



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [2010 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) » [Africa](#) » [Nigeria](#)

## Nigeria

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Twelve northern states use Shari'a (Islamic law) courts to adjudicate criminal and civil matters for Muslims and customary law courts to adjudicate cases involving non-Muslims.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although some local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity. The government often invoked religious sensitivity as a reason for caution in taking a stance on international issues with religious implications.

Violence, tension, and hostility between Christians and Muslims increased, particularly in the Middle Belt, exacerbated by indigene/settler laws, discriminatory employment practices, and resource competition.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and improve interreligious relations. The U.S. mission staff assumed an active role in discussing and advocating these issues with government, religious, civil society, and traditional leaders.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 356,700 square miles and a population of 150 million. While some groups estimate the population to be 50 percent Muslim, 40 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs, it is generally assumed that the numbers of Muslims and Christians are approximately equal.

The predominant sect of Islam is Sunni; however, there is a small but growing Shi'a minority. Christians include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and a rapidly growing number of nontraditional evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. There are also adherents of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The North, dominated by the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups, is predominantly Muslim. Significant Christian communities have resided and intermarried with Muslims in the North for more than 50 years. Both Muslims and Christians reside in approximately equal numbers in the Middle Belt, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and also in the Southwest, where the Yoruba ethnic group predominates. While most Yorubas practice either Christianity or Islam, the practice of traditional Yoruba religious beliefs continues. Southeastern ethnic groups are predominantly

Christian. In the Southeast, where the Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists are the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites like marriage rites, ceremonies, and culture in tandem with Christianity. In the Niger Delta region, where the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups are most numerous, Christians are the majority and only an estimated 1 percent is Muslim. Pentecostal Christianity is also growing rapidly in the South. Members of the Ahmadiyya movement maintain a small presence in Lagos and Abuja.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion including freedom to change one's religion or belief and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The constitution mandates that the government "shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." The government occasionally placed limits on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

There are 36 states; state governors enjoy significant autonomy in decision making and derived substantial resources subject to oversight from the national government. State legislatures possessed significant discretion to develop and promulgate legislation, although disagreements have arisen over the past several years about the limits to that autonomy.

The constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting a state religion or giving preferential treatment to any religious or ethnic community.

The constitution provides that states may establish courts based on the common law or customary law systems. Twelve northern states (Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Zamfara, and Gombe) maintained Shari'a courts, which adjudicated both criminal and civil matters, alongside common law and customary law courts. Many Christians alleged that having Shari'a courts amounted to the adoption of Islam as a state religion. In addition the Civil Liberties Organization, a prominent nongovernmental organization (NGO), contended that Zamfara State promoted Islam as a state religion through its establishment of a Commission for Religious Affairs.

While the constitution specifically recognized Shari'a courts for civil matters, it does not address the application of Shari'a to criminal matters. Aggrieved parties had the right to appeal judgments of Shari'a courts on three levels of Shari'a appellate courts. Cases that reach the Shari'a Court of Appeal (the highest level of the Shari'a courts) can theoretically be appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal and then to the Supreme Court. No case involving the Shari'a criminal code has reached the Federal Court of Appeal, however, and the court has not rendered a judgment on the issue of constitutionality of Shari'a court jurisdiction over criminal matters.

The constitution technically does not permit non-Muslims to consent to Shari'a legal jurisdiction, but in practice non-Muslims occasionally chose to have cases heard in Shari'a courts, citing that they were faster and less expensive than customary courts.

The potential expansion of Shari'a in other northern states was a topic occasionally raised in public discussions, for example, at a public hearing on the Senate Committee's review of the 1999 constitution. In December 2009 Muslims from Kano State expressed support for Shari'a to be included in the state's constitution during a public hearing on the Senate Committee's review of the national constitution.

In Zamfara State a Shari'a court must hear all criminal cases involving Muslims. Other states that use the Shari'a legal system, including Niger and Kano, permitted Muslims to choose common law courts for criminal cases. Civil society

groups alleged that some qadis (Shari'a court judges) applied harsher penalties in adultery and fornication cases against women than against men and required stronger evidence to convict men than to convict women.

There are no laws that barred women or any groups from testifying in common law courts or that gave less weight to their testimony; however, Shari'a courts usually accorded less weight to the testimony of women and non-Muslims.

In April 2010 former Zamfara state governor and current Senator Ahmed Sani Yerima reportedly married a 14-year-old girl from Egypt. The marriage was not legal in either Egypt or the Federal Capital Territory (the location of the marriage), where the age of consent for marriage is 18. The senator justified his actions by saying he was following Shari'a principles and stated, "I do not work with such law that runs counter to my religion." Under pressure from the Human Rights Commission and women's groups, the Senate Ethics Committee began an investigation. The National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) interviewed Sani Yerima on May 17 and June 17 and transferred the case to the attorney general to decide whether to prosecute him for a violation of the Child Rights Act at the end of the reporting period.

There is a legal distinction between "indigenes," persons whose ethnic group is considered native to a location, and "settlers," persons who have ethnic roots in another part of the country, although their ethnic group may have lived in that location for generations. Throughout the country authorities granted indigenes certain privileges, including political positions, access to government employment, and lower school fees. To receive such privileges, a person must produce a certificate of indigeneship, granted by local government authorities. The concept of indigeneship was sometimes exploited to discriminate against minority ethnic and religious groups, according to human rights observers.

Several states used state funds to subsidize the annual pilgrimages of citizens to Mecca for Muslims and either Jerusalem or Rome for Christians. State governments generally made efforts to meet the religious needs expressed by the majority of their residents.

The federal government approved the use of air carriers for pilgrims, established airfares, and negotiated bilateral air service agreements with Saudi Arabia and Israel to support these services. The National Hajj Commission was responsible for logistical arrangements for the country's approximately 75,000 annual pilgrims to Mecca. In April 2008 the commission announced it would not provide federal subsidies for pilgrimages and, over the past few years, there has been a gradual decrease in the amount of government-provided support; however, the state-sponsored subsidies have not been completely eliminated. Likewise the Nigerian Christian Pilgrims Commission was responsible for logistical arrangements for approximately 20,000 annual pilgrims to Jerusalem and Rome.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Maulid al-Nabi, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

The Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), jointly chaired by Christian Association of Nigeria President Bishop Ayo Oritsejafor and Jama'atul Nasril Islam President Sultan Muhammadu Abubakar, advised the government on ways to mitigate violence among religious communities. NIREC met quarterly, rotating its meetings throughout the country. Although NIREC is an independent association, the federal government continued to support its efforts publicly and reportedly provided funding for meeting expenses.

The law required Christian and Muslim groups planning to build new churches or mosques to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). In some northern states, state-level authorities reportedly denied building permits for construction of Christian churches and for expansion and renovation of existing ones. Churches at times have applied for residential permits as an alternative. Officials closed or demolished churches and mosques that ignored registration requirements or violated other zoning laws.

Both federal and state governments were involved in the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools; however, as mandated by the constitution, students do not receive religious instruction in any religion other than their own. State officials claimed that students could request a teacher of their own religious beliefs to provide alternative instruction. Nonetheless there were often no teachers capable of teaching Christianity in northern schools or Islam in southern schools. Moreover, according to government officials in the south, Christian religious education is mandatory for all students in many states.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice, although some local political actors stoked sectarian violence with impunity.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states continued to allege that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches and, in some cases, demolished churches that had existed for as long as a decade. Muslims in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna State alleged that local government officials prevented the construction of mosques and Islamic schools. Officials denied discrimination, attributing application denials to zoning regulations in residential neighborhoods and a large backlog of applications.

Although the expanded jurisdiction of Shari'a technically does not apply to non-Muslims in civil and criminal proceedings, certain social mores inspired by Shari'a, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools, health care, voting, and transportation services, have affected non-Muslim minorities in the North.

Hisbah vigilante Shari'a enforcement groups funded by state governments in Bauchi, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, and Kano states enforced some Shari'a statutes. In Kano Hisbah leaders cited enforcing prohibitions on alcohol and prostitution as the group's primary focus; however, they continued to serve primarily as traffic wardens and marketplace regulators.

On June 5, 2010, the Bauchi Hisbah reportedly arrested five individuals for allegedly hosting a same-sex wedding. The Hisbah also may have assaulted at least two persons attending the event. The accused maintained they were celebrating the recovery by one of their mothers from a long-term illness. The accused were taken to the Shari'a Commission in Bauchi for interrogation. The Shari'a Commission transferred them to the Bauchi Criminal Investigation Department, which did not find any evidence of criminal activity to support the arrest and, therefore, granted them bail on June 9 at the end of the reporting period.

In March 2010 the Kano Hisbah destroyed 34,000 bottles of confiscated alcohol. Kano State maintained steep fines and prison sentences for the public consumption and distribution of alcohol, in compliance with its Shari'a statutes. Some non-indigene and non-Muslim Kano State residents have accused the Hisbah of injuring travelers passing through the state over alcohol use and impounding alcoholic beverages transported on federal roads through Kano. Alcohol was illegally served in some hotels and restaurants which catered to foreign residents and international business travelers.

In March 2010 a Kaduna Shari'a court ordered the suspension of debate on Internet sites, including Facebook and Twitter, about the first amputation under Shari'a law in the country. In that 2000 case, Bello Buba Jangebe's hand was amputated after his conviction for stealing a cow. In the March 2010 Shari'a court hearing, the judge said that Muslims have no right under the law to question or review any judgment given by the Shari'a court.

On March 1, 2010, the Kano State Censorship Board cancelled a three-night international music festival hosted by the French embassy for the past six years, citing lack of proper authorization for the event. The French ambassador later suggested that the festival was canceled because it included a musician who had previously spoken out against the board's censorship of certain music in Kano State.

In September 2009 the Borno State House of Assembly passed the "2009 Islamic Preaching Bill." The bill provided for the establishment of a censorship board that would issue and suspend licenses for preachers and prescribed a 10-year jail term for preachers who violated the law. The bill also gave the governor power to suspend a preacher's license without prior notice. Prior to passing the bill, as a temporary measure to prevent further violence following the Boko Haram attacks in July, Borno State screened more than 150 Muslim clerics before issuing temporary permits to preach in designated mosques in Maiduguri during Ramadan; 30 preachers were banned from speaking.

#### Abuses of Religious Freedom

In February 2010 Niger State authorities reportedly dislodged a small Islamic group called Islahuddeen from Mashegu, Mariga, and Kontagora LGAs. Armed policemen allegedly bulldozed the group's central mosque and other buildings, and took members into custody for an indeterminate amount of time. No updated information was available at the end of the reporting period.

On August 15, 2009, a team of 1,500 police, immigration, and intelligence officers raided a settlement in Niger State inhabited by the Islamic group Darul Islam. The officers reportedly removed Darul Islam members from their village for "un-Islamic" worship and failure to cooperate with their neighbors. The raid was allegedly conducted after a letter from the Niger State government asserted that the group's activities threatened peace and security. More than 3,000 members were detained and transported to the Government Technical College in Mokwa, which served as a temporary camp. Detainees complained that the camp lacked adequate facilities and that at least 20 women suffered from cholera as a result. More than 200 foreign members were eventually deported to neighboring countries and 1,250 were returned to their states of origin. Local officials detained Darul Islam leader Amrul Bashiru Abdallahi Sulaiman for more than 60 days in Kano, despite his insistence that the group had lived lawfully and peacefully in their community for more than 15 years.

In July 2009 police carried out extrajudicial killings of Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf, other group members, and other civilians. On August 3, 2009, then-president Yar'Adua ordered his national security advisor to investigate the killings. In February 2010 the Qatar-based international satellite television network Aljazeera released video which appeared to confirm that security forces had summarily executed suspects. Police and army personnel allegedly searched homes and selected at random individuals to take into custody. Security forces initially denied killing civilians, but federal officials subsequently acknowledged extrajudicial killings occurred. By the end of the reporting period, no police officers had been disciplined, as police authorities claimed they were waiting for the national security advisor to conclude his report.

In 2007 state officials and police in Sokoto State allegedly began a coordinated campaign of repression of Shi'a Muslims, including the detention of large numbers of Shi'a and their religious leaders. The action revolved around the 2007-08 gubernatorial elections and continued to affect these communities at the end of the reporting period. NGOs reported that Shi'ite homes and businesses were demolished with little or no subsequent official investigation. There were reports that government officials fired persons identified as Shi'a from state jobs; others quit for fear that their superiors would label them as Shi'a. Many Shi'a reportedly fled to neighboring states in response to the government action.

There were continuing delays in the trial of 18 men who were arrested in August 2007 in Bauchi on vagrancy and cross-dressing charges under the Bauchi State Shari'a penal code. The defendants remained free on bail pending the outcome of the trial. Trial dates have been set, but at each hearing, the Shari'a court issued a continuance.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were unconfirmed reports of Christians forced to convert to Islam, particularly during the July 2009 Boko Haram attacks.

In many communities Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced ostracism by adherents of their former religion. In some northern states, those wishing to convert to Islam applied to the Shari'a council for a letter of conversion to be sent to their families, which served to dissolve marriages to Christians, and to request Hisbah protection from reprisals by relatives.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Violence between Christian and Muslim communities increased in several regions due to political and socioeconomic conflicts. Acute communal violence in the Middle Belt heightened tensions between religious groups even in areas that did not experience the violence.

Religious differences often paralleled and exacerbated differences among ethnic group. In the Middle Belt, identity is simultaneously molded along both ethnic and religious lines. Competition for scarce resources, in concert with livelihood differences and discriminatory employment practices, often underlay the violence. Local politicians and others continued to use religion on occasion to spur hostility among groups.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's suggestion in March 2010 that the country be divided into two nations along religious lines sparked vocal reaction from citizens and government alike, who responded that the strength of the nation was greater than the religious differences.

While the law prohibited religious discrimination in employment and other activities, some businesses continued to discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity in hiring. In nearly all states, rivalries between "indigenes" and "settlers" led to societal discrimination against minority groups. Muslim women in the South allegedly faced job discrimination in the private sector, especially in banking, if they wore a hijab. In April 2010 the Christian Association of Nigeria in the 13 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory alleged gross discrimination against Christians in federal appointments.

The lack of justice and reconciliation in Plateau State after the 2008 violence facilitated the eruption of new communal killings there in January and March 2010, which continued at the end of the reporting period. The violence caused hundreds of deaths, extensive property damage, and the displacement of thousands of residents. NGOs and traditional leaders led conflict resolution efforts to reduce sectarian violence in their communities with only limited success.

On April 25, 2010, the bodies of two Christian journalists for the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) were found after they had been intercepted by Muslim gangs on their way to interview a local politician. Reports indicate that after killing the two men, the assailants answered the journalists' phones when COCIN officials called, taking responsibility for the two deaths. No arrests had been made at the end of the reporting period.

On April 12, 2010, suspected Muslim gangs burned the homes of three government officials, including a local chairman in a Christian village near Jos.

On the same day, a COCIN pastor and his wife were killed by Muslim assailants in Bauchi State after his church in Jos had been burned, allegedly by Muslim refugees from Jos a few days after Christians displaced by the January violence had taken refuge in it. Authorities questioned the village head, but the perpetrators were not identified at the end of the reporting period.

On June 14, 2010, the Muslim communities in Jos South and Barkin Ladi LGAs filed a suit against Plateau State and the Police Service Commission for the damages inflicted on them during the January 2010 crisis in Jos. They claimed that

statements made by the then-commissioner of police portrayed Muslim youth as the primary cause of the crisis. They demanded \$6.6 million (one billion naira) in compensation for damages. The case had yet to be scheduled in court at the end of the reporting period.

On May 23, 2010, two persons reportedly died, and several others were injured, at a Muslim youth protest on Bauchi Road in Jos. The violence was allegedly ignited during the funeral procession to the Jos Central Mosque for those who were killed the previous day.

On May 22, 2010, Christian Berom youth allegedly attacked Tusung village, 24 miles south of Jos, Plateau State. Three persons were killed. Police arrested 15 suspects.

On May 19, 2010, Muslim Fulani youth in Kwasam, Kiru LGA, Kano State, allegedly burned a Baptist church and the pastor's home.

On May 5, 2010, the federal government set up a special task force to restore peace in Plateau State and inaugurated a court martial panel to try five individuals accused of assault, offence against property of service personnel, and negligent firing. Women in Plateau State accused members of the special task force of sexual harassment and rape.

Killings occurred throughout April 2010 in what appeared to be a series of reprisal attacks. On April 26 2010, seven persons were reportedly killed near Jos; police arrested several suspects. On April 24, 2010, police in Bauchi State arrested 206 suspects travelling to Bauchi city for alleged possession of weapons including guns, knives, and bows and arrows. On April 20, 2010, Berom youth allegedly barricaded the road in Riyom LGA, stopped vehicles, and killed seven persons after interrogating passengers to ascertain their religious affiliation and ethnic identity. As a result Muslims in Plateau State advised all Muslims to avoid traveling on the federal highway in that area. On April 15, 2010, Pastoral Resolve, a group representing Fulani nomads in West Africa, alleged that men from Plateau State armed with guns and axes attacked pastoralist homes in Kaduna State, killing six persons and stealing thousands of head of livestock. On April 11, 2010, the homes of three government officials in Kuru Jenta village were attacked. Assailants burned three houses and six vehicles. On April 6, 2010, the chief of Jos, Gbong Gwom Da Gyang Buba, held a peace and reconciliation meeting with Fulani leaders. However, also on April 6 three persons died in clashes between Christian and Muslim gangs in Jos. On April 4, 2010, a women's procession returning from Easter Mass passed through predominantly Muslim areas and were attacked by local youth; military personnel intervened and stopped the women from passing through other volatile areas.

On April 1, 2010, the country's authorities charged 20 persons with terrorism in connection with the violence in Plateau State in March 2010. More than 160 persons were arrested prior to the charges having been filed, and authorities announced their intention to charge 41 persons with terrorism in connection with the March violence, with the possibility of the death penalty for some arrested persons. In addition, 123 were charged with illegal possession of firearms.

On March 17, 2010, Fulani herdsmen reportedly attacked Byei village in Riyom LGA, killing approximately 12 persons, injuring several others, and burning buildings. Christian mourners at a funeral for victims of an earlier attack in Dogon Nahawa assaulted a Hausa-Fulani radio reporter, destroyed his car, and stole his equipment.

On March 7, 2010, Fulani herdsmen attacked Dogon Nahawa, Zot, and Rassat villages in Jos South and Barkin Ladi LGAs, killing at least 500 persons including women, children, and babies, and displacing an estimated 800 persons. Survivors reported that Muslims in the three villages had received anonymous phone calls two days prior to the attack warning them to leave the area. Local newspapers had previously published the names of Fulani killed in January with a Fulani promise to seek revenge.

Beginning on January 16, 2010, several days of violence broke out in Dutse-Uku when Christian youth allegedly surrounded a Muslim man attempting to rebuild his house, which had been destroyed in the November 2008 rioting, in an area that had become primarily Christian. The youth fought with the man and his workers; on January 17, 2010, allegedly in retaliation, Muslim youth attacked Christian worshippers leaving a church. By January 19, 2010, violence had spread to the Jos suburbs of Bukuru, Nasarawa Gwong, Tudun Wada, Katako, Kuru Jenta, and Angwan Rukuba. Assailants reportedly killed an estimated 150 persons, and set houses ablaze, displacing approximately 3,000 persons. Authorities arrested 60 suspects, and the state government implemented a 24-hour curfew, which was later reduced to 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and finally lifted on May 19.

On December 27, 2009, a clash in Zango, Bauchi State, between members of the Islamic group Maitatsine, also known locally as "Kala Kato," and the government security personnel resulted in 38 deaths and the destruction of several homes. The violence began after residents expressed concern about aggressive open-air preaching by the group's members, who questioned the crackdown by security forces against Boko Haram in July. Security personnel arrested 20 individuals, including 11 juveniles.

In August 2009, nine suspects were arraigned before the Suleja High Court in Niger State in connection with the June 2009 death of a local pastor. On June 17, 2009, there were clashes between Christians and Muslims north of Suleja, Niger State, after police released a man accused of stealing a cell phone from a Muslim man in the village of Gauraka. A local pastor reportedly spoke provocatively about the Muslim man who reported the theft to police. Muslims responded by attacking Christians, resulting in the pastor's death. Authorities responded to the spreading violence by closing schools and increasing security in the area.

In July 2009, violent clashes erupted in Bauchi, Borno, Kano, and Yobe states after supporters of an Islamic extremist group, "Boko Haram" ("Western Education is Forbidden"), attacked police stations and other government facilities. The army restored order, but clashes between security forces and militants reportedly resulted in an estimated 700 deaths. Police and military in several states detained persons suspected of supporting Boko Haram and reportedly killed them. The military captured Maiduguri-based Boko Haram spiritual leader Muhammad Yusuf alive after a siege of his compound and turned him over to the police, whose colleagues the group had killed at the outset of the violence. A policeman summarily executed Yusuf in front of onlookers after parading him before television cameras. Many Boko Haram members remained incarcerated at the end of the reporting period. Nearly 700 suspects were reportedly arraigned in Maiduguri. At least three of the 77 suspected Boko Haram members standing trial for homicide were granted bail, and one died of illness. On April 13, 2010, a Maiduguri high court ordered the federal and state governments and the police to pay \$600,000 (90 million naira) to the family of Baba Fagu Mohammed, Muhammad Yusuf's father-in-law, who was allegedly killed by police; however, both the government and police announced that they would appeal. In June 2010 another suspect was released after the prosecution withdrew the charges.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The ambassador and other U.S. mission personnel met regularly with religious leaders and scholars throughout the reporting period, including Sultan of Sokoto Muhammadu Abubakar; Shehu of Borno Abba Kyari Umar Garbai; Shehu of Dikwa Mohammed Masta II Ibn Alamin El-Kanemi; Emir of Katsina Abdulmumini Kabir Usman; Emir of Daura Alhaji Umar Faruk; Emir of Kano Alhaji Ado Bayero; Christian Association of Nigeria's former president Archbishop John Onaiyekan, and many others.

The U.S. mission promoted interreligious respect at programs and events throughout the reporting period. For example, in October 2009 embassy staff and volunteers from Plateau State's interfaith community cleaned and refurbished basketball and volleyball courts at the Dadin Kowa Peace Zone Recreation Center in Jos. Several of the USAID-supported "Peace Clubs," consisting of Christian and Muslim youth from local neighborhoods, use the courts as part of a program to reduce violence by integrating young persons of different religious and ethnic groups into sports activities. During Ramadan the U.S. mission promoted religious pluralism at an iftar (dinner to break the fast during Ramadan) hosted by the consul general in Lagos. The dinner guests, who included both Muslims and Christians, listened to speeches from guest speakers who focused on the fundamentally tolerant and peaceful nature of Islam and openly denounced religious violence. In April and May 2010, the ambassador led delegations from the mission's Jos task force to meet in Jos with partners, religious leaders, and civil society groups to promote reconciliation and ascertain needs and the factors fueling the violence.

The U.S. mission regularly distributed information throughout the country on human rights topics, including religious freedom, to journalists, academics, businesspersons, civic organizations, teachers, students, government officials, the military, clergy, and traditional rulers through Information Resource Centers and American Corners.

USAID, in collaboration with the Office of Security Cooperation, worked on designing a new interfaith program called Training of Leaders on Religious and National Coexistence, which is intended to increase stability in the North by reducing lawlessness and radicalism, mitigating extremism, and increasing the legitimacy and capacity of governance structures to defend religious freedom. A local organization was expected to implement this program to ensure durable interfaith and interethnic dialogue to encourage tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Over a one year period, USAID enhanced the capacity of the Interfaith Mediation Center (IMC) in Kaduna to address ethnic and religious violence, as well as to develop it to implement directly future US government activities. IMC implements activities that support interfaith dialogue, interethnic relations, trauma healing for women and youth, early warning and response, media sensitization, and special election monitoring. USAID supported IMC and the Kaduna Peace Committee through its recently ended Conflict Abatement and Local Mitigation (CALM) project to address communal, ethnic, religious violence or violence stemming from resource issues.

The CALM project, which ended in June 2010, operated in five states (Delta, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, and Rivers). The program promoted local conflict mitigation by educating community and opinion leaders, youth groups, and faith-based organizations about the benefits of peaceful coexistence. Through the program, the U.S. mission also provided support to the IMC and three Conflict Mitigation and Management Regional Councils (CMMRCs) made up of 37 Muslim and 30 Christian clerics in Kano, Kaduna, and Plateau states. The mission provided training and technical assistance to IMC to enhance its capacity to develop and implement ethnic and interfaith activities. The mission trained the CMMRCs to collect and disseminate early warning information and to respond directly and quickly to threats to peace, including ethnic and religious tensions.

The U. S. government regularly sponsored speakers on the rule of law, religious tolerance, and democratic governance at major universities, think tanks, and American Corners in major cities. The embassy also administered the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP), providing opportunities for an average of 40 future leaders to learn more about the United States through personal experience. Five Muslim religious leaders were nominated to participate in the fiscal year 2010 Single Country Project "Religious Freedom and Interfaith Dialogue", and one prominent Muslim scholar was nominated to participate in the fiscal year 2011 Africa Regional Program "Religious Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue in the U.S."

[Back to Top](#)