, assessment of parties’ positions and proposals, stakeholder buy-ins, confidence building prospects, incentives and credible threats or risks, feasible negotiation/mediation strategies, form, sequencing and timing; test/ indicators of parties’ authority and commitments, and actionable benchmarks. Such research document may need to be classified as confidential, however challenging in part or whole, for the purpose of achieving the desired goal of durable settlement. Pre-negotiation/mediation strategies may require both skilful intra- and inter-party preparations and capacity building, including team building skills.

Panelists:

Professor Kelechi Kalu, African-American and African Studies Ohio State University, Columbus

Professor Robert Dibie, Dean Public Affairs Indiana University, Kokomo

Dr. Salman Yusuff, Imam and Islamic Chaplain for the New Jersey State Police

Attorney Victoria Maloka, Senior Associate of the Center for Mediation in Africa, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Attorney Daniel Yamshon, Esq., Arbitrator and Mediator, Center for Africa Peace and Conflict Resolution


Professor Vincent Nmehielle, Legal Counsel, African Union Commission, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Rapporteur: Ms. Ijeoma Ononogbu, Solicitor, London / UK

Inquiry on Brief or additional information about the panel:

Prof. Ernest Uwazie
Director, Center for African Peace & Conflict Resolution
California State University, Sacramento CA 95819, USA
uwazieee@csus.edu.