

The Role of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Implementation of Culture of Peace and Security among Religious Adherents in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Conflicts and tensions related to Nigeria's religious diversity have posed severe obstacles to Peace and security in the country. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage a culture of peace and security among religious adherents in Nigeria. Based on these assumptions, the study evaluate the impacts of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in achieving religious dialogue, culture of peace and security in Nigeria; investigate the factors responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria; examine the reasons behind the establishment of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC);in addition, the paper examine the strategies adopted by NIREC in achieving, preventing, reducing and mitigating religious conflict and upholding religious dialogue and culture of peace among religious groups in Nigeria; investigate the challenges confronting NIREC in maintaining religious dialogue, culture of peace and security in Nigeria; as well as proffer recommendations on ways NIREC can improve on their activities in Nigeria. The research methods employed in the study is qualitative and quantitative research technique involving the use of interview and questionnaire. The data used for the study includes both primary and secondary sources. The interview was tailored towards eliciting information from key informants, including religious group leaders, leaders of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Traditionalists/Orientalists, religious experts, peace and conflict experts, elder statesmen and other stakeholders. Secondary data were sourced from textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet materials in relation to the subject studied. The study adopted Integrative Conflict Resolution and Transformative Mediation Theories as theoretical framework. The study observes that there is a need to entrenched Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in order to quench the tension of intra and inter-religious conflict and promote tolerance and unity among the religious groups in Nigeria. To this end, the study provides recommendations for NIREC and other stakeholders while also emphasizing the importance of fostering a culture of peace and security in Nigeria's diverse religious landscape to promote peaceful coexistence in a culturally and religiously diverse Nigeria.*

Keywords: *NIREC, Religious, Dialogue, Culture of Peace, Security*

Introduction

Over the years, the concern has been maintaining Peace and unity among Nigeria's two prominent religious practitioners. It is not gain saying that Religion has brought more division than unity in the country (Adabembe & Adedayo, 2022). The World Council of Churches (WCC) and Royal Jordanian Aal Al Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT) identified Nigeria as a center of frequent violence between Muslims and Christians. However, scholars have observed that the country is fast running into anarchy as a result of insecurity of lives and properties caused mainly by ethno religious crises, which has hampered the peaceful coexistence and development of the nation. All these necessitated the establishment of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) on September 11, 1999. NIREC is a voluntary association instituted by the religious leaders of the two major religions in practice in Nigeria. NIREC consists of fifty members, twenty-five Muslims, and twenty-five Christians.

Meanwhile, inter-religious organizations are as old as religion itself. Therefore, it is not novel to Nigeria; for example, Muslims, Jews, Turks, Catholics, and orthodox Christians dialogued around the 16th and 19th centuries under Ottoman to forestall crises that permeated the society at that epoch. Similarly, Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus were involved in inter-religious dialogues under the leadership of Emperor Akbar of India. In Nigeria, many international and national organizations are responsible for finding lasting solutions to the country's ethno-religious, inter-, and intra- religious crises. Meanwhile, NIREC is Nigeria's only government-recognized council saddled with this responsibility. Therefore, it is not worth mentioning some non-governmental organizations involved in this inter-faith mediation in the country. In this category are the inter-faith Mediation Centre (IMC), Universal Peace Federation (UPF), Nigerian Interfaith Action Association(NIFAA), Inter-Faith Partners for Peace and Development(IPPD), and hosts others(Faseke, 2019).

Furthermore, one would have thought that all the government and non-governmental organizations listed above would end inter-religious violence in Nigeria. Unfortunately, religious violence is still on the increase in Nigeria. Since the emergency of the Boko Haram group in 2009, the Nigerian state has been faced with the horror of this militant group which includes the bombing and burning of public buildings, mosques, churches, houses, and killing of innocent people, and attacks security personnel; terrorists have killed people in their thousands in Nigeria (World Report, 2023) It is unfortunate that these groups of people belonged to a religious set.

The Boko Haram terrorist group and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) persistently carry out attacks in the North Eastern part of the country. Meanwhile, in recent times, their attacks have expanded beyond the region (World Report, 2023). For instance, the killing of forty worshippers in a Catholic Church in Owo town, Ondo State, South West Nigeria, and a series of attacks by Islamist and other armed groups is an indication that religious violence and insecurity of lives and properties is prevalent in Nigeria(World Report, 2023). The escapee of Kuje prison Abuja, which was attacked by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and prisoners were let loose in their hundreds, was linked to the church attack in Ondo State (World Report, 2023). Similarly, in May 2022, Deborah Samuel was killed by a mob in Sokoto state; she was accused of blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed; an attempt to arrest and prosecute her killers met stiff opposition, leading to religious tension in the region. All these and many more are still prevalent in the country despite the activities of NIREC.

The importance of peace and security in the growth, development, and advancement of any society cannot be underrated, "without peace, there cannot be any development". Peace removes fear and anxiety in people's lives and promotes society's progress, growth, and development. It also encourages international cooperation, trade, and relationships. Having realized that a good understanding of Peace and security is essential to the growth and development of our society, one may be forced to ask how well we understand Peace and peaceful coexistence.

Since establishing the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in 1999, the council has been saddled with the responsibilities of promoting Peace, justice, and social transformation among various religious groups in Nigeria. The objective of this research is to explore the implementation of a culture of peace and security among religious followers in Nigeria, with a specific emphasis on the role played by NIREC. By examining NIREC's initiatives and endeavours and considering the challenges and perceptions of religious adherents, this study aims to understand how Peace and security can be nurtured in a context characterized by religious diversity.

By comprehending the dynamics of religious conflicts and the potential for peaceful coexistence, policymakers, religious leaders, and stakeholders can formulate informed strategies to reduce tensions and cultivate an environment where diverse religious communities can flourish alongside one another. Ultimately, the findings of this research can guide the actions of NIREC and other relevant entities in their efforts to promote Peace and security among religious adherents in Nigeria, fostering a society that embraces diversity, dialogue, and collective well-being.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to evaluate the roles/impacts of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in achieving religious dialogue, culture of peace and security in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- a) investigate the factors responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria;
- b) examine the reasons behind the establishment of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC);
- c) examine the strategies adopted by NIREC in achieving, preventing, reducing and mitigating religious conflict and upholding religious dialogue and culture of peace among religious groups in Nigeria States;
- d) investigate the challenges confronting NIREC in maintaining religious dialogue, culture of peace and security in Nigeria; and
- e) examine people perceptions and attitudes towards Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in promoting peace and security in Nigeria

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Peace Building

The term 'peace building' came into widespread use after 1992 when Boutros-Ghali, the then United Nations Secretary General announced his Agenda for Peace (Boutros Ghali, 1992). Since then, the concept has enjoyed widespread acceptance and usage among scholars, peace practitioners, development workers, international organizations and so on. Creating an environment conducive for peace takes various dimensions. These dimensions relies on different peace building initiatives, techniques and strategies such as structural, gender based and indigenous knowledge based dimension.

Peace building covers action which supports political, economic and social and structures aiming to strengthen and solidify settlements in order to redress the causes of conflict. This includes mechanisms to identify and support structures which tend to consolidate peace, advance a sense of confidence and well-being and support economic reconstruction. It also refers to strategy which tries to avoid conflicts through measures of an attitudinal, socio-economic and political nature. Peace building strategies involves greater inter-party contact. Peace-building tries to build bridges between people through:

contact and forgiveness; contact and the pursuit of super-ordinate goals; contact and confidence building; and contact and education for mutual understanding (Schroange, 2015).

Culture of Peace

Culture of Peace involves various approaches, processes, and stages needed to transform towards more sustainable and peaceful relationships. It comprises various activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and social transformation (Mayor, 1999). A culture of Peace is a long-term process after the violent conflict has slowed down or stopped. In a narrower sense, peace-building is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable Peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of conflict, crises, and violence by addressing the root, background, underlying, remote, and immediate causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building (Mayor, 1999). Promoting Peace consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often integral to post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Security

According to Adabembe&Adedayo (2022), security is the protection of life and property of a person. In recent time, the meaning of security has undergone a change from traditional conceptualization to a non-traditional meaning, Traditionally, security was the one-sided function of the state especially if we consider the intellectual perceptions of some political theorists like Thomas Hobbes who argued that the essence of a state is to provide law and order, which are attained through (effectual) security.

Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Religious conflicts in Nigeria have extensive historical origins and have been driven by various factors, including competition for resources, political power struggles, and socio-economic disparities (Falola, 1998; Salawu, 2010). Unfortunately, these conflicts often manifest along religious lines, with clashes primarily occurring between Christians and Muslims. Regrettably, these conflicts have taken various forms, ranging from local disputes and communal violence to large-scale attacks and, more recently, acts of terrorism perpetrated by extremist groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). One fundamental cause of religious conflicts in Nigeria is the intersection of Religion and ethnicity. Religion often becomes a defining characteristic of one's identity, closely intertwined with cultural, social, and political affiliations (Bidmos, 2006). In some instances, religious conflicts coincide with ethnic tensions, intensifying the complexity and severity of the disputes. This overlap is particularly evident in regions where religious and ethnic groups are concentrated and have historical grievances against each other (Toki et al., 2010).

The repercussions of religious conflicts in Nigeria have been grave, leading to significant loss of life, displacement of communities, destruction of property, and a prevailing sense of insecurity.(Abubakah&Aghedo, 2014) Additionally, these conflicts have had detrimental effects on social cohesion, economic development, and political stability within the country. Nigeria has made continuous efforts to address religious conflicts and promote harmonious coexistence. Numerous organizations, religious leaders, and government bodies have actively engaged in initiatives to foster interfaith dialogue, enhance understanding, and mediate disputes. The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) stands out as a critical institution in this endeavor, providing a platform for collaboration between Christian and Muslim leaders to work toward Peace and security.

Overview of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)

The Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is an essential institution in Nigeria dedicated to promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation between religious communities in the country. The

council was established in 1999 during the presidency of Obasanjo, following the advice of Rev. Yusuf Oba, the Presidential Villa Chaplain at the time, to address religious disputes in Nigeria (Oliver, 2013). A delegation led by Dr. Sunday Mbang, the leader of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), visited the then Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammed Maccido, who was also the President General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), seeking his support in establishing a body that would promote interfaith dialogue and prevent frequent religious disputes (Oliver, 2013). Consequently, both religious bodies unanimously agreed to name the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (Faseke, 2019).

The council was officially inaugurated on September 29, 1999, by President Olusegun Obasanjo, with a total of fifty members—twenty-five selected from each religious body (Tanko, 2003). The co-chairpersons of the council were Dr. Sunday Mbang, the president of CAN at that time, and Alhaji Muhammed Maccido, the Sultan of Sokoto. Currently, the council is chaired by Alhaji Muhammed Saad and Archbishop Daniel Oke.

Nigeria Inter-Religious Council aims to promote and instill in the adherents of the two major religions in Nigeria an appreciation for their unique differences. The council utilizes brochures, conferences, talks, workshops, seminars, and conversations to disseminate information to the adherents (Ayantayo, 2023). The establishment of NIREC was driven by the desire to foster acceptance and promote peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, moral principles, and good governance among the two major religions in Nigeria. Consequently, NIREC emphasizes ethical values, social justice, respect for human life, and human rights as indicators of good governance (Ayantayo, 2023).

Furthermore, NIREC is pivotal in advocating for religious tolerance and safeguarding religious rights. The council actively raises awareness about the significance of embracing diversity, supports peaceful elections, and denounces religious extremism and violence. NIREC's influence extends beyond religious matters, as it actively engages in national discussions on governance, human rights, and societal progress. The council's significance lies in its capacity to bring together influential religious leaders from diverse faith communities, fostering cooperation and unity. Through its initiatives, NIREC contributes to formulating strategies and policies that cultivate a culture of Peace and security among religious adherents in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This aspect of the study discusses the theory that forms the framework with which the research works is built. For the purpose of this study, the theory used is Integrative Conflict Resolution and Transformative Mediation Theories.

Integrative Conflict Resolution and Transformative Mediation Theories: Integrative Conflict Resolution theory strongly emphasizes the need for parties involved to reach amicable resolutions and common ground. This study applies this theory to understand how NIREC's support of interfaith dialogue enhances open communication, understanding, and the discovery of shared values among various religious groups in Nigeria, in the context of NIREC's function. NIREC can help lessen interreligious disputes by encouraging inclusive and cooperative methods to resolve conflict and by identifying solutions that consider all parties' requirements and interests.

While transformative mediation theory focuses on empowering people and changing how they view and relate to one another during conflicts. The theory evaluates NIREC's involvement in supporting mediation procedures. It comprehends how it aids in transforming the relationships between Christians and Muslims, the two religious devotees often involved in conflicts in Nigeria. The interventions of NIREC may encourage empathy, perspective-taking, and acceptance of the humanity of the "other," which could ultimately result in conflict resolution and create long-lasting, harmonious relationships.

Methods

The study utilized mixed methods research design which comprises qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, and integrating the two forms of data.(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of this study, qualitative method involved the use of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Direct Observations (DOs) while quantitative method involving the use of questionnaire was disseminated through Google form. The questionnaire and interview guides were designed to elicit responses on each of the specific objectives of the study. The questionnaire and interview were used to gather information from key informants, including, religious group leaders, of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), and Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Traditionalists/Orientalists, religious experts, peace and conflict experts, elder statesmen, among other stakeholders.

The secondary data was derived from textbooks, magazines, academic journals, newspapers and the internet. Data derived from the questionnaire and interview was analyzed. Data obtained from questionnaire issued to respondents were collated, summarized and analyzed. In order to simplify the work for easy interpretation and understanding, frequency distribution tables and simple percentage method were applied as a major statistical tool. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in this study helps in assessing Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), Religious Dialogue, Culture of Peace and Security in Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The target of the Google questionnaire were various representatives Leaders of Christian Association of Nigeria; Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs; Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria; NIREC Officials; Public Affairs Analysts; Traditionalists, members of the public and other stakeholders across the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria. However, the responses gotten the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) via Frequency and Percentage table.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	RESPONDENTS BIO DATA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	GENDER:		
	Male	97	64.67%
	Female	53	35.33%
	Total	150	100%
2	AGE DISTRIBUTION:		
	18-25	19	12.67%
	26-40	41	27.33%
	41- 55	51	34.00%
	55years and above	39	26.00%
	Total	150	100%

3	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION: Primary Education Secondary Education Tertiary Education No Formal Education	4 22 122 2	2.67% 14.67% 81.33% 1.33%
	Total	150	100%
4	RELIGIOUS Christianity Islam African Traditional Religious (ATR)	84 62 4	56.00% 41.33% 2.67%
		150	100%
4	RELIGIOUS/GROUPS AFFILIATION: Leaders of Christian Association of Nigeria Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria NIREC Officials Public Affairs Analysts Traditionalists/Orientalists Members of the Public	25 25 25 25 20 10 20	16.67% 16.67% 16.67% 16.67% 13.33% 6.67% 13.33%
	Total	150	100%
	Geopolitical Zone South-West South-East South-South North-Central North-West North-East	25 25 25 25 25 25	16.67% 16.67% 16.67% 16.67% 16.67% 16.67%
		150	100%
	Ethnic Group Yoruba Igbo Hausa/Fulani	50 50 50	33.33% 33.33% 33.33%
		150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Findings and Discussion

Findings on Research Objective 1(The Roles/Impacts of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Achieving Religious Dialogue, Culture of Peace and Security in Nigeria)

Table 2: Roles/Functions played by Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in advancing harmony and Security among Religious Adherents in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Interfaith Conversation	48	32.00%
Setting up of Conflict Resolution Strategies	34	22.67%
Advocacy for Peaceful Coexistence	25	16.67%
Promoting Collaboration among Religious Groups	22	14.67%
Building Capacity Training for Religious Leaders	21	14.00%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

Table 2: Above shows to a great extent that Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in advancing harmony and Security among Religious Adherents in Nigeria. This is evident from respondent’s response. The majority of respondents 48 (32.00%) agreed that NIREC have been engaging interfaith conversation among religion adherents in Nigeria regularly, while 34 (22.67%) of the respondents indicated that NIREC has set-up conflict resolution strategies. It revealed that 25 (16.67%) of the respondents indicated that NIREC has been networking on advocacy for peaceful coexistence among religion adherents in Nigeria. In addition, 22 (14.67%) agreed that NIREC has been promoting collaboration among religious groups in Nigeria while 21 (14.00%) of the respondents agreed that NIREC has been working towards building capacity training for religious leaders in Nigeria.

Findings on Research Objective 2(The Factors Responsible for Religious Conflict in Nigeria)

Table 3: Factors Responsible for Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Wrong Religion Orientation and teachings	46	30.67%
Low Literacy Level of Religious Adherents	34	22.67%
Nigeria Government Involvement in Religious Matters	19	12.67%
Selfishness on the Part of Religious Personalities	17	11.33%
Nepotism and socio-religious bigotry	12	8.00%
Marginalization and Oppression of Religion Groups	12	8.00%
Gross Violation of People Religious Rights	10	6.67%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

The Table 3 revealed the distribution of respondents based on their opinion of factors that is responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria. The data showed that 46(30.67%) respondents indicated that the wrong religion orientation and teachings is one of the major factors that is responsible for religious conflict. 34(22.67%) respondents indicated low literacy level of religious activities responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria, 19 (12.67%) respondents indicated that Nigeria government involvement in

religious matters is the main factor responsible for incessant religious conflict, 17 (11.33%) agreed on selfishness on the part of religious personalities; 12 (8.00%) indicated that nepotism and socio-religious bigotry; 12 (8.00%) indicated marginalization and oppression of religion groups while only 10(6.67%) respondents indicated that religious conflict is as a result of gross violation of people religious rights. This shows that there is prevalent of religious conflict in Nigeria states.

Findings on Research Objective 3(The Reasons Behind the Establishment of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)

Table 4: Factors contributed to the Establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Incessant ethno-religious crises	49	32.67%
Religious motivated killing and maiming	40	26.67%
Imbalance in sociopolitical landscape of Nigeria	29	19.33%
Intolerance among religious leaders and followers	22	14.67%
Lack of peace, unity and progress among multi-religion groups in Nigeria	10	6.67%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

Table 4 presents responses on factors that contributed to the establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Nigeria. The data showed that 49(32.67%) respondents indicated that the incessant ethno-religious crises in Nigeria is one of the major factors that contributed to the establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Nigeria. 40 (26.67%) respondents indicated religious motivated killing and maiming contributed to the establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) 29 (19.33%) respondents indicated imbalance in sociopolitical landscape of Nigeria were the main factors that contributed to the establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Nigeria, 22 (14.67%) respondents indicated that Intolerance among religious leaders and followers is the main factor contributed for the establishment of NIREC, while only 10 (6.67%) respondents indicated that NIREC was established because of lack of peace, unity and progress among multi-religion groups in Nigeria. This shows that there are heavy incessant ethno-religious crises and massive religion motivated killing and maiming in Nigeria states.

Table 5: The Main Purpose for Establishment of Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
To reduce religious conflicts and insecurity	38	25.33%
To strengthen social cohesion and national stability	30	20.00%
To encourage culture of peace and security among religious adherents	23	15.33%
To stimulate roles of religious leaders	21	14.00%
To protect fundamental human rights among the religion groups	20	13.33%
To promote sustainability of the society	10	6.67%
To improve international reputation of Nigeria	8	5.33%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

As revealed in Table 5 above, the respondents agreed that the main purpose for establishing Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Nigeria is to reduce religious conflicts and insecurity as 38 (25.33%) of the respondents indicated so. 30(20.00%) of the respondents identified the reason as to strengthen social and national stability, 23(15.33%) indicated to encourage culture of peace and security among religious adherents in Nigeria, while 21(14.00%) indicated that the purpose for establishing Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is to stimulate roles of religious leaders in Nigeria, 20 (13.33) agreed on protection of fundamental human rights among the religious groups; 10 (6.67%) indicated that NIREC was established in order to promote sustainability of the society, while only 8(5.33%) of the total respondents indicated that the main purpose is to improve international reputation of Nigeria.

Findings on Research Objectives 4(The Strategies adopted by NIREC In Achieving, Preventing, Reducing And Mitigating Religious Conflict And Upholding Religious Dialogue And Culture Of Peace Among Religious Groups In Nigeria States)

Table 6: Do you think Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is controlling all forms of religious conflict in Nigeria?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	124	82.67%
No	24	16.00%
I don't know	2	1.33%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

As revealed in Table 6, shows that many of the respondents agreed that Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is controlling all forms of religious conflict in Nigeria states as 124 (82.67%) of the

respondents indicated yes. However, 24 (16.00%) respondents disagreed with the opinion, while 2(1.33%) were not decisive in their opinion. This shows a significant relationship between Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) and religious conflict control in Nigeria.

Table 7: Do you think Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) religious conflict handling styles aligns with best and conventional practice of resolving conflict?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	142	94.67%
I don't know	5	3.33%
No	3	2.00%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

As revealed in Table 7, most of the respondents agreed that Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) religious conflict handling styles aligns with best and conventional practice of resolving conflict as 142 (94.67%) of the respondents indicated yes. However, 5 (3.33%) were not decisive in their opinion, while 3 (2.00%) respondents disagreed with the opinion. This shows a significant relationship between Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) religious conflict handling styles and the best and conventional practice of resolving conflict.

Table 8: Do you think Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has minimized religious conflict in Nigeria states?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	126	84.00%
No	20	13.33%
Maybe	4	1.33%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

Table 8 shows the distribution of the opinion of respondents in respect of whether Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has minimized religious conflict in Nigeria states, thus, a significant majority of the respondents 126 (84.00%) agreed that Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has minimized religious conflict, 20(13.33%) respondents disagreed, while only 4 (1.33%) respondents were not decisive.

Table 9: Strategies adopted by Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) for the Prevention, Reduction and the Control of Religious Conflict in Nigeria States

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Mediation and Negotiation Strategies	42	28.00%
Grassroots Campaigns and sensitization	40	26.67%
Increase the level of religious literacy among the people	27	18.00%
Closing of gaps between religious minorities and majorities	23	15.33%
Projection of equal rights among groups regardless of their religion and belief	18	12.00%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

As revealed in Table 9, mediation and negotiation strategies is the most common strategy adopted by Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) for the prevention, reduction and control of religious conflict in Nigeria as indicated by 42 respondents constituting 28.00% of the total respondents. Meanwhile, 40 (26.67%) indicated grassroots campaigns and sensitization, while 27 (18.00%) respondents indicated increase the level of religious literacy among the people, 23 (15.33%) respondents indicated closing of gaps between religious minorities and majorities and 18 (12.00%) indicated projection of equal rights among groups regardless of their religion and belief. This data reveals that mediation and negotiation strategies and grassroots campaigns and sensitization are the main strategy adopted by Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) for the prevention, reduction and control of religious conflict in Nigeria. This further made clarity of NIREC activities in Nigeria.

Findings on Research Objectives 5(People Perceptions and Attitudes towards Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in Promoting Peace and Security in Nigeria)

Table 10: People Perceptions and Attitudes towards Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in promoting Peace and Security in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Recognition of the influence of religion in fostering peace	78	52.00%
Projection of interfaith discourse and collaboration	34	22.67%
Promotion of social justice and equity	15	10.00%
Response to counter extremism and violence	13	8.67%
Support for peace building initiatives	10	6.67%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

The Table 10 above revealed the people perceptions and attitudes towards Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in promoting peace and security in Nigeria. Thus, 78(52.00%) of the respondents indicated NIREC has been using recognition of the influence of religion in fostering peace to promote peace and security in Nigeria, 34(22.67%) indicated projection of interfaith discourse and collaboration, 15 (10.00%) indicated promotion of social justice and equity, 13 (8.67%) of the respondents also indicated that its Response to counter extremism and violence that make it possible for NIREC to combat religious conflict,, while 10(6.67%) indicate that the support for peace building initiatives. This shows that there is significant connection between Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) and promotion Peace and Security in Nigeria

Table 11: Obstacles and Difficulties Confronting Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in implementation of Culture of Peace and Security in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Deep-rooted conflicts and dissension	41	27.33%
Religion Ideologies	28	18.67%
Weak governance and persuasive corruption	23	15.33%
Lack of trust in reconciliation process	21	14.00%
NIREC Limited capacity and resources	19	12.67%
Lack of political will and bad leadership	16	10.67%
Socio-economic disparities and inequality	2	1.33%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

Table 3 establishes that Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is facing a lot of challenges that really affect the smooth implementation of it mandates. Majority of the respondents 41 constituted 27.33% claimed that deep-seated conflicts and dissension in Nigeria landscape served as the major obstacle and challenges to Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) operation in Nigeria. Beside, 28 (18.67%) of the respondents also indicated religion ideologies and violence; 23 (15.33%) agreed on weak governance and persuasive corruption in Nigeria; 21 (14.00%) opted for lack of trust in reconciliation process. In addition, 19 (12.67%) agreed with NIREC limited capacity and resources; while 16 (10.67%) indicated lack of political will and bad leadership and only 2 (1.33%) of the total respondents indicated socio-economic disparities and inequality.

Table 12: Ways Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) can improve its peace building and religious conflict resolution efforts in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
By conducting community based engagement	56	37.33%
By re-enactment of law that will strengthen the activities of NIREC in Nigeria	38	25.33%
By domesticate NIREC law and operations in all states in Nigeria	31	20.67%
By employing or engaging more peace and conflict studies and religion scholars into NIREC committee	15	10.00%
Timely prosecution and punishment of religious conflict perpetrators	10	6.67%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

As revealed in Table 12 above, the respondents agreed that the only way Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) can improve its operation in Nigeria is by conducting community based engagement as 56 (37.33%) of the respondents indicated so. 38(25.33%) of the respondents indicated re-enactment of law that will strengthen the activities of NIREC in Nigeria; 31(20.67%) indicated that by domesticate NIREC law and operations in all states in Nigeria; 15 (10.00%) indicated that by employing or engaging more peace and conflict studies and religion scholars into NIREC committee while only 10(6.67%) of the total respondents indicated by timely prosecution and punishment of religious conflict perpetrators in Nigeria.

Findings and Discussion

From the record of findings, it is clear that NIREC has been able to take control of religious conflict in Nigeria. The highest percentage of respondents in both the answers to interviews and responses to questionnaires show that NIREC has been able to control incessant religious conflict in Nigeria States. For instance, a key informant, (NIREC official) while responding to interview questions specifically states as follows:

Before the establishment of NIREC, citizens experienced religious conflict in most cities in Nigeria. The religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims was recurrent every day most especially in Northern Nigeria. Worship centers were destroyed, and many people died. The major reason why NIREC succeeds is that they have the temerity to conducting community based engagement and interfaith conversation. Unlike arrest and persecution of perpetrators of religious conflict. This has accounted for the level of success recorded so far. It is common knowledge that the NIREC officers are well educated with issue of religion in Nigeria. They are members of religious groups and respected traditional rulers and they know pluralistic nature of religion in Nigeria (Fieldwork, 2023).

In concluding this segment of the study, it is safe to say that the establishment of NIREC has controlled the level of religious conflict in Nigeria.

It was assumed that the strategies adopted by Nigeria-Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) for the prevention, reduction and the control of religious conflict in Nigeria were effective and efficient. Meanwhile, findings from this study show that there has been an increase in religious peace, harmony and security in Nigeria. To be specific, 42 respondents representing 28.00% believe that Mediation and Negotiation Strategies among religious groups was aggravated by the establishment of NIREC. In addition, 40 respondents representing 26.67% believe NIREC has been embarking on aggressive grassroots campaign and sensitization. Responses to interview questions are not different. For instance, 81% of those interviewed agree with the respondents to questionnaires. In this case, it could be concluded that NIREC has made a significant impact reducing religious conflict and promoting peace and security in Nigeria States.

From the findings of this study, all the respondents agree that NIREC are faced with various degrees of challenges and obstacles. Some of them NIREC is faced with the challenges of deep-rooted conflicts and dissension, religion Ideologies and many others. While it is true that these challenges hamper the smooth running of NIREC, some of the respondents to the interview questions believe NIREC is not doing below expected. However, the request that the federal government of Nigeria should pay attention to the development of the committee. They believe NIREC is providing them with negotiation and mediation strategies in combating religious conflict as expected.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council's (NIREC) persistent efforts and strategic interventions in fostering a culture of Peace and security among religious adherents have resulted in tangible progress in changing the religious landscape of Nigeria. NIREC is well-positioned to pave the way for a peaceful and secure future for all religious adherents in Nigeria by fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting education and awareness, engaging religious leaders, advocating for policy changes, working with security agencies, and empowering the youth. The shared commitment to peaceful coexistence continues to be a pillar for NIREC and every person, religious organization, and institution working to create a united and prosperous Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations are made: Interfaith discourse should be actively encouraged and supported by NIREC among Nigeria's religious followers. This can be done by regularly scheduling conferences, seminars, and workshops where representatives from many faith communities can unite to promote respect, understanding, and peaceful coexistence. As a matter of urgency, NIREC must also actively interact with religious leaders of other religions and involve them in efforts to advance Peace and security. These can be accomplished by planning training sessions for religious leaders on interfaith collaboration, peace-building, and conflict resolution. Then, religious leaders can share these ideas with their respective communities, promoting a culture of Peace.

NIREC should support community outreach initiatives that unite people of many religious origins. These initiatives can include group community service projects, cultural exchange activities, and social projects to build bridges and promote partnerships. Promote Religious Tolerance, the Protection of Religious Freedoms, and Inclusivity: NIREC has to promote policy reforms at the national and local levels that support religious tolerance, the Protection of Religious Freedoms, and inclusiveness. All This may entail advocating for legislation that forbids religious discrimination and guarantees the equality of all religious communities.

To handle religiously motivated disputes and encourage security among religious devotees, NIREC must work closely with security services. Working with security services entails information exchange, training security officers on religious sensitivity, and fostering communication between religious communities and law enforcement organizations. A system for tracking and reporting religious intolerance, prejudice, or violence should be implemented by NIREC. For NIREC to address these hotspots and areas of concern and advance Peace and security, this will aid in identifying them.

Since today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders, NIREC should actively incorporate them into its projects by developing youth-led initiatives and forums for interfaith discourse. NIREC can ensure that religious followers in Nigeria have a long-lasting and peaceful future by empowering young people to become peace ambassadors.

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