

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

8 November 2012

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Nigeria: Treatment of Christians who convert to Islam; treatment of Muslims who convert to Christianity; information on state protection for mistreated religious converts
 Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Context

Sources indicate that in Nigeria religious freedom is protected (Freedom House 2012, 8; US 30 July 2012, 1). Christian Green, a senior research fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at the Emory University School of Law, indicates in an article published in the *Emory International Law Review* journal that intermarriage "is often the occasion and motivation for religious conversion" (2011, 958). The US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011* for Nigeria indicates that "[i]n many communities, Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced ostracism by adherents of their former religion" (30 July 2012, 8).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria indicated that attitudes toward interreligious conversion "differ markedly among the different Nigerian ethno-religious groups" (Senior Research Fellow 17 Oct. 2012).

2. Conversion from Islam to Christianity

In 17 October 2012 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria provided the information contained in the following paragraph.

The Hausa-Fulani and related groups located in the north of Nigeria rely on the "Arab world" for "religious, socio-cultural and political inspirations." This means that they may see themselves as "the bastion of opposition against the spread of Christianity and Western culture in Nigeria." Since the leaders of the Hausa-Fulani community view with "grave concern" the "increasing Western influence" among their people, conversion from Islam to Christianity by their members is also regarded as a "treasonable act." Those who convert are "ostracized" by members of their community and cease to benefit from the protection and patronage from both the government of their states and Muslim kinsmen, and are, therefore, "prone to [en]danger their lives." Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The senior research fellow expressed the opinion that "the Hausa-Fulani presents an extreme situation in Muslim intolerance to Christianity" in Nigeria.

2.1 Forced Conversion

Media sources cite the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, as saying during a dinner with journalists that there is nothing like a "forceful" conversion of non-Muslims to Islam because Islam does not advocate "compulsion" in religious beliefs (*This Day* 17 Aug. 2012; *National Accord* 17 Aug. 2012). He reportedly denied the existence of a plan "Islamise the country" (*ibid.*; *This Day* 17 Aug. 2012). The Sultan of Sokoto is the religious leader of Nigeria's Muslim community (Harvard University 15 Sept. 2011).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that there were unconfirmed reports of forced conversions of Christians to Islam, particularly by Boko Haram members (US 30 July 2012, 7). Boko Haram, which means "'Western education is forbidden,'" is described by the US Department of State as an "extremist sect with aims to overthrow the Nigerian government and impose a stricter form of Sharia throughout the country" (*ibid.*). The US

report also indicates that Boko Haram issued a statement in February 2011 calling for "continued violence until the country embraced Islam, dropped its constitution, and adopted the laws in the Qur'an" (*ibid.*). The Voice of America (VOA) and CiNews, a non-profit daily news service that focuses on topics of interest for Christians (ciNews *n.d.*), report that Boko Haram killed at least 50 people in the Plateau State during a weekend in July 2012 and issued an statement indicating that Christians should convert to Islam "or they will never have peace" (*ibid.* 13 July 2012; VOA 10 July 2012). The Christian news agency BosNewsLife reports that Boko Haram "has also given Christians, including those indigenous to the north and center, the alternative of conversion or death" (11 Aug. 2012). In an older article, BosNewsLife cites an official from the Christian Association of Nigeria as indicating that members of Boko Haram "tortured" and "beheaded" three pastors and eight Christians in July 2009 when they resisted "forceful conversion" (9 Aug. 2009). A report by Human Rights Watch also points out that Boko Haram killed people who refused to convert to Islam during the July 2009 violence (*Oct.* 2012, 45).

3. Conversion from Christianity to Islam

In 17 October 2012 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria provided the information contained in the following paragraph with regard to the Igbo community.

The senior research fellow said that dominant Christian Igbo community in the East "display[s] intolerance towards conversion to Islam." The Igbo view Hausa-Fulani men as "ritually unclean" as they are usually not circumcised. He added that Igbos may display "aggressive defence" of the Christian faith and conduct evangelical activities among the Hausa -Fulani. In the senior research fellow's opinion, "[t]o the Igbo and Hausa-Fulani ... interreligious conversion between them amounts to a case of extreme religious apostasy and a virulent rebellion against their respective communities." However, he also stated that the Igbo situation represents "the extreme of intolerance towards conversion to Islam" in Nigeria. He also indicated that while conversion from Christianity to Islam is encouraged by the Hausa-Fulani, new Christian converts find it difficult to integrate fully into the community. Some traditional Muslims may regard new converts from Christianity to Islam with "suppressed disdain"; this, claims the senior research fellow, is illustrated by the unwritten policy that prevent new converts from Christianity to Islam from taking important roles within the community. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani consider that no convert from outside their customary group should be either an Imam or *Qadi* [Sharia judge]. Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The senior research fellow expressed the opinion that, based on their interpretation of the Quran, "most traditional Muslims" perceive new converts from Christianity as "unreliable members" of the Muslim community. Corroborating information or information pertaining to other Christian communities in Nigeria could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Religious Conversion in Yorubaland

Both Christianity and Islam have influence among the Yoruba (Senior Research Fellow 17 Oct. 2012; US 30 July 2012, 2). The senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria provided the information contained in the following paragraph.

The senior research fellow says that Yoruba people of both religions share an attachment to the "traditional value system," which partly explains the "absence [among the Yoruba people] of the kind of bitter rivalry between Christianity and Islam found in the North." He further explains that Muslims may participate in Christian events in churches while, similarly, Christians may attend Muslim events in mosques. However, the senior research fellow says that "there still exists subtle rivalry arising from interreligious conversions" and that both communities engage in efforts to convert members of the other community. Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact professors from the following universities were unsuccessful: King's College; University of Birmingham – Centre of West African Studies; University of Edinburgh – School of Divinity; University of Florida – Center for African Studies. Attempts to contact representatives from BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights were unsuccessful.

Professors from the following universities could not provide information: University of Oxford – African Studies Centre.

Internet sites, including: Africa for Women's Rights; African Journals Online; Amnesty International; Anwar-ul-Islam Movement of Nigeria; Asylum Aid; Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation; Center for Reproductive Rights; *Christian Science Monitor*; Council on Foreign Relations; Denmark – Danish Immigration Service; ecoi.net; Encyclopedia of the Third World; GERDDES-AFRICA; *The Guardian*; Islam Sharia Watchmen; Nasrul-Iahi-I-Fathi Society of Nigeria; Nigeria – Ministry of Interior, Police Force; *Nigerian Tribune*; Saint; *The Punch*; United Kingdom – British Council, Border Agency; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld, Reliefweb; United States – Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, Overseas Security Advisory Council; University of Wisconsin; *Vanguard*.

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