

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY BOSS MUSTAPHA,
SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
FEDERATION)**
**AT THE 2018 MEETING OF THE NIGERIA INTER-
RELIGIOUS COUNCIL (NIREC
HELD IN ABUJA NIGERIA ON THURSDAY, 22ND
MARCH, 2018**

PROTOCOL

It is with great pleasure that I am here today to address the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) which is made up of prominent, patriotic and worthy Nigerians that devote their life time to nation building and stability.

2. My presence here today is a demonstration of total commitment by Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the peaceful co-existence, economic well-being and harmony amongst Nigerians.

3. The membership of this Council is evenly distributed between Muslims and Christians faithful and is built on the recognition of the role of inter-religious collaboration in assisting the Federal government to achieve cohesiveness in the society. To underscore its importance, the management of the affairs of this Council is handled by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation in the Presidency.

4. Since its establishment in 1999, NIREC has enhanced interaction between Muslims and Christian faithful and the Council has played active roles in managing conflict and dousing potentially inflammable situations from snowballing into serious conflicts.

5. This administration came into existence in May, 2015 and inherited several challenges that are of religious,

security and socio- economic in nature. We recognize the fact that these situations might have been curtailed had the Council met regularly since 2013.

6. This meeting is holding at a critical time in the national life of our dear country. Nigerians at times like this expect the voice of reason that the membership of this Council represent, to intervene and steer our minds and thoughts in the right direction.

7. As you are all aware some of the challenges confronting the government include extremism and religious intolerance. In your positions as religious leaders, custodians of our traditions and molders of public opinion, we expect that your discussion at this meeting will help to find solutions that will complement the on-going efforts of government. We urge you to speak up against actions and groups that threaten our peace and national unity.

8. Closely associated with the issues of religious extremism is insurgency that has threatened national security and territorial integrity. In this instance the Boko Haram insurgency and Militancy come to mind. While recognizing that the security agencies have been living up to their expectations, it is also important to emphasize that the business of security is the business of all Nigerian citizens as a collective responsibility. The Federal Government pledges all support towards achieving the objectives for which the Council was established in order to ensure that dialogue and peaceful approach are deployed to support the Military effort.

9. The third major challenge that the government still faces is the economic recession which the country is

gradually over coming. As a response to this economic challenge, government has designed the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) aimed at diversification and deepening of economic growth. This is been carried out through several strategies including safety net programmes, adopting policies to ease process of doing business in Nigeria, deploying resources to boost infrastructure development that can create opportunities, employment and enhance the fight against corruption. This Council has a role to play in the success of all these strategies adopted by government.

10. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I have taken you through these critical challenges we face as a country in order to let you know that the peaceful co-existence of Nigerians is important. Religion is an instrument for building national harmony and peaceful co-existence, and this government is committed to fairness to all, irrespective of their ethnic background or religious beliefs. At the same time it is important to state that government will be decisive in applying the full weight of the law against those who masquerade under the disguise of religion or any other pretence to perpetrate crimes.

11. Your Royal Highnesses, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as we prepare for the next elections, we also urge you to help disseminate information on the importance of registration by all eligible citizens, because that is their civic duty while voting is their constitutional right. Government also urges that you should convey the message of non-violent political activities all through the electioneering process.

12. I have no doubt that the agenda of this meeting will be populated by discussions on issues of national

importance. The expectation of government is that the outcome will be robust and will help government to formulate better policies that will help address our challenges. I urge you to be dispassionate in your discussions and to put Nigeria first in your deliberations.

13. I thank you very much for your attention.