

## **MOBILISING FOR TRUE AND ENDURING CHANGE IN NIGERIA**

**Being a Welcome Address by Mallam Aliu Badmus, National Coordinator of Islamic Welfare Foundation, at the Opening Ceremony of 2015 Conference on Islam in Nigeria Held at Fountain University, Osogbo, on Monday 23rd November, 2015**

Courtesies

We give praises and adoration to Allah and also invoke His blessings and benediction on His Noble Messenger, Muhammad (PBUH). We are especially grateful to Allah for making this event possible. Nigeria is currently experiencing challenging moments unknown in our recent history. Things are so hard that not a few laudable programmes have had to be suspended for dearth of resources. So, we are immensely grateful to Allah that this conference is not one of those good things that have to be suspended. Similarly, we deeply appreciate those of you who have honoured our invitation. As I said, these are challenging times and it is so convenient to find a thousand and one reasons not to attend. You have ignored these reasons because you know that attending this programme is a service to Allah. May He accept it as such and reward you abundantly, both here and hereafter.

This annual Conference on Islam in Nigeria organised by the Islamic Welfare Foundation (IWF) in collaboration with universities and other stakeholders is not a hollow ritual. Rather, it is an effort to deploy intellect to the service of Islam and humanity. It is one of several of the several efforts the Foundation is making to transform the Muslim Ummah and indeed the larger society into knowledge-based entities. This is done in the hope that they will become more rational rather than emotional in decision-making. The ultimate goal of these efforts is to make our society a better place to live.

The theme of this year's conference is: The Muslim Agenda for Nigeria: The Challenge of Development and Good Governance. Before mischief makers seize this as a propaganda and blackmail instrument, let me quickly say that this is not about islamising Nigeria. Islam is a religion based on conviction (belief or faith) and, therefore, cannot be imposed. Allah specifically forbids imposition of religion when He declares in Qur'an 2:256 that "there is no compulsion in religion". He goes further to declare freedom of worship for all when He commanded Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Qur'an 109:6 to tell people of other religions that: "For you is your religion and for me is mine".

The purpose of this conference is to lay an intellectual foundation for a monumental positive change in Nigeria and to demonstrate that religion, indeed Islam, has a credible and pivotal role in the process. There is no re-inventing the wheel when it comes re-engineering society for optimal performance. Nigeria is not the first society to seek social transformation. The pre-Islam Arabian society was as rotten as Nigeria is today. Islam came and cleaned the Augean stable making Arabs to become civilised and all the societies that accepted Islam thereafter became world leaders in commerce, education, science and technology. These countries declined only when they abandoned Islam. Islam still has the potential and the potency to make any contemporary nation to become great. This is why we believe that Nigeria has a lot to learn from Islam in its effort to bring about positive change in the country. This conference is intended to showcase some of the things Nigeria can learn from Islam in this respect.

We believe that religion has a role in shaping society at least by inculcating moral values. A nation that underplays morality can never achieve true development; it will only labour in vain. We therefore call on all religions and their respective leaders and followers to be alive to their responsibility to be part of the efforts to bring true development to Nigeria. All religions share the common desire to make their adherents live in abundance with hope and security. This common purpose should make it easy for religions and religious groups to collaborate. This is why IWF has only found it expedient to invite people of other religions to participate in our programmes and projects. We have a common desire to serve Allah and humanity and can always collaborate to do this even though our modes of worship differ.

Over the years, Islamic Welfare Foundation has been at the vanguard of "Practical Islam". This simply implies practicing what we preach. It involves seeking ways to practice the Shari'ah of Islam in the non-Islamic society we live in. It is our responsibility to create the enabling environment for carrying out the will of Allah on earth. For example, the Shari'ah forbids interest on loans. Happily, the laws of Nigeria now permit it. But it is left for Muslims to create institution that will make this possible. For an unacceptable length of time Muslims have been bemoaning the absence of interest-free financial institutions rather than act rigorously towards establishing them. In this regard and in our quest after "Practical Islam", I am delighted that IWF has opened an interest-free Microfinance Bank in Ilorin. We hope to open more in other locations. This is in fulfillment of our pledge at last year's conference. We also promised at that conference that the Journal of Islam in Nigeria and State of the Ummah in Nigeria Report will be published. I am pleased to inform you that both will be presented to the public at this ceremony.

Moving forward in our quest for "Practical Islam" I wish to inform you that our next project is to open a window of opportunity for Muslims in states where there are no Sharia courts. We plan to hold around-table on May 1, 2016 in Lagos to mark the 32nd anniversary of IWF. The theme will be "Integrating the Shari'ah in the Multi-Door Court System". Experts will explore the available possibilities with a view to making Muslims in Nigeria to be more Shari'ah compliant.

I wish to express our profound gratitude to all those who have cooperated and collaborated with us in pursuing our noble vision. Fountain University, Osogbo is prominent on the list. We remember late Prof. Hakeem Mobolaji who started the preparation for this conference with us but no longer with us to actualise the plan. May Allah repose his soul and grant him Al-Jannat Firdaos. We also appreciate Bishop Mathew Hassan Kuka who graciously accepted to be part of our effort on inter-faith dialogue. We cannot but appreciate the other Keynote speaker, our own Yusuf Olaolu Ali SAN, who makes substantial, profuse and regular contributions to IWF, the lead speakers, Prof. Hassan O. B. Oloyede and Prof. Rasheed Aderinoye. We appreciate other individuals and institutions too numerous to mention for their contributions. May Allah reward you all abundantly.

We call on governments at all levels in Nigeria to deliver on whatever they have promised their electorates. To do otherwise is to be hypocritical. That is the ruling of Prophet Muhammad. We laud the efforts of the present Federal Government on corruption, security and especially the issue of Chibok girls. But we cannot rest on our oars until success is achieved. The issue of IDPs should receive more attention.

There is now a consensus that Nigeria needs change otherwise she will go into oblivion and become a damning epithet of how not to be a nation. Happily, we have a leader and probably a leadership that is committed to this change. But the hope for a true and enduring change is still dim. This is because the generality of Nigerians believe that change is the responsibility of the leadership whereas in Islam change is the responsibility of all. Allah says:

....Verily, never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves.... - Q13:11

Thus, we must jointly and severally be the instrument of the change we seek in our society. Change can only be inspired by the leader and not be imposed if it will endure. While the leader must continue to inspire change through personal example, the followers too must buy into the change process. So, henceforth, before anyone asks the leader for what change he has wrought, let him ask how much himself has changed for the better. This is what will bring true and enduring change to Nigeria.

I thank you all for your attention.