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**Niger Delta Militants and the Boko Haram: A Comparative Appraisal**

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**Abstract**

*Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Since independence in 1960, ethno-religious and communal conflicts have remained the disastrous legacies of the British rule and of the three decades of military authoritarian control of the Nigerian state. The military not only distorted the practice of federalism that was bequeathed by the founding fathers of modern Nigeria but also, exacerbated the political rivalries between the major tribes. The unintended consequences are the struggle for political power and the sharing of the scare resources. This ushered in corruption and neglect of the need for good governance. Apparently, this brought sufferings to the people. It brought in its wake agitations and protests mainly among the unemployed educated youths. This, not only led to the Nigerian civil war (1967-70), but also the Niger Delta and Boko Haram crises. This therefore is an attempt at a comparative appraisal of both Niger Delta and Boko Haram crises.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a country of about 80 million people at the time of independence in 1960. But now it has approximately 150 million people. Nigeria is a nation of many nationalities. Among the major ethnic groups are the Hausa –Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, TIV, Ijaw and Kanuri, etc. Nigeria is a country in the Western part of the continent of Africa, situated within the tropics between latitude 4<sup>0</sup> and 14<sup>0</sup> of the equator and longitude 3<sup>0</sup> and 14<sup>0</sup> East of the Greenwich Meridian. It is surrounded on the west by the Republic of Benin, on the East by the Republic of Cameroon, on the North by Niger Republic and washed on the south by the Atlantic Ocean.

Nigeria as a nation of many nations and sub-nationalities is embroidered into many problems starting from the struggle for independence, the control of resources, self determination, ethnic dichotomy, revenue allocation politics, and the decentralization of hegemonic federal power in the context of shrinking oil reserves. Though these conflicts started out in the form of ethnic, religious, and communal conflicts (indigene/settlers), had deepened with the various military regimes. They exacerbated at the resumption of democratic rule in 1999 as different groups formed themselves into identities against the state in the struggle against perceived exclusion and claims for inclusion in gaining access to resources.

These groups have been involved in violent conflicts; the situation in the oil-rich Niger Delta region necessitates a special attention for concern not only because of the level of environmental degradation there, but because of the rate and dimensions of militancy and militarization. At the heart of the conflict lies the question of who should exercise control over the oil explored and exploited from the oil rich delta, which has become the central core of Nigerian state.

While the dust raised by the Niger Delta issue were about settling down, some parts of northern Nigeria have been reverberating with bombs, suicide bombers, gun shots that have claimed lives and properties. States like Borno, Maidugiri, Kaduna, Plateau and others are no go areas. The economic and social lives of the people are affected too.

The southerners are no longer safe in the north and are not willing to travel to the northern parts of the country. Most of the northern states has become dangerous for the Christians to travel to. Nigeria right now is in the throes of security challenges as a result and the test of existence as a nation due to the

consequence of the threats from the Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen. It is as a result of this emergence of Boko Haram in the political landscape of Nigeria that we attempt to compare the Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram threats to the existence of Nigeria as a nation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It must be noted that, in most cases, conflict is as a result of frustration when a legitimate desires of a person or group is denied them either directly or indirectly as a result of the way the society is structured. The feeling of disappointment may lead such a man or group to express anger through violence that will be directed at those held responsible. This anger and violence can also be directed to people who are directly or indirectly related to those people that are said to be responsible. But according to systematic theorists like Johnson (1966:12-13) the reasons for the emergence of violent social conflicts can be found in systematic factors that lead to changes in peoples' material comfort including environmental degradation which reduces access to sources of livelihood, uncontrolled population growth especially, in urban centres, resource scarcity and its allocation through lopsided political processes and competition, the negative effects of colonial and cold war legacies, break-down of cherished values and traditions that play crucial social control functions, widespread-poverty in the midst of plenty, the domination and marginalization of minority groups by those in the majority, and ethnicity. It is in the light of this view point that, an attempt is made here to compare the role of the Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram sect conflicts in Nigeria.

Presently, Nigeria is facing serious security challenges posed to it by the Boko Haramist insurgency group. For months now, the Boko Haram sect have been terrorizing, killing, maiming innocent Nigerians especially Christians and people of the Igbo extract with guns and bombs. Churches have been burnt, worshippers killed, market places with heavy tolls on live and property in Plateau, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri and other parts of the north especially the north east. These are faceless people that even the national Assembly is even afraid to discuss their matter for fear of reprisals attacks on them or their people. Even two governors from the north publicly renounced (apologized) their earlier statements as demanded by them for peace to reign in their respective states. "The government on its side has taken a placatory step by ordering the prosecution of the members of the police force accused of extra legal killing of the leader of the Boko Haram

sect while he was under the custody of the Nigerian Police. (Aomda; Vanguard: July 20; 2011).

### **The Boko Haram**

#### **Etymology, Definition and Meaning**

The words Jama'aful Ahlul Sunna Wal Liddawati Wal Jihad etymologically means, "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad", or "Ahlan Sunnah Lid Da'Waati Wal Jihad Yaanaa (brothers)", better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram. The group was formed in the town of Maiduguri. The residents dubbed it Boko Haram. The term "Boko Haram" comes from the Hausa word boko meaning "western education" and the Arabic word haram figuratively meaning "sin" (literally, forbidden"). The name loosely translated from Hausa, means "Western education is forbidden" (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Boko Haram is a Jihadist terrorist organization based in the north east of Nigeria. The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything western, which it believes corrupts the Muslims. As an Islamist movement, it strongly opposes man-made laws.

The group was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the aim of establishing a Sharia government in Bornu state under former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. Yusuf established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighbouring countries enrolled their children. The centre had ulterior political goals and soon it was also working as a recruiting group for future Jihadists to fight the state. The group includes members who come from neighbouring Chad and Niger and they only speak Arabic. By speaking out against the police and political corruption, Yusuf succeeded in attracting the youths; unemployed, the poor and illiterate ones to the camp. (Jurisprudence June 20, 2011).

It all boils down that Boko Haram has a spiritual leader, Sheikh Imam Abubakar Shekau, a parliament called Shura. They also have cells spread across Nigeria and Niger and other places. And members of the group do not take action without being given directions to do so (Okafor; June 20, 2012).

The growing frequency and geographical range of attacks attributed to Boko Haram have led some political and religious leaders in the north to conclude that the group has now expanded beyond its original religious composition to

not only include Islamic militants, criminal elements but disgruntled politicians also. For there is an opinion which believes that, the insecurity threat in the northern region within this period by the radical Islamic sect, Boko Haram, is considered to be a resentment by politicians from the north against the victory of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw from the Niger Delta, as the president and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Ever since its inception, the Boko Haram sect had been playing a mixed role. Its emergence has been attributed to the political rivalry between the north and the south towards controlling the political power in the country. Even though its presence has been felt in the north since 2008, it has lied low ever since. But it emerged at the national scene as a political organization immediately after the presidential election results were announced killing innocent people in Kaduna state including corpors on national duties, maiming others including pregnant women and the children especially those from South East and the entire Southern Nigeria (Ogoloma; 2012:7). On other occasions, Boko Haram has emerged not only as a religious body expecting to Islamize the country by introducing the Sharia law, but as a communal organization and killing the Christians in Jos Plateau state and other parts of the northern country.

Nevertheless, those who believe that Boro Haram has no clear agenda must be mistaken. For Boko Haram is fighting to establish a theocracy along the Sahelian belt as far West as Mali through Mauritania. To Obinnakwere; (Tentacle February 26, 2012:18-22). “The sect, Boko Haram, is not unleashing its terror on citizens in the North without clear and definite demands. It has always insisted that it wants sovereignty for 12 states in the north where the Sharia legal instrument will be fully implemented and churches will no more be found in the 12 states”. And according to Frank Zuokumor (Sunday Vanguard, November 4, 2012), the North is using Boko Haram to distract Jonathan. For the Boko Haram insurgency was masterminded by some Northern leaders for selfish reasons. That is why Boko Haram has no clear ideology, no cogent reason. It is a secret political party that is ready to even kill their own as long as it will make news at the end of the day.

According to Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) president Ayo Oritsejafor (Sunday Sun; 2012), “The frequency, lethality and sophistication of Boko Haram’s attacks raise disturbing questions regarding training and

logistical support they have received from other like-minded international terrorist networks” And “since its creation, the Boko Haram network has never hidden its agenda or intentions”. “Boko Haram has openly stated that they reject the Nigerian state and its constitution and seek to impose Sharia law”. To this end, Boko Haram has waged a systematic campaign of terror and violence. They seek an end to Western influence and a removal of the Christian presence in Nigeria. In Nigeria, according to Can president, my people are dying every single day, and it is only a matter of time before the international terrorist links and anti-democratic Islamist agenda of Boko Haram turns its attention to the United States. The CAN president recalled the killing of 58 people in Christian villages in Jos, Plateau state including a Senator and a state law-maker describing such activities as outright terrorism, not legitimate political activity or the airing of grievances”.

According to Idowu (August 5, 2012: 72), On August 1, newspapers reported the sect as claiming responsibility for the coordinated attacks across parts of the North that included the Zaria (Kaduna State) home of Vice President Namadi Sambo. The Islamist sect put it elegantly. “We have reasons for all our activities and we only kill those who wrong us. We attacked Sokoto because many of our brethren have been incarcerated there. We are gladdened by the successes we recorded at the office of the AIG in Mina and the Police divisional office at Unguwan Rogo as well as the Police Station at Arkila. We wish to reiterate that our crusade is not for personal gain; it is meant to ensure the establishment of an Islamic state by liberating all Muslims from the excesses of the infidels. We strongly believe that Almighty Allah will reward us with his famous paradise in the hereafter as he rightly said in chapter 9 verse III of the Holy Quoran. We wish to strongly warn people to desist from collaborating with security agents”.

The fact is that, “we are the warriors of the Almighty and even the security forces are finding it difficult to contain our activities. We want to stress that in our struggle, we only kill government functionaries, security agents, Christians and anyone who pretends to be a Muslim but engages in assisting security agents to arrest us”. There is no reason therefore to say that Boko Haram has no agenda or purpose.

Today, Boko Haram is perceived equally as religious bigots, extremists and intolerant group in the north having links with Al-Qaeda. There are those who claim that Boko Haram’s anger was sparked off by the extra-judicial killing of its members and especially Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. There are

those who equally believe that Boko Haram started as a non-violent Islamic group that aims to Islamize some states in the north and later extend it to the entire federation where proper implementation of the Sharia law will take place, just as they were peacefully preaching in their schools and mosques (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

And according to Mohammed, “if you notice, at the beginning of the conflict in the North East, they only targeted symbols of authority such as, policeman, politicians and district heads. These were their major targets. They did not care whether you were a Muslim or a Christian then. It is the management of these crises or rather the lack of it that led us to a situation today in which Boko Haram is not just a local issue but a recognized international terrorist organization” (Saturday Sun Newspaper, May 26, 2012:14).

The concept and ideology of militancy and terrorists are not the same. The Niger Delta militants’ ideology was to fight the injustices perpetrated against the Niger Deltans in their father land over their God-given wealth. For, if the wealth had been found in the North, East or Western parts of the country, people from those parts of the nation would not have agreed to share it with the Niger Deltans. That is why Amnesty was granted to them in 2009.

While that of the Boko Haram is insurgency and terrorism. It poses a threat in most parts of Nigeria especially in the North. “Boko Haram started by saying that “Western education is evil”, thereby threatening various Nigerian universities and blowing up different places in North and other parts of Nigeria leaving scores of people dead”. Boko Haram therefore poses security challenge to the nation.

According to Junaid Bello (Tell July 23:2012), everything in the North is gone because our leaders lacked focus; everything the first generation leaders did have been allowed to collapse. Our leaders are selfish and self-centered. Even this Boko Haram, is it not our leaders who are behind it? Because power slipped from them, they don’t want any other person there. Our leaders are just fooling us. These leaders have become something like the HIV to us in this zone”.

So what benefit has political power held by northerners for decades recorded for the region if, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, neglect, etc are the causes of Boko Haram insurgency? The country has been ruled by the northerners for the better part of its independence and little has been made in

terms of development in the area. This accounts for the high level of poverty in the region (Ogoloma 2012).

The unrelenting activities for Boko Haram in the region have prompted apprehension about the future of northern Nigeria and that of the entire country. Apart from widening the gap between the North and South economically and educationally, Boko Haram insurgency in the North may endanger the corporate existence of the country. There is no gainsaying therefore that, the spate of insecurity, characterized by ethnic conflicts and Boko Haram insurgency, is fast demolishing the remnants of economic and social infrastructure of the North, with the unpalatable prospect that life would become tougher and harder in the region. For, before Boko Haram, life was already tough and hard enough for most Nigerians, especially those in the northern parts of the country where years of misrule and corruption had rendered most states unviable. This is what prompted Okoye (Tell, 2012) a Kaduna state based legal practitioner to say that, a climate of fear, anxiety and insecurity has enveloped most states in northern Nigeria, leading to the exodus of persons and complete paralysis of business activities and development initiatives. In places like Borno, Yobe, Kano and Kaduna states for examples, a substantial number of businesses have closed down or partially closed. Some are in a period of transition and relocation. Others are not opening and not thinking of opening new outlets. This is on account of the number of deaths recorded in some of the conflict areas and the mindless looting and destruction of properties of individuals in these conflicts”.

### **Background to the Niger Delta Struggle**

The core Niger Delta was part of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria that came into existence in 1951 (One of the three regions, and later one of the four with the creation of mid west in 1963). The region included people from colonial Calabar and Ogoja Divisions, the Igbos and Ijaw peoples with Igbos as the majority and Professor Eyo-lta of Calabar as the head (Premier) of the region under NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon) as the ruling party in the region. NCNC later became National Convention of Nigerian citizens when Western Cameroon broke away from Nigeria to become part of Cameroon (Ogoloma: 2011).

In 1953, the region witnessed a major upheaval as a result of the expulsion of Professor Eyo Ita from office by the Igbo majority tribe. Infuriated by this happening, the minorities in the region under the platform of the Ibibio union, mainly the people of Old Calabar kingdom, the Ijaw and Ogoja



demanded a state of their own to be called, the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) state out of the Eastern region. It must be noted that, the struggle for the creation of COR state was a major issue on the status of minorities during the constitutional conferences in Europe for Nigerian independence.

The Niger Delta area is a place where most oils in Nigeria are being exploited. Yet the people live in abject poverty with no education and employment for their educated youths. Isaac Boro rose and fought for the right of the Niger Delta in the 1960's, after which he was arrested. He also fought in the civil war where he later died. The quest for justice and an end to marginalization of the area by the Federal government of Nigeria saw Ken Saro-Wiwa an environmentalist emerging as a leader of this phase of the struggle. The Ogoni's cried out for lack of development even with the money from the oil that came from the area. They equally complained about the environmental pollution and destruction of their farm land and rivers by the oil companies. This led to the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others from Ogoni by the Sani Abacha led Nigerian government.

In the process, the struggle went out of control and became militant in nature.

Owubokiri had this to say, "The People of the Niger Delta have endured five decades and two years of the suspension from the enjoyment of their land and rights. It is monstrous injustice which has been visited upon them by groups who concede and hide behind the nationalities and states of the Federation to communalize the property of those they consider as minorities. We must continue to make the point within the ambits of civilized agitation that is sore point which portrays Nigeria as a country that steals from its own people with the aid of unjust laws... We must all remember that whether it is the subversion of people's will or, the appropriation of their resources, injustice in any form and perspectives breeds anarchy" (Vanguard, Tuesday, May 1, 2007:24).

### **A Comparative Appraisal**

Drawing parallels of both Boko Haram and Niger Delta militants or attempting a comparative appraisal of both of them is a difficult one. This is because; people perceive both of them in different lights while ascribing few similarities to either of the two.

According to Kalu (Saturday Sun, August 4, 2012), "many had thought that the government would have approached the menacing issues of insecurity with the same diplomacy and tack with which it handled the Niger Delta

crisis. But are the two challenges the same? Definitely not! While the Niger Delta agitators were visible and positively disposed to negotiation, those behind the current Boko Haram onslaughts are exactly the opposite. They have neither revealed their identity nor shown any willingness to negotiate with anybody. All entreaties by the Federal Government for them to accept its olive branch and come forward for a peaceful dialogue have fallen on deaf ears. Rather they stuck to their guns, like leaches, and refused to be appeased. All they care for is for the government to accept their own conditions, unconditionally. Government, on its parts, is not ready to budge either.

### **Similarities**

According to Isa Yaguda, the Bauchi State Governor, “the Boko Haram are like other pressure groups such as the para-military arms of political parties or the youth organizations like the Niger Delta militants in the South-South, the OPC in the South-West and the Arewa Youth Vanguard in the North. They seem to be protesting against social injustice notably mass unemployment in the country. With the army of unemployed youths that we have in the country, we should know that an idle hand is a devil’s workshop”.

In another light, both Boko Haram and Niger Delta are from specific ethnic groups in the country, both have used violence to attract international attention to themselves and as a result project a negative image of the country to the outside world. Equally, they have used the media effectively and as a result managed to destabilize the whole country. Both equally, did not exhaust the conventional way of dispute settlement before resorting to arms conflict.

### **Dissimilarities**

Boko Haram members are faceless people and can not be identified. That is why President Goodluck Jonathan says that “Boko Haram operates without a face”. The Boko Haram is said to be an organization without any clear agenda. They want all their members who are in detention to be released. As a localized organization with an agenda of avenging the killings of its own members now has become a national problem. They have no intercessors whom they can obey and can as well negotiate on their behalf. Being faceless with no given agenda and accessors to depend/rely upon, it becomes difficult for the government of the day to discuss or negotiate with them. President Goodluck Jonathan in the process, has challenged the Islamist militant group Boko Haram “to come forward and state their demands as a basis for

dialogue”. This came after the group had attacked police stations in the northern city of Kano, killing 185 people. But it is not true that Boko Haram has no fixed agenda. If you understand the Islamic sect very well, you will understand that they are only aiming at Islamizing the entire country.

From whatever name we call these organizations and their actions, as well as the style government is using to mollify them, we could be able to understand their aims by what they profess and demand. For the Niger Delta crises, the activities are militant in nature while, the Boko Haram is insurrectional and terrorism in objectives.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2005), ‘militant’ means, “using or willing to use, force or strong pressure to achieve your aims, especially to achieve social or political change”. Terrorism stands for, “use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or to force a government to act”. While, insurrection means, “a situation in which a large group of people try to take political control of their own country with force”. These definitions will go a long way in making it easier for us to understand the aims of these organizations, whether their actions are militancy or insurgency. In these crises, one thing is clear, majority opinion believes that Niger Delta militants are not insurrectional while, Boko Haram is and threatens the security of Nigeria having links with Al Qaeda terrorist from the north easts of Africa.

The Niger Delta militants are “for a greater share of the region’s oil wealth and or for a just treatment of the Niger Delta, the cash flow of the entire economy”. They are therefore not insurgents and did not pose a threat of insurgency to government. Their strategy at best was largely to disrupt the operations of the oil and gas companies in order to extract concessions.

According to Asari-Dokubo, one of the leaders the Niger Delta Militant group, “for years, they broke open pipe-line, filling canisters with crude oil and refining some of it through time worn techniques used by locals to boil palm-tree sap into wine. This crippled enough oil infrastructures to bring Nigeria’s production on some days to a near-halt. In the process, the government offered them amnesty in 2009. The guerrillas dropped off rifles, machine guns, tear-gas canisters, dynamite bundles, rocket launchers, anti air craft guns, gun boasts and grenades to be sold to the government, which also offered the non-violence training, courses and nine-month vocational classes.

The Boko Haram on the other hand, is insurrectional and want to achieve their aim with force. They are a violent organization dreaming of a country of their own that is under Sharia law and also under the Islamic rule.

Already they have 12 states in the north out of 36 states in the country. The Boko Haram sect has opted for war and its policy is to kill and kill and that by all means. The primary enemy of the sect is the security forces of the government.

Boko Haram has never hidden its interest in advancing the course of its brand of Islam in the country through violence and the use of force. To achieve this aim, it has embarked on acts of unbridled terrorism and wanton destruction of lives and property. Never since the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970 has the country faced the kind of security challenge posed by Boko Haram. The group has bombed national institutions and attacked and killed security agents and ordinary citizens. The United Nations Building in Abuja and some foreigners have been victims of the Boko Haram terror. The number of those who have died in the spate of terror attacks is now far in excess of 1,200 lives. Boko Haram shares the poisonous world view that glorifies Jihad as a solution to national challenges. Appeasing such a group is difficult in theory and impossible in practice. If a group has openly declared that it has no other agenda than working to establish an Islamic kingdom". Why do people continue to cite poverty, unemployment and illiteracy as its main motivation? It is also a known fact that some of the group's known leaders, including the assassinated Buji Foi, who resigned as a commissioner in Borno State to further devote time and effort to promoting Boko Haram activities, are very well educated. The problem is really how to free the innocent from the terror gang recruits as foot-soldiers from a criminal ideology.

Sadly too, the Federal Government has been fooled into accepting this theory of poverty and unemployment-phenomena that are also common in the south-as the reason for Boko Haram's act of terrorism against fellow Nigerians. As such, the government has set up a special task force to tackle the menace of the terror group and also considering the capitulative option of dialogue with Boko Haram.

According to Stephanie, The Boko Haram by its "politics has staked its claim as a primary state power interest group which have decided that it can at will use force to implement its purpose and resolving its conflict. Since their current outing in Bauchi state on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2009 when they attacked a police station, as many as 800 people were killed. In that four-day armed struggle

between state security forces spread up to three other states (Yobe, Kano and Borno)” (Stephanie, ISN Security Watch).

In all these happenings, the northern leaders have not been able to say anything. Why are they silent over the bombing, killings and wanton destruction of property? Do they acquiesce to the Boko Haram activities? Could it be that their silence is born out of fear? It has been the Emir of Anka, Zamfara State, Alhaji Attahiru Muhammad Ahmed, who expressed concern over the people’s refusal to condemn the terror group point blank. He said, “Why should everybody be afraid of Boko Haram? The one who kills must be killed.

This prompted the Senate President David Mark to say that, the silence of any leader in the North on this matter is not any way different from the act of suicide bombing itself. Mark wondered why northerners who have been yearning for development should allow their territory to suffer at the hands of hoodlums called Boko Haram. He noted that the nefarious activities of Boko Haram have led to mass movement on regional basis, thus promoting ethno-religious conflict (The Nation, Thursday August 23, 2012).

### **Conclusion/Suggestions**

In conclusion, it is widely believed that poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, unemployment, infrastructural decay, marginalization, struggle over the scare resources, political rivalries, ethnic/tribal chauvinisms, parochial loyalties to the sub-nation, lack of national ideologies, religious fundamentalisms, corruption etc, are the causes of revolutions, military coups, protests, agitations, youth restiveness, etc especially amongst the able-bodied underprivileged sections of the society. Nevertheless, both Niger Delta and Boko Haram crises falls within the purview of the issues above. This study has shown that the Niger Delta militants were not terrorists and did not pose any security challenge to the country. They were for a just treatment of the Niger Delta, the cash flow of the entire economy. Dialogue and negotiations in 2009 brought about an amnesty for the militants. And now everybody seems to believe that the problem is over. But Boko Haram is an insurgency and terrorist group that is bent upon Islamizing the entire northern Nigeria with their brand of Islamic ideology. Boko Haram’s guerilla attacks on churches, UN and Police Headquarters, etc, have killed maimed and destroyed lives and property.

While some apologists of the group have continually attributed Boko Haram's mindless acts of terrorism to poverty, unemployment and bad governance, the group itself has held fast to its stated mission of foisting its variant of the Islamic mode of governance on the northern parts of the country. But while claiming responsibility for the recent attacks on Plateau state villages that claimed over 100 Nigerian lives, including those of a serving Senator, Gyang Dantong, and the majority leader of the State House of Assembly, Gyang Fulani, the terror group broadened its mission, reportedly saying, "Christians in Nigeria (no longer the north) should accept Islam, that is true religion, or they will never know peace". It has never cited poverty and unemployment as its grouse. Its actions are they that of hunger and poverty ravaged society. The answer is no. And according to Ibekwe (The Nation, Saturday, April 21, 2012), "The Boko Haram imbroglia is not only targeted at dismembering the nation but a grandiose design to scuttle the peace and unity of the country". The group itself has held fast to its stated mission of foisting its variant of the Islamic mode of governance on the northern parts of the country.

In a statement appearing in the nation newspaper of August (Thursday 23, 2012), the Boko Haram disowned a pupported dialogue with the federal government. They went on to say that, "the federal government of Nigeria must know that, the only recipe for peace is comprehensive implementation of the Sharia system. The Qur'an must replace the constitution and Western democracy must be abolished. Failure to implement these conditions means continued violence because the warriors of Allah will never lay down their arms".

"We are optimistic that we could triumph over the infidels by over throwing the government and replacing it with Islamic government. We are a force to reckon with. The government could not subdue us when we started this crusade few years ago with knives, swords and sticks, cutlasses and knives. We are now sophisticated and in possession of countless high profile. "We have never sent an emissary to Saudi Arabia....Infact, how can the Saudi government allow negotiations with us in its land when it was the same government that chased Osama Bin Laden (May Allah forgive him) away from his country.

But today, the Boko Haram outfit are setting conditions for a negotiated settlement of their case. One is surprised at the turnaround from their earlier positions. This double talking has some sinister element in it. Why this

sudden change of mind. Have they come to realize the futility of their quests. For nothing has changed since their earlier announcement of not negotiating with the government. Apparently, the heat on them, they want to buy time and want to use the offer of dialogue to regroup and re-organize. The irony of it all is that, a day after the offer for negotiation they killed a civil war hero, major General Muhammed Shuwa. His killing occurred 24 hours after the sect gave conditions under which it would negotiate peace with the Federal Government. (The Nation, Saturday, November 3, 2012). And upto now there has been no let up from their nefarious activities. Innocent Christians are still being killed as they continue to bomb the churches.

And on the issue of dialogue and negotiations with the Boko Haram, one is surprised at impunity and arrogance with which Boko Haram is attempting to dictate things for the Federal government. They are not only dictating the venue but also selecting who should represent them and the Federal government. The question is, why Saudi Arabia as the facilitator in the negotiations? It is also a surprise at the choice of a former head of state Gen. Buhari, who after the election of Goodluck Jonathan in 2009 declared that he will make the country ungovernable for him.

Granted, what is going to be the agenda for discussion? Should the government beg Boko Haram to drop the idea of Islamizing Nigeria or the modus operandi of the Islamization? The negotiators and the government should note that, Nigeria is a secular state where the constitution expressly says no religion should be adopted as a state religion. Moreover, Nigeria is not a monolithic state with more than 230 nationalities and therefore, the interests of those nationalities must be safeguarded and protected.

Nevertheless, the government should dialogue with any identified groups with a view to negotiating the way out of the menace.

- 1) The Federal government should liaise with the main states or if possible with the entire Northern Forum and deliberate on the best approach to resolving the security challenges.
- 2) Find a suitable way of reconciling the warring parties/communities in the north.
- 3) Design mechanism to address youth restiveness and unemployment in the region.

- 4) The negotiation should be that which will affect everybody and, there should be no appeasement as is the case with the Niger Delta militant.
- 5) The negotiation should not be that which could endanger the sovereignty of the country and, Nigeria should partner with the USA and others that fight terrorism. For Boko Haram is a terrorist and insurgent organization having linkage with Al-Qaeda especially with Al-Qaeda Islamic Magreb.

Moreover, the government should remember that in negotiating with Boko Haram that, terrorist, is like a blackmailer. He is never contented with concessions, which is why no dialogue ever succeeds with terrorists. Attempts by the Afghan government to discuss with the Taliban as an example according to opinion (Punch Newspaper, August 5, 2012) have so far ended in the killing of the head of government negotiation team, Burhanuddin Rabbani, a former President of that country. And here in Nigeria, “the initiation efforts at discussion initiated by former President Olusegun Obasanjo ended with Boko Haram killing the contact person, Babakura Fugu, two days after meeting the former president”.

To solve the problem of Boko Haram, the government must first of all understand the nature of the problem which is not poverty, unemployment and bad governance. It must first of all acknowledge, like the American congress has been saying all along that, Boko Haram is a terrorist group which will attract to it greater international recognition. Boko Haram is known to be collaborating with al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, two of the world’s most vicious and notorious terrorist groups.

Regarding the proposals made by the Boko Haram for dialogue, it is expected that the presidency is studying the cease-fire conditions reeled out by Boko Haram. The government should weigh these terms on whether they are acceptable to it or not. There is nothing wrong in having dialogue with the sect, but the conditions from Boko Haram deserve careful study. The naming of a former Head of State, Gen. Muhammedu Buhari and others as negotiators is a key challenge to both parties if the dialogue is to hold at all. No one knows the mindset of Buhari on this offer because he has not been attending the council of state sessions. Also, the disposition of Saudi Arabia to serve as a facilitator of the talks is another diplomatic issue. Being a moderate state, we are not sure if it will want to shoulder such a



responsibility. The Federal government reported (The Nation, Saturday, November 3, 2012 P. 2).

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