

The Interfaith Forum for Muslim and Christian Women's Associations

(A.K.A. Women's Interfaith Council)

Communiqué of a One Day Seminar on Women, Development and Security

Held on

Thursday the 5th of June, 2014 at the Catholic Social Centre

Introduction.

The need for women's greater involvement in development and security initiatives has been identified as key to sustainable development. To this end, the international communities like United Nations and African Union have provided different conventions, instruments and protocols that guarantee women's involvement in development and security initiatives. Some of such protocols include CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women etc.

The Interfaith Forum of Muslim and Christian Women's Associations (a.k.a. Women's Interfaith Council) is very much aware of the urgent need to find ways to better implement these Resolutions in Nigeria especially in the face of current security challenges the country is faced with. To this effect, on Thursday 5th June, 2014, the Women's Interfaith Council hosted a seminar on the theme, Women, Development and Security. The Seminar was held in the Auditorium of Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna.

The Seminar provided an opportunity for the voices of women and those of representatives of security agencies to be heard under one roof and how women of faith in Kaduna can be more involved in taking proactive measures on security issues starting from their immediate environments. In addition, the Seminar also provided participant to those insights for self reliance, starting household industries, partnership and networking etc

Objectives.

The objectives of the one-day seminar include:

- a) To connect the relationships between underdevelopment (poverty, unemployment and structural injustice) and insecurity.

- b) To consider how women's underdevelopment (voicelessness, marginalization, low literacy level and lack of basic rights) prevents them from contributing their quota to development and security initiatives.
- c) To highlight the reasons for the present day insurgency in Nigeria and possible ways to overcoming them.

At the end of deliberations, the following have been observed:

Women in General

- i. Within the context of development and security in the society, the extent to which women are able to play a positive role is largely determined by how they perceive themselves in the first place. When women decide to see themselves as servants instead of helpmates; when they stereotype themselves as “weaker sex” instead of as having a critical and irreplaceable role in the scheme of things, they rob themselves of the needed incentive to play that all-important role in the family, and hence the society, which includes proper child nurturing upbringing. The insurgency that Nigeria is currently faced with in the north is largely attributable to failure at this level of the family.
- ii. This self image among women is not accidental. Society has over the ages relegated the girl-child and has always placed the male above her. They have even seemed to be deprived of an ambitious life and social status and this is seen in the kind of education they have been encouraged to pursue: women are hardly found in fields like the sciences, engineering or technology, which offer more ambitious job prospects. Society itself has appeared to encourage this trend by the kind of growth environment it presents the girl-child with vis-à-vis the male. Therefore, women earn less than men even at the same job with the same educational level. This predisposition places women in a disadvantaged socio-economic pedestal.

- iii. On other counts too, women face limiting circumstances. In health, for example, women are confronted with daunting challenges especially in the developing world. Most of them are in the informal sector and as such are out of the social safety nets such as health and other types of insurance schemes which the formal sector provides. They are also not able to acquire property. This means that once they are faced with any health challenge, their chances of accessing quality medical care are limited as they lack the economic wherewithal.
- iv. In spite of all these, women still have better life expectancy than the men folk. Yet again, this, instead being a blessing, is somewhat a problem because it means that they outlive the men who should form some support for them in old age. Therefore they end up old, alone and plagued with more poverty.

All of the above impact on the quality of role the woman is able to play in development and security within the Nigerian society.

Women in the Home Front

- v. The insurgency in Nigeria is real and it does not recognize religion or ethnicity. In fact women are the hardest hit. Apart from being direct victims, they are also being used as political bargaining chips: the Chibok abducted girls issue is now being highly politicized
- vi. The all important responsibility of child-rearing by parent is suffering. Sadly, among mothers, who have a first line charge in this regard and also in the security of the home, there is noticeably an alarming rise in the abuse of drugs and other substances;
- vii. Communal life which used to ensure that every child belonged to every parent has vanished. Women no longer see other people's children as theirs and hence no longer pay attention except to their own children alone. The vigilance with which all parent watched their, and each other's, children no longer exists;

The State Security Agencies and Structure

- viii. People do not have trust in the security system. They are afraid of giving information to the police, for instance, for fear that their anonymity will not be guaranteed and there will be a backlash on them and their families;
- ix. The police are perceived as not ready to conduct good investigation on matters beyond the first information report they receive, therefore often mishandling cases and to the detriment of innocent persons. This has further depleted the needed trust for citizens to be able to collaborate with the security system to combat the present insecurity;
- x. Also, uniformed personnel who are supposed to provide security for the people have been often alleged to take advantage of their uniform to harass and extort ordinary citizens;

Some General Security Realities

- xi. On a general level, there is the underlying problem of corruption at all strata of Nigerian life which has bred and continues to engender insecurity in all shades;
- xii. The socio-economic status of the common Nigerian, where about seventy percent of people live on less than two dollars a day, continues to be a major engendering factor for insecurity;
- xiii. The unfettered access of foreigners into the country who also find ways into homes as domestic helps also constitutes security threat as such persons' backgrounds and antecedents are not easily known. They could serve to sniff for information or even introduce young family member into radicalism or clandestine groups;
- xiv. There is an alarming rate of drug and substance abuse among youths;

- xv. There is also the problem of youths belonging to secret societies and cults. Persons as young as primary school age are being targeted for initiation. This factor also constitutes part of the security threats that confront the nation.

As a way out, the following have been recommended:

- i. Women, even with a disadvantaged level of education, should pursue economic empowerment. The government offers schemes and facilities that target small and medium level enterprise; they should always seek information that will help them access some of these facilities. This is one sure way that will help them to play an effective role in development and security in the society;
- ii. Women are encouraged to belong to or form groups that will add value to their lives such as cooperatives and the like;
- iii. Women should encourage their female children to pursue ambitious courses in school such as the sciences, engineering and ICT as this will enhance their competitiveness in the marketplace;
- iv. Women should recognize their strengths and play their role as influencers in the home and the society at large;
- v. Women need to know and understand their children better. They should cultivate good neighbourly relationships in their immediate communities and together keep an eye on their children so as to spot any tell tale signs early enough;
- vi. Women must be vigilant in their immediate environment, they should watch out for strangers and never be afraid to accost them to be sure of their mission;

- vii. Any breach of law and order should be promptly reported to the appropriate authorities for action. This is the beginning of the mitigation of insecurity;
- viii. In spite of doubts, women should always give relevant information to the police when any comes up; they only have to channel such to the right quarters within the police;
- ix. The police itself is called upon to ensure the protection and anonymity of its sources of information to ensure that the needed trust is built;
- x. The police must improve their image before citizens; they have to come down to the level of the grassroots and be seen to be fair and just so as to build trust;
- xi. The Women Interfaith Council (WIC) is encouraged to have within it a committee that can serve as an information collection hub for onward transmission to the police and other security agencies accordingly. This will ensure the anonymity of informants;
- xii. The WIC should regularly organize sensitization forums on delicate matter, such as the Chibok abductions, where the real facts in issue are discussed to avoid leaving them to undue politicization. Such will reduce the levels of misunderstanding and wrong dissemination of information.
- xiii. Women are encouraged to seek to understand issues from the perspectives of people other than theirs or their kind;
- xiv. This initiative should be stepped down to the grassroots through the organizations that make up the WIC;
- xv. Government must step up efforts to enforce the nation's drug laws;

- xvi. Schools should strike partnerships with the security corps and the nation's drug law agency for enlightenment for staff, students and parents on relevant issue as related to the particular corps.

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