THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN PEACE BUILDING: FOCUS ON PLATEAU STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Religion and peace have been almost mutual companions from time immemorial and in different cultures all over the world. This is simply because the vast majority of adherents and leaders of different religions still hold that true religion is a source and guarantor of individual and societal peace. Religion has the capacity to bring people together based on the increased trust and love it can introduce in the hearts of the people. However, gaps exist between the text and the practice of religion. The gap between peace and conflict in religion of finding common grounds for the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relationships remains a prime commodity. This paper prevents an overview of this gap among world religions and the need to close the gap in order to achieve peaceful coexistence. The research used secondary data. political feud/elite conspiracy theory was adopted.

Introduction

Nigeria has been described as the most populous Afro-cultural grouping in the World, that is, the most populous Black Country. According 2006 population census it has an estimated population of over one hundred and forty (140) million people, and contains about 20% of the entire African population. It tends to be divided along three major ethnic groups; the Igbo, the Hausas and the Yorubas, a mixture of religions amongst animist tradition. Religion is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being. For every religion in the world today preaches peace, but the gap between these religions or it majors today boils down to the conflict, tolerance and misunderstanding we have in our contemporary world today.

For every religion in the world today preaches peace, but the gap between these religions or it majors today boils down to the conflict, tolerance and misunderstanding we have in our contemporary world today Religion has great influence in peace building process in Nigeria. These variety of traditional methods in which the principle of nonviolence is entrenched which include: proactive or preventive mechanisms and the reactive mechanisms such as mediation,

dialogue, communication, jokes, storytelling, drama etc. which should be encourage in our contemporary times so as to reduce or manage conflict from destructive to constructive form.

This study examines deeply the relationship between the religion and peace building in Plateau state and Nigeria in general and the existing gap which has an end result of conflict.

Conceptual clarification

Peace is generally concerned with the creation and maintenance of an ordered and just society. Not less than six definitions of peace have been given by scholars including – peace as the absence of war (absence of direct violence), peace as justice and development (absence of structural violence) as well as peace as respect and tolerance between people (Francis, 2006). Galtung (1990) has identified two kinds of peace to be positive and negative peace.

Conflict is also seen as the existence of non-compatibility or disagreements between two actors (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources, etc. Fink defines conflict as any "situation or processes in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction".

The psychological antagonisms are such things as incompatible goals, mutually exclusive interests, emotional hostility, factual or value dissensions and traditional enmities; while antagonistic interactions range from the most direct, violent and unregulated struggle to the subtlest, indirect and highly regulated forms of mutual interference. Conflict occurs when two or more persons engage in a struggle over values and claims in order to secure status, power and resources; a struggle in which the objectives of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Thus, conflict is a special kind of social interaction process or interactive relationship between parties who have mutually exclusive or incompatible values, a struggle between opposing forces; a battle, an opposition between ideas, interests, etc. It is an opposition between two simultaneous but incompatible wishes or impulses, sometimes leading to emotional tension. It could also mean to come into opposition, clash or to fight.

Religion is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being Religion as a social institution cannot be exempted from conflict. No major religion is exempt from complicity in violent conflict. Religious convictions certainly were one the motivations for the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in the United States of America, as well as other violent actions by Muslims extremist in Pakistan, Afghanistan and even Nigeria. In Northern Ireland the conflict is between Catholics and Protestants while in both Somalia and Afghanistan the source of conflict is which brand of Islam will prevail.

Understanding the Identity of Religion

Identity may be defined as a combination of socio-cultural characteristics which individuals share, or are presumed to share, with others on the basis of which one group may be distinguished from others. Identity is a group concept in the sense that it is based on traits which make individuals members of a group; such traits also provide responses to the question, “Who am I?” Identity has a combination of ethnic, religious, gender, class and other layers all of which refer to the same person either in self-definition or as defined by others. Identity as other defined persists irrespective of whether people so labeled accept the definition(s). Thus, people who might see themselves as different may be seen by others as “one of them” (Alubo, 2009).

According to Castells (2004), identity is a people’s source of meaning and experience. By identity, as it refers to social actors, is understood to mean the process ofconstruction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or arelated set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over othersources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor,there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a sourceof stress and contradiction in both self-representation and socialaction.

While identity has been at the heart of violent conflicts in Nigeria, sustainable peace depends on the reconfiguring of identities as the basis of conflict resolution models.

Religion provides a context within which identity is formed. This has important implications for the potential resources and methods available for peace building.

Religion is not the only basis for identity or for deriving meaning. There is a complex web of affinities that comprise the unique complex of individual identity, as well as the crosscutting dimensions of communal identity. However, on an almost daily basis, religious identities are the bases of contestations for inclusions in opportunities and rights as they are available to others. As a result of this, many of these contestations lead to violent conflicts. On the other hand, these identities can lead to the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relationships between groups *that share common religious identities.

The gap between peace and conflict in religion of finding common grounds for the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relationships remains a prime commodity. Abdu (2010) states that, in Nigeria, against the historical attempt at evolving national consciousness and commonality devoid of primordial attachments, the nation has continued to witness a steady rise in primordial identities such as ethnic, religious and regional identities.

Peace and Conflict in Religion

Every major religion of the world has expressed at some point through its texts and practices, a commitment to the value of peace; on the other hand, throughout the world, also, no major religion is exempt from complicity in violent conflict. David (1998

Religious actors have increasingly played an important role in peace and conflict across the world. The Catholic Church, the Mennonites and Quakers have intervened in conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Buddhists have intervened in conflicts in Cambodia and Vietnam. Religious conviction certainly was one of the motivations for the September 11 attacks and other violent actions by Muslim extremists in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some Buddhist monks assert an exclusively Buddhist identity for Sri Lanka, fanning the flames of conflict there. Some Christian and Muslim leaders from former Yugoslavia saw themselves as protecting their faiths when they defended violence against the opposing faith communities in the Balkan wars.

Throughout the long era of human history, religion has been a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred and intolerance. Yet religion has also developed laws and ideas that have provided civilizations with a cultural commitment to critical peace-related values. The latter include empathy, an openness to and even love for strangers, the suppression of unbridled ego and acquisitiveness, the articulation of human rights, unilateral gestures of forgiveness and humility, interpersonal repentance and the acceptance of responsibility for past errors as a means of reconciliation, and the drive for social justice (Gopin, 1997).

The role of religion in peace and conflict is a complex phenomenon. While adherents of some faiths creatively integrate their religious traditions towards peacemaking, others engage in some of the most destabilizing violence confronting the global community today.

While religion is an important factor in conflict, often marking identity differences, motivating conflict, and justifying violence, religion is not usually the sole or primary cause of conflict. The reality is that religion becomes intertwined with a range of causal factors—economic, political, and social—that define, propel, and sustain conflict. Certainly, religious disagreements must be addressed alongside these economic, political, and social sources to build lasting reconciliation. Fortunately, many of the avenues to ameliorate religious violence lie within the religious realm itself (Smock, 2008).

Public perception prevails that religion is a principal source of conflict, but the role of religion as a force in peacemaking is usually overlooked. Smock (2008) also extensively examines peace and conflict in religion with various examples, such as when the United States became heavily engaged in trying to bring peace to Sudan because evangelical Christians pressured the Bush administration to deepen its engagement. Evangelical concern was based initially on an oversimplified view of the conflict, that an Islamic fundamentalist government was forcing Christians and animists in southern Sudan to convert to Islam. As evangelicals mobilized, they developed a more nuanced and authentic understanding of the conflict.

Jews have joined Christians and others in bringing public attention to the crisis in Darfur because widespread slaughter there has been viewed as genocide, provoking memories of the Holocaust.

Religious communities have also directly opposed repression and promoted peace and reconciliation. Churches in Eastern Europe mobilized opposition to Soviet occupation. More famously, clergymen Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane, and Beyers Naude in South Africa worked to break the bonds of apartheid. This effort entailed not only civil disobedience and advocacy for international sanctions against South Africa, but also shaming white South African Christians into recognizing that their effort to justify apartheid contradicted biblical teachings.

More recently, the civil disobedience of Buddhist monks in Burma (Myanmar) dramatically illustrated how religion could motivate the promotion of human rights and peace. In addition to the street demonstrations that garnered so much national and international attention, the monks' refusal to accept alms from members of the military was a particularly poignant declaration that the regime's policies and actions violated Buddhism's fundamental precepts. The regime recognized that the demonstrations generated much greater international attention and domestic pressure than would have been the case if they had been exclusively secular. The monks' moral authority and respect that others have for them, the symbolic resources they drew upon, their chants for compassion, and their nonviolent approach all contributed to a deeply persuasive message and image. The largely religious leadership of the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s carried similar moral weight and authority.

The decades-long civil war in Sudan is often described as a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians, with the north being predominantly Muslim and the south predominantly Christian and animist. There is some truth to this characterization, particularly after 1989, when an Islamic fundamentalist government came to power in Khartoum with an agenda to Islamize all of Sudan.

In Nigeria, Christian and Muslims died in riots over a Danish cartoon depicting Mohammed. Others were killed when Christians opposed extending the authority of Sharia courts in several northern states. In the Israeli-Arab conflict, the management of and access to religious sites are sources of disagreement and extremist religious groups both Jewish and Muslims exacerbate the problem.

Religion is a divisive and a major factor in conflict. It is undeniable from examples in history that have been used as examples to demonstrate that religion is a major factor in conflicts. The role of religion as a factor in peacemaking must however also not be over looked. The holy books of all the major religions in the world have passages where its adherents are encouraged to embrace the virtue of peace. Brathon, (1990).

The Holy Quran states clearly that Islam is a religion of peace. (ASALAM ALEKUM) Similarly, the Holy Bible makes it clear in Mathew 5:9 that, peacemakers will be called children of God. (SHALOM) The Catholic Church has also been involved in efforts to bring to an end the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine which is still ongoing following the october 7th attacked by Hamas. Through the activities of religious and nongovernmental organizations, terms like forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation and restorative justice which were previously the exclusive preserve of theology and religious worship have moved to the center of public discourse. So also COCIN church, JNI and CAN are still doing the same thing in promoting peace on the plateau and Nigeria in general.

In promoting peace and avoiding conflict in religion, religious leaders and organizations must use religious activism to promote peace especially since they offer credibility as trusted institutions; a respected set of values; moral warrants to oppose injustice; unique leverage for promoting reconciliation among conflicting parties; capability to mobilize community, nation, and international support for a peace process.

Gaps between peace and conflict in religion exist within the institutional framework of the different religions. There are usually some ideas, principles, agreements or rules that provide the basis or outline for the establishment of any institution or organization. This will determine to a large extent how that institution develops some scholars; for example, beliefs that the current Islamic fundamentalism that is ravaging the world is as a result of its foundation which is affirmed by military victories. Theologically, it still utterly dependent on the premised material superiority of its adherents. Opposition to this from other religions like Christianity and Hinduism have therefore induced a conflicting stance (Luttwack, 1994). This argument is in

direct contrast to other scholars that believe Islam is a religion of peace.

Gaps also exist as ideological differences. Ideologies are primarily some kinds of ideas or belief system and these belief systems are socially shared by members of a collectivity of social actors. In other words, ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group, this includes its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction (Dijk, 1991). In society, there are different religions and different kinds of religious organizations each with its own ideology. These differences affect peace or conflict within or outside the organization.

The Boko Haram scourge that is currently ravaging Nigeria is as a result of the jihadist ideology of the group that has pitted it against the state of Nigeria. Also, one way in which dominant ideologies reproduce, reinforce and legitimatize themselves is through the denigration of an "other". This invariably generates conflict.

Peace and conflict gaps exist in religion due to political manipulation. Political leaders manipulate religion to protect their vested interests. Ojomojobi (2013) states that in northern Nigeria, religion is used as a political tool and this has been the cause of religious conflict in the region. Aguwa (1993) also notes that religious identity is used by the leaders in the north of Nigeria to mobilize people in order to acquire and retain political power. Muhammed Buhari is said to have played this religious card during the last election which contributed to the violent reaction to result of that election. When conflict erupts it is the same religion that leaders will resort to for solutions to the conflict.

Lastly, as a result of ignorance, gaps between peace and conflict in religion are also evident. Where there is a high rate of illiteracy among people in a society, there is a greater risk of mobilization of religious identities to cause and perpetuate conflict. The people depend on their leaders to explain to them how to worship or participate effectively in religious activities. Whatever they are told is accept as factual. This is because they cannot read or are not allowed to critically examine the holy books so that they can make informed decisions. Thus not knowing the real truth about their religion, they go about committing all kinds of atrocities in the name of God. If they were literates, they will be to know that they are being manipulated.

The Duality of Religion

Religion and peace have been almost mutual companions from time immemorial and in different cultures all over the world. This is simply because the vast majority of adherents and leaders of different religions still hold that true religion is a source and guarantor of individual and societal peace. Religion has the capacity to bring people together based on the increased trust and love it can introduce in the hearts of the people. Okpanachi, . (2010

Despite its ostensible peaceful aims and potentials as contained in its text and teachings, religion could also become a malady fuelling conflicts and wars in the society. It could be instrumentalised as a convenient tool for belligerents of all faiths. Religion of all hues and shades, and especially the major religions which hold sway over the vast majority of the worlds faithful have variously condoned, incited, financed, sanctioned or encouraged conflicts in the society. Looking at the conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, Nigeria and Sri Lanka one could rightly assert that religious differences are epicenter of these conflicts (Abu-Nimer, 2000).

The reality is that religion always has social consequences. It can be a disease as is evident in the killings one by *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, but it can also cure. Hate generated by religion has societal consequences, but so does the love it generates. It is also a reality that religion could be used as a badge of identity which is usually to fuel or abate conflict for many reasons (Djikema, 2013).

As a major source of power, it has been used or misused by religious and even governmental organizations to pursue their interest to a greater extent. Its ability to inspire violence is intimately related to its impressive power as a source of peace (Mani, 2013).

Beyond the overt preaching for mercy, forgiveness, goodness and peace in religion lies all the other forms of violence within the society associated with religion (Samson & Cynthia, 1997). There is the violence within the religions, between religions, between the religious and the

secular and between the religious and the heretics. The negative peace, exclusion and discrimination religions birth and breeds has failed to condemn and eliminate structural violence such as; the distinction between believer and non-believer, lush caste and untouchable, saved and heathen souls (Mani, 2013).

According to Mani (2013), religion influences the cultural behavior and perceptions of individuals and groups to varying degrees to the extent that those who get involved in violent conflict often declare that they fight and kill others in defense of their culture and identity, political and religious beliefs.

Religion has the tendency to re-enforce the human psychological construct to be capable of love and creativity as well as hatred and destructiveness (Appleby, 2000).

It could be viewed as a double-edged sword in that it has the capacity to bring about violence and also peace. Nevertheless, it remains a tremendous resource for the creation of a just and egalitarian society that the world seeks (Abu-Nimer, 2000).

Religion and Peace Building Process

According to Ben, peace-building involves comprehensive processes, using various approaches to transform conflict towards more sustainable and peaceful relationships (Ben, 2012). The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords.

Peace building is a term describing outside interventions that are designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict within a nation by creating a sustainable peace. Peace-building activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society politically and socio economically. The exact definition varies depending on the actor, with some definitions specifying what activities fall within the scope of peace building or restricting peace building to post conflict intervention. In 2007, the UN Security-General Policy Committee defined peace building as follows: "peace-building involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peace building strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific 'needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized. Sequenced and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.

Although many of peace building aims overlap with those of peacemaking, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, it is a distinct idea. Peacemaking involves stopping an ongoing conflict, whereas peace building happens before a conflict starts or once it ends. Peacekeeping prevents the resumption of fighting following a conflict; it does not address the underlying causes of violence or work to create societal change, as peace building does. It also differs from peace building in that it only occurs after conflict ends, not before it begins. Conflict resolution does not include some components of peace building, such as state building and socioeconomic development. Like peacekeeping, conflict resolution can only follow not precede, conflict.

The tasks include in peace building vary depending on the situation and the agent of peace building. Successful peace building activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace, reconcile opponents, prevent conflict from restarting, integrate civil society, create rule of law mechanism, and address underlying structural and societal issues.

Lisa (2004:8), In simple terms, peace building is all activity aimed at improving the quality of life. Peace building prevents, reduces, transforms, and help people to recover from violence in all forms of human needs and rights. Peace building is the responsibility of many different actors: government, religious organizations, civil societies, Traditional Leaders and structures, the Media and the business community. It takes place at all levels of society in the towers of academia and government, in schools and businesses, and in community centers in every ward and town. Peace building is a set of values, relational skills, analytical frameworks, and social processes. Peace building has since expanded to include many different dimensions, such as disarmament, demobilization reintegration and building

governmental, economic and civil society institutions, the concept was popularized in the international community through UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's 1992 report: An Agenda for Peace.

In the 1970s Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung first created the term peace building through his promotion of systems that would create sustainable peace. Such system needed to address the root causes of conflict and support local capacity for peace management and conflict resolution. Galtung's work emphasized a bottom-top approach that decentralized social economic structures, amounting to a callfor societal shift from structures of coercion and violence to a culture of peace. American sociologist John Paul Lederach Proposed a different concept of peace building as engaging grassroots, Local and International NGOs and other actors to create a sustainable peace process. Sociologically, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are nosocial antagonisms. Peace is a condition in which there are no social conflicts and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations. Politically, peace entails the institutionalization of political structures. This means that stable structures and secular culture must be in place and political values like tolerance, bargaining and negotiation are made the norm. Abu-Nimer, (2000)

Peace is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict. Peace relates to existing social conditions, rather than an ideal state or condition. It is a dynamic process and it is possible to precisely identify and study the factors that drive *it.* It is not a finished condition, but always a 'work-in-progress.' It is never finished because human societies continue to aspire to higher levels of development and less conflict. Peace increases or decreases depending on objective socio-economic and political conditions. It can move from higher levels of peace to lower levels.

Galtung (1990), distinguishes between 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of peace. Positive peace means the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace at all levels while negative peace is the absence of direct violence, war and fear at all levels. There are also different ways in which people in other societies see peace.

i. a society fragmented and polarized by perpetual war and armed conflict will interpret peace as the absence of war;

ii. a political community driven by unjust structures and policies will equate peace with justice and freedom;

iii. People suffering material deprivation and poverty will invariably perceive peace in terms of equality, development and access to essential necessities of life.

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Bliss S. (2010) view peace building as a term within the international development community used to describe the processes and activities involved in resolving violent conflicts and establishing a sustainable peace. It includes **conflict transformation, restorative justice, trauma healing, reconciliation, development and leadership**. She pointed out that it is similar to conflict resolution but goes beyond seeking a

sustainable social and economic development. More importantly, it is about prevention of future wars and violence.

Gaulden P. (2004) refers to peace building as the process of making sure that a country or society creates a condition for sustainable peace. Such conditions can be created when a country is already in a state of being peaceful. In such situation, the conditions are created in order to prevent conflict from erupting and therefore peace is sustained. The conditions can also be created in post conflict situations. This is done after a conflict must have been put to an end through a conflict resolution mechanism. Under such a situation the process of peace building begins with the transition period. The various processes of implementing aspects of peace agreement become the process of peace building. He further states that the process of peace building is a continuous one as it entails taking various measures which include transformation of state organs, socio-economic development, democratization and regional integration.

In his contribution, David (2006) refers to peace building as efforts and interventions aimed at overcoming the root causes of conflicts. According to him, peace building aims at overcoming the structural, relational and cultural contradictions which are at the root of conflict in order to underpin the processes of peacemaking and peacekeeping. Peace building as a concept is quite complex. In spite of its different definitions, the underlying fact remains that peace building is basically targeted towards the realization of atmosphere of positive peace, love and tranquility that is best for human existence which will enable man achieve the best life can bring. Abdu, . (2010)

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the main cause of Conflict / insecurity in Plateau state in North central Nigeria will require a brief reflection on three theoretical perspectives which are the human development theory, and political feud/elite conspiracy theory Okpanachi, (2010). The theory of the human development model is that poverty is the cause of deprivation and frustration and it is linked to violent conflict and insecurity. Contrastingly, Osei-Brown (2012) contends that the nature of violence in northern Nigeria has never been poverty induced but rather fuelled by religious differences, While these views are partly plausible, we cannot discard the fact that the stark poverty, malnutrition, Politics, unemployment, bad governance or un govern spaces. environmental degradation and marginalization in the centralized federation may also in part impel some into conflict.

To have an understanding of the conflict theory, firstly, is to build a theory of religion and conflict. Religion as a meaningful framework for understanding the world. That is, religious frameworks provide the adherents with a basis for understanding reality without which these adherents could not comprehend the real world or function in it.

This point is greatly highlighted by Wentz (1987) as he argues that human beings are more than just biological creatures. They are also open to the possibility of understanding ultimate order and meaning in their existence. For this reason, humans have a need to seek such understanding and meaning and religion is one of the ways in which humans achieve this goal, beliefs and values. Wentz describes them as the walls of religion. People build a psychological wall of religion around themselves and their religious communities in order to deal with reality and are prepared to defend it. The biological theories have given rise to what may be referred to as innate theory of conflict which contends that conflict in all human beings. This theory is being projected by Thomas Hobbes, St. Augustine Malthus and Freud; others who subscribe to the innate theory are the theologians and religious people, who see an inner flow in humankind by way of sin that brings forth bitterness, violence and conflict. The whole purpose of religion is to regulate this sinful nature in the relationship between men and men on the one hand, and men and God on the other hand.

Conclusion

The gap between peace and conflict in religion contaminates social relations and undermines the social harmony and peaceful coexistence of states and societies. The realities of religious conflict in Nigeria are alarming and require very urgent, apt and continued attention. The use of religious identities should unite rather than divide states and societies in order to promote peace, harmonious peaceful

co-existence and unity. Consequences of the gap between peace and conflict among religious groups have been responsible for so many lives and property. The catalogue of religious conflicts has resulted in the loss of millions of lives throughout history and unquantifiable psychological and maternal damages.

Failure to tackle the problem of the gap between peace and conflict in religion through articulate policy actions continues to be the bane of development in many countries. Religious conflicts are usually inevitable in multi-religious societies. There must be a concerted effort by adherents of all religions and tolerance, acceptance and accommodation where the worth and dignity of the individual and human life is accorded respect to all people irrespective of religious inclination.

Recommendations

1. The variety of traditional methods in which the principle of nonviolence is entrenched which include: proactive or preventive mechanisms and the reactive mechanisms such as mediation, dialogue, communication, jokes, storytelling, drama should be encourage so as to promote peace in our society.

2. Let use our religion identity be a source of unity and peace in our state and country at large.

3. Let there be religious tolerance among the citizens so as to promote peace and development.

4. The Teachers of religious groups should preach what will unite the people not what will divide people.

5. 5.Religious organization should encourage peace building by promoting the role of faith based organization to participate in the country.

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