



# **18 (c). RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA**

**Imam AhmAd AbdurRahman**

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

A PAPER PRESENTATION BY IMAM ABDURRAHMAN  
AHMAD FOR NIREC

# Imam Ahmad AbdurRahman

- **Imam Ahmad AbdurRahman was born into a religious family in the Isale Koto quarters of Ilorin. He attended formal Islamic educational institutions after attaining a level of proficiency in Arabic and Quranic studies at home. He studied Fiqh, Hadith, Tawhid and Seerah in Madrasah. He attended the Government Secondary School, Ilorin, the Kwara State College of Technology (now Kwara Polytechnic) and the University of Maiduguri where he bagged a degree in Mass Communication. He is a member of the Fatwa committee of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC). He is currently the National Imam and Head of Mission of The Ansar ud deen Society (a century old foremost Islamic organization).**



# INTRODUCTION

## What is Religious freedom?

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Freedom of religion or religious liberty is a principle that supports the freedom of individuals or community in public or private, to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. It also includes the right not to profess any religion or belief or not to practice a religion (often called freedom from religion)

*Wikipedia*

## 2. *Freedom to manifest religion or belief in:*

*Teaching*

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*Practice*

*Worship*

*Observance*

*3. Since Nigerian became an independent country on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, it's independence Constitution that contained provisions on fundamental human rights has remained entrenched without amendments.*



*4. The provisions were included to address problems associated with ethnic and religious minorities.*

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*The idea was to protect minorities across different parts of the country against possible domination by majority ethnic and religious groups including alleged forceful imposition of the religion of Islam on minority Christian communities in Northern Nigeria.*

5. The provisions originated from the universal declaration of Human rights adopted by member states of the United Nations in 1948. The UN Charter agreed in 1945 declared that one of the purposes of the United Nations was “*promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.*”





## *6. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY AND DIVERSITY*

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*Nigeria is a religiously diverse country with several challenges related to freedom of religion or belief.*

*The US government estimates total population at 225.1 million (mid year 2022). According to the Pew Research Centre, as of 2015 the country is 50% Muslim, 48.1% Christian and 2% belong to other or no religion. Muslims and Christian can be found in virtually all parts of the country.*

- 7. MANAGING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
- 7.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF BELIEF OR RELIGION.

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- a. Nigeria's constitution provides that no one has the rights to demand that one religion is the official religion of the government of the Federation or a State *S.10*
- b. The citizens of Nigerian must exercise the right in a manner that is consistent with the supremacy of the Constitution *S1(1) and (3)*. This is the guiding principle that considers the indivisibility and indissolubility of the country as inviolable, see *S.2(1)*.
- c. Thus, it will be an unlawful exercise of religious rights to assert them as justification by any person or group of persons to take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof.



- d. The exercise of the right to religious freedom, individually or communally is subject to the exigency of “public order” and “private safety”, which when threatened obligates government to provide, maintain and secure such supplies and services as may be designated by the National Assembly as “essential for their restoration.”
- e. Section **38(1)** makes provision for the citizen’s freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion on belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
- f. Section **39(1)** provides that every person shall be entitled to freedom to hold opinions and to receive or impart ideas and information without interference, while **S 40** guarantees that “every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other person.”



g. These are the enabling clauses that give the citizens of Nigeria the constitutional rights to engage in religious propagation within the shores of Nigeria among other rights: to associate, to hold opinions or to impart ideas without hindrance.

8. The rights are however not absolute. The Constitution gives the state the power to derogate from them through laws that are “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” *S45(1)* provides that nothing shall invalidate any law that is “reasonably justifiable” in a democratic society in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of others.

## 9. WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN STATE AND RELIGION IN NIGERIA.

The reality is that Nigerian runs a hybrid system of religion-state pattern. Vertically it shows a preference for Islam and Christianity and horizontally there are various religious favoritism regimes with some exhibiting establishment or endorsement models or both. Some exhibit a religious preference model, and some exhibit the so-called “benevolent neutrality.

10. The Nigerian Constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

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- Selected State Governments (across the Muslim/Christian divide) individual and groups outside of the national government occasionally committed abuses.
- The Government is often not proactive in preventing the outbreak of communal clashes or investigate and prosecute those responsible.
- Federal, State governments and local authorities are yet to effectively address underlying political, ethnic and religious grievances leading to violence.
- Muslims, christians, churches and mosques are often targets of the outbreaks.

# CONCLUSION

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In general, Nigeria is a pluralistic religiously diverse Country with Constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion and conscience. The Country practices a hybrid system of religion – State pattern that shows vertical preference for Islam and Christianity and horizontal favoritism regimes.

Mutual ethnic and religious suspicions, fear of domination, manipulation of religious sentiments for ethnic and political gains, settler/indigene dichotomy and farmer/herdsman are to be critically interrogated for frequent clashes which sometimes masquerades as religious crises.

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ATTENTION**