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BETWEEN TERROR AND RELIGION: PAVING WAYS TO SILENCING ARMS IN THE NORTH-EASTERN REGION OF NIGERIA

The growing influence of the insurgent group known as Boko Haram is a worrisome prospect for Nigeria. It appears that the insurgent landscape of the country will become more complex and threatening after the emergence of the Shekau Bin Abubakar-led Boko Haram insurgent group in the north-eastern region. Because Nigerian insurgents do not operate in isolation, it is natural for them to draw inspiration from the IS. As insurgent group prepare to enter into another phase of ideologically and operationally transformed jihadist discourse, the implications for Nigeria's internal security are severe. Apart from security implications, this process will affect extremism discourse in the country and the behaviour of non-violent religious organisations. This article will explore how the widespread use of arms in Nigeria's north-eastern region aggravates the problem of the safety and security of lives and property, undermining stable peace. It also suggests ways by which the critical challenges posed to human security in the region can be tackled in order to realise genuine religious tolerance and peace everywhere in the north-eastern region.

Keywords: *Boko Haram; Arms; Religion; Tragedy; North-Eastern Region*

Introduction

Since 2009, Nigerian religious leaders have announced a last push or critical event that will turn around the situation in Nigeria. Each time the underlying assumption is that, with increased resources and the right plan, the weaknesses of the Nigerian state can be tackled and stability achieved. Yet despite the latest and massive military surge and accompanying 'civilian uplift,' the political and security situation has continued to deteriorate (Bamidele, 2014). The Boko Haram insurgent group has expanded their reach across the country from their strongholds in the north-eastern while the Nigerian public increasingly views the government of President Muhammadu Buhari as ineffective. Even under a reform-minded leadership, a self-sufficient central state that could provide security and justice for the people would take decades to build up. Within the 2015 transition time, without basic political stability and in an environment dominated by increasingly self-serving religious elite, it is practically out of reach.

In the current Nigerian context, reports of preliminary contacts between the federal government and the Boko Haram insurgent group have become a cause for optimism. A political settlement is needed, but at the same time, an exclusive deal between federal government and the Boko Haram insurgent group would be divisive, alienating civil society, minority groups, and other constituencies. If the international community wants to reduce its role by 2020 without further destabilizing Nigeria, it will need to work out a religious strategy to ensure that it does not become the guarantor of a deal that splits the country-or that sets the stage for renewed civil war. Boko Haram insurgency arising from the proliferation and widespread of arms is a severe challenge to human rights in the country. Since 1967-1970 civil war ended, the availability of existing arms together with the illicit trade of arms has exacerbated religious insurgencies in Nigeria. Nowhere is this truer than in the north-east region of Nigeria.

In the north-eastern region of Nigeria, the culture of impunity and the easy availability of arms diminish people's capacity to be open and tolerant with each other. The possibility of religious insurgency is intensified by the poverty and corruption in the region, where underdevelopment is caused by corruption and the inequitable sharing of allocation belonging to the people. Not even the federal government that should mediate insurgencies has demonstrated any neutrality. It dispenses more violence invoking the bogey of national security. This undermines humanitarian principles and poses a challenge for governance, threatening the stability of the country and particularly the region. Peace and security is a sine qua non for stable peace in any society. Thus in the north-eastern region, where there is a large influx of arms and where peace and security are noticeably absent, there is a need for concerted analysis and action. This article is aimed at highlighting the need for balance in premises of understanding the causative factor that birth insurgent groups in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. This article will explore how the widespread of arms in Nigeria's north-eastern region aggravates the problem of the safety and security of lives and property, undermining the prospects of religion tolerance and stable peace. It also suggests ways by which the critical challenges posed to human security in the region can be tackled in order to realise genuine religious tolerance and stable peace everywhere in the north-eastern region of Nigeria.

Geographical Description of North-Eastern Region of Nigeria

The north-eastern region is one of the largest in the northern region of Nigeria. Covering Nigeria's states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states, while the region is generally known for its subterranean farming. The region, which is the largest zone in Nigeria, was created as a regional government in 1967 and until 1976 when the region was split into Bauchi,

Borno, and Gongola states. In 1991, Yobe state was carved out from Borno state while Gongola was split into Adamawa and Taraba states which increased the number of states in the north-eastern from three to five. In 1996, Gombe state was created from the then Bauchi state making the numbers of the states to be six as it remains until this date.

The region comprises six of the 36 states in the country which are Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe, along with 112 Local Government Areas. The nation's north-eastern extends from latitudes 6 28" N and 13 44" N and longitude 8 44" E and 13 38" E. The last nationwide census of 2006 revealed the population of this region to be 18, 984, 299 out of a total population of 140, 431, 790 people in Nigeria; that is, 13.52% of the population of Nigeria lives in this region. The land mass of the region is calculated to be 272, 395km² which is 29.54% of the total landmass of Nigeria. The relief of the region is divided into highlands and the plains. The highland area was described as mountainous, especially the Mandara Mountain (1200–1500 km), the Atlantika (1200 m), the Shebsi (1800 m) and the Biu hills.

The highland region is heavily dissected and many large areas are covered with volcanic lava. The plains with an average elevation of 300 m developed on young sedimentary rocks consisting mainly of clays with some sand horizons and gravels. The plains are usually seriously flooded during the rainy season. The region borders a transition zone (Sahelian strip) between the Savannah and the Sahara desert. Few trees such as thorny acacia, scattered gum, Arabic trees and date palms are available. Grasses grow to the maximum of one meter in the north but increase in quantity and height toward the south. The grasses serve as pasture to animals because most of the inhabitants are nomadic herdsmen. Rainfall ranges from about 1200 mm to the south to 500 mm in the north (Yadudu, 1992). These geophysical, geostatic, and geodynamic attributes affect farming, citing of industries, town planning, physical development, socialization, culture, livelihoods, employment, and so forth, of the people in the north-eastern region of Nigeria.

In the north-eastern region, the inextricable link between the socio-economic impacts associated with *Sharia law* and the control of the political positions accruing from it has precipitated varied and far-reaching religious and political insurgencies in which the widespread use of arms now represents a major problem. The region insurgency, within the broader rubrics of the struggle for power and imposition of *sharia law*, is particularly instructive in that it has prompted arms brokers and governments to push arms into the hands of non-state actors for personal gains, thereby granting impetus to the national surge in arms importation.

The region is at the epicentre of the numerous religious violent conflicts that are destabilizing the country today. From 2009 to the present, the manifestation of these religious insurgencies, which have reached crisis proportions, is a culmination of long years of neglect and of unstructured

and unpredicted *Maitatsine* religious struggles that started in the 1960s and continued to the 1980s (Yusuf, 2013). From the despair of violent religious protests, petitioning against conditions of poverty, corruption, and implementation of *Sharia law*, the struggles in the north-eastern states have risen, since the execution of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009 (the former leader of Boko Haram insurgents group), to the point of insurgency in which arms flow easily through the region's labyrinthine network of porous borders and deserts in the region (Odhiambo, 2014). The religious violent character of the insurgency now includes the suicide bombing, cross-killing of state security forces and innocent citizens, and the unprecedented practice of hostage-taking in recent times.

While the Nigerian state has been primarily concerned with regime security, the extremists involved in the struggle are competing with the state for the implementation of *Sharia law* and enforcement of Islamic state. The determination of the extremists supports Ted Gurr's (1998) postulation that men rebel when they are driven by the relative deprivation occasioned by the gap between expectation and actualization. Having suffered a lot of deprivation and unprecedented repression at the hands of the Nigerian state, the extremists in the north-eastern have demonstrated increasing willingness to resort to religious armed violence ... using available weaponry (Muhammad, 2012). Needless to say, the growth of religious armed group in the north-eastern region is predicated on the emergence of a more generalised phenomenon of religious extremists such as Boko Haram insurgent group and similar groups which are often sponsored by highly powerful and influential religious leaders in the society. The widespread nature of the violent activities of this Boko Haram insurgent group is revealed in Onuoha's (2012) estimation that Nigeria is home to a thousand arms.

The unfettered and unlimited access of the north-eastern states extremists to stockpiles of highly sophisticated and sturdy arms suggests their backing by networks of powerful and relatively rich religious leaders. While frantic efforts to uncover the identity of these religious financiers have not yielded any success, there is nevertheless a consensus about their existence. This is particularly evident in their ability to undermine the security mechanism in place as well as the highly rigid laws regulating the possession and use of arms in Nigeria (Firearms Regulations, 1990). The latter makes it unlawful for anybody to possess or operate a wide range of explosives, lethal weapons and ammunition without certification (Ibrahim, 2003).

In explaining the source of the arms' flow to the north-eastern states, the common position has been to point to political and religious leaders who have issued them to hired thugs to eliminate or maim perceived or real opponents. While there is an element of truth in this, in view of the high stakes and inordinate quest for political power and religious superiority among the political and religious class and the spate of high profile assassinations

associated with elections (especially those of 2007), the fact that the volatility of the north-eastern states crisis pre-dates the present democratic dispensation warrants other explanations. One can look further in tracing the influx of arms into the north-eastern states to local manufacturers, dubious arm dealers who make false declarations of contents in imported illicit goods, and smugglers who take undue advantage of the country's porous borders. The region has a labyrinthine network of porous borders that facilitate the flow of arms. North-eastern security agents (both serving and retired) are also suspected of providing arms and training in their use to their religious extremists. As well, arms are re-cycled into north-eastern states of Nigeria from armed conflict states such as Mali, Libya, Chad, Niger.

While Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping operations has afforded some unpatriotic elements who have served in missions abroad to smuggle and sell arms, others are involved in arms theft from the National Armoury. As far back as 1980, a customs official gave 16 G-3 rifles to some northern youths as part of his 'contribution' to the religious superiority cause (Ndime, 2005). Between 1980 and 1999, police and custom officials in Nigeria and Niger confiscated about 3,500 assault rifles, 80,000 rounds of ammunition, and some 200 pistols from smuggling syndicates. Also seized around this period were: 10 rifles and 10,000 rounds of ammunitions hidden in a vehicle travelling from Chad to the north-eastern region of Nigeria, 5 double-barrelled shot-guns and 22,000 cartridges of live ammunition hidden in a trawler sailing from Mali to the north-eastern region of Nigeria (Bello, 2010). A further 3,000 rifles and 7,000 rounds of ammunition on their way to the region were apprehended by guards at north-eastern region of Nigerian borders (Malam, 2014). While these cases are a little dated, the situation has been made worse by desperate extremists in the north-eastern region who continue to take undue advantage of the change precipitated by the return of the country to civilian rule in May 1999. The boom which the arms-flows have brought to the black-market in the region is largely responsible for the religious superiority in all places ravaged by religious crises, including the region. For instance, it has been observed that herdsmen openly carry AK- 47 and automatic rifles (Bamidele, 2016).

Although investigation has confirmed that there is a correlation between north-eastern retired military officers from these feuding religious groups and training on the use of arms, other scholars argued that since the arms are light, insurgents in the north-eastern region learn to use them on their own through frequent handling and practice (Ibrahim, 2003; Nte, 2011; Anyadike, 2013). The scenario in the north-eastern region where openly armed extremists patrol group territories demonstrates the extent to which arms have become a symbol of power, dominance and worth. Young extremists have grown up to believe that religious violence, especially through the use of arms, is the only way of gaining power, obtaining goods and services, and establishing respect, thus perpetuating the culture of religious violence (Anyadike, 2013).

It is common knowledge that in the wake of the escalation of religious violence in the north-eastern region, Nigerian state joint securities have not only armed private security personnel to render security services, they have also “reached an agreement with both federal and state governments to import arms and ammunitions for Nigerian troops (Olukayode and Kujenya, 2012). This is the context for the recent pronouncement by Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari, during the swearing in headquarters in Abuja. In 2014, the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan administration approved \$2.1 billion Arms deal to suppress the Boko Haram insurgent group in the north-eastern states, not to develop the region (Tori Nigeria News, 2015). This money can be channel to the development of the region because if the region is developed, the extremists will not carry guns.

Although the incumbent President (President Muhammadu Buhari) responded to the former President’s (Goodluck Ebele Jonathan) expose of the administration’s covert arms purchase by referring to the allegations as “reckless and barefaced lies” and a plan design to scuttle the transition programme, the fact that the statement came from such a high level makes it impossible to ignore (Okoro, 2015). Rather than take the incumbent President’s statement to mean that there can be a different approach to the north-eastern question, President Obasanjo revealed that:

We discovered that quite a number of extremist Islamist youths, running into thousands ... are establishing camps.... They are also buying arms with a view to overawe the community, overawe the local government, overawe state government and overawe government of Federal Republic of Nigeria. No self-respecting government will allow criminality to overawe it (Nte, 2011).

The above pronouncements, if anything, make the north-eastern region question a top election issue in 2015.

Challenges of Widespread of Arms in the North-Eastern Region

A critical look at the challenge of arms around north-eastern region of Nigeria makes one wonders if they are not the real weapons of mass destruction. From the conditions that precipitate their demand to the abuses that their availability facilitate, arms have proved a fundamental challenge to several north-eastern states since the demise of the *Maitatsine* religious crisis and Biafra civil war (Adesoji, 2010). The Maitasine violence threatened the age old fragile inter-ethnic relationship between the Hausa-Fulani northerners and people of southern ethnic extractions in the north. And the relatively peaceful inter-faith cohabitation of the people of northern Nigeria, as non-members of the sect, but most especially Christians, were the targets of the violence. This blood lust was

tacitly supported by the northern political class who looked at their southern counterparts with the same level of hate and condescension. Although they do not cause insurgencies, their potential to fuel underlying tensions, deepens the sense of religious and political crisis, raising the number of casualties and generating more insecurity (George, 2002). Arms are cheap, readily available, easy to transport and difficult to control and monitor. Their portability and simplicity allow them to be used even by ill-trained people.

They have become the instruments of modern day religious violence in the north-eastern region of Nigeria, causing over half a thousand deaths a year. Beyond being an everyday phenomenon, the complete out-of-control status the proliferation of arms has assumed around states in the region has further exacerbated poverty and underdevelopment where they constitute a menace. There are 640 to 650 thousand imported and locally made arms circulating in the north-eastern region today and every year about three thousand new guns and 8 billion units of ammunition are imported through the north-eastern borders from southern and northern American countries (Nte, 2011). Nte (2011) stated that “the death toll from arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems – and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs. In terms of the carnage they cause, arms, indeed, could well be described as “weapons of mass destruction”.

Yet there are still no federal and state administrations to limit their spread. Added to the foregoing is the fact that a significant proportion of the trade in arms is conducted in secrecy. Besides being part of a wider trade that incorporates more lethal weaponry, the existing lack of control of the trend has not only caused the diversion of legally traded arms into the illegal sector, it has also reinforced an environment in which corruption and the black market thrive (Obasi, 2002). Thus from the hotbeds of armed conflicts in the West African states of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d’Ivoire to the low intensity religious and political violence arenas of Niger, Mali and Chad, the record of religious and political crisis sustained by easy access to arms continues to pose serious challenges and vulnerabilities. This is the context in which the north-eastern region situation constitutes a special case.

Arms, Religion and Insecurity in the North-Eastern Region

There are multitudes of extremists as well as regular government and private security personnel who take part in religious violence in the north-eastern region using imported and locally made arms. The dynamics of the interface between the struggle for power and the struggle for religious superiority tend to condition the nature, dimensions and magnitude of the proliferation of the illicit arms (Mustapha, 2014). While the option of religious violent confrontation may represent one of the ways in which people have chosen to express their disgust for the unhealthy development, hardship and misery

which infidel leaders has spawned, the Nigerian government's resort to the use of violence – under the bogey of “national security” for the absolute protection of lives and properties to whom it is held captive as a rentier state – has worsened the conditions for internal violence, leading to the free flow of arms and, by extension, exacerbating the existing poverty and underdevelopment in the region (Ehindero, 2011).

Although there is the tendency to single out the north-eastern as Nigeria's biggest arms problem, the legal and illegal circulation of arms has far-reaching effects on religious violence and most especially on armed banditry, which is prevalent throughout the region. According to a study carried out by (Kukah, 1994), the failure of Nigeria's government to implement arms control programs after the *Maitatsine* religious crisis of 1980s and after other political violent conflicts within the region thereafter is at the source of the country's arms proliferation problem. The availability of arms in religious and political clashes has killed more than 10,000 Nigerians since 1990 i.e. an average of 1000 people per year (Kwaja, 2008). Security forces are acquiring arms in a bid to live up to the demands of security in the country while individuals and/or groups are buying arms because security forces are not up to task and also because of the benefits of carrying out political and religious violence (Keili, 2008).

It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of arms in circulation in the north-eastern region as a whole and in Nigeria in particular. This is partially because of the extensive nature and the porosity of north-eastern Nigerian borders, corruptibility of the customs and security apparatus, incapability, lack of interest and will on the part of local government officials and politicians (Keili, 2008). But the main reason is poor record keeping in the hand of security agencies in Nigeria. Before 2002, the only data available was a semi-official document stating that Nigeria's citizens possessed approximately one million firearms (Obasi, 2002). ECOWAS Commission reported that the number of illicit arms in Nigeria ranges between one and three million (ECOWAS Commission, 2011). This number may seem small for a country counting up to 170 million inhabitants, but play a big role in religious crime, religious violence and insecurity in many parts of the country (Adele and Stott, 2008). Arms have continued to play a very important role in religious violence and thus insecurity in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. Arms such as AK-47 assault rifles, automatic pump-action shotguns, shoulder launched rockets, beretta pistols, Browning pistols, carbine rifles, double-barrel shotguns, G-3 rifles, general-purpose machine guns, and sub-machine guns are widely in circulation in north-eastern region of Nigeria (Osman, 2010). Citing the ongoing of war against Boko Haram in the north-eastern region of Nigeria, a lot of arms has been recovered from the group (see Table 1).

Since 1999, more than ten thousand Nigerians have lost their lives in religious conflicts which have been characterized by an increased

involvement of arms especially in the north-eastern region (Adejo, 2005). As it has already been demonstrated, arms are playing an ever increasing role in fomenting religious violence and insecurity in the region. They are used for criminal activities ranging from petty crimes, through more serious crimes like kidnapping taking up to ethno-political crisis, most especially for religious motivated killings around religion crisis periods. In a small scale study that was carried out by a group of researchers in a hospital in north-east region of Nigeria following the religious clashes of 1980 and 2007, it was observed that though the majority of casualties were due to firearms, the majority of firearms victims sustained permanent disabilities (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). The study also revealed that most of the firearms victims were males which would suggest a considerable weakening of economic productivity, since women generally stay at home in the region (John et al, 2007).

Table 1: Major Rescue Operation of Civilian JTF with and without Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) in North-Eastern Region involving Recovery of Arms from Boko Haram Group

Date	Arms recovered from Boko Haram
August 2013 - December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an another event in Zabarmari ward of Jere Local Government Area of Borno State, civilian JTF killed 15 Boko Haram terrorists and recovered two AK47 from them
January 2014 - December 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Gamboru, in another joint operation between civilian JTF group and SMJTF, they recovered 70 motorcycles from Boko Haram terrorists and they also collected 2 Hilux vehicles and Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) from them, while many Boko Haram terrorists were captured alive with several ammunitions recovered from them. • In Biu Local Government Area, the civilian JTF captured 6 Boko Haram terrorists that camouflaged as Fulani herdsmen and they also recovered guns from them.

<p>January 2015 - December 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Budun village, with another joint operation with the SMJTF, they were able to identify those places that the Boko Haram terrorists group hid their ammunitions and they recovered 65 AK47 and 8 riffles from them. • In Benesheik village, the civilian JTF group killed 8 Boko Haram terrorists with their locally made guns and rescued 2 women and 7 children.
<p>January 2016 - July 2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a joint operation between civilian JTF group and the SMJTF in Dure village, the civilian JTF and SMJTF recovered 2 AK47 rifles, 2 locally Dane Guns, 3 AK47 Magazined with 38 rounds of ammunition. Those Boko Haram terrorists were killed along Rugga Fulani. • In a similar operation from Wala, Durubajuwe and Rugga Fulani, the civilian JTF group and the SMJTF recovered 2 rusty General Purpose Machine Gun barrel, 3 grinding machine and 6 locally made Dane gun. • In another joint operation between the civilian JTF groups and the SMJTF in Kudiye, Souma, Dika, Mijigeta and Mida, with the help of information from the civilian JTF, the SMJTF group recovered 7 rifles, 47 motorcycles and killed 34 Boko Haram terrorist members and freed 387 hostages. • In another joint operation called Operation Lafiya Dole (Peace by Force) initiated by SMJTF of the Nigerian Army and civilian JTF group, both group were able to discover the largest cache of arms and ammunitions hidden on the ground by Boko Haram terrorists in Brogozo-Alagarno area very close to Sambisa forest and both group recovered them. • In another joint operation in Alagarno forest between the civilian JTF and the SMJTF. With the help of information from the civilian JTF, the civilian JTF group and the Special Military Joint Task Force recovered another large cache of arms and ammunitions that power a battalion of solders which include 36 boxes of .51mm calibre, 5 x 20 Lyra beefcake mixture of 7.62mm (NATO) ammunition, large quality of 7.62mm (Special) ammunition and

	<p>one 81mm mortar tube in Kadari, Camp Abu Fatima and Gursum villages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In another operation along Alagarno forest the civilian JTF group and the SMJTF in Kadari, Camp Abu Fatima and Gursum villages. With the effort of civilian JTF members, both group also recovered 2 Toyota Hilux, 2 Generators and 68 motorcycles.• In similar operation in Alagarno forest, the civilian JTF and the SMJTF were able to rescue and recover 27 motorcycles, 12 vehicles, 9 AK47 rifles, 3 Fabrique Nationale rifles, a Sniper rifle, fabricated rocket bomb, 5 locally made Dane guns, solar panels and more than 20 persons under the custody of Boko Haram terrorists were released.• In Dikwa local government area of Borno, the civilian JTF group and the SMJTF of 112 Battalion recovered large cache of weapons and medical facility which include from Boko Haram Camp fuel dump, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), mechanical workshop machines, a large numbers of generators and waterpumps while more than 56 Boko Haram terrorist members were killed.• In another village very close to Dikwa local government area, in another operation involving the civilian JTF and the SMJTF, both groups were able to recover another set of 4 vehicles loaded with IED medical facilities, mechanical workshop machines and generators and fuel dump. In the operation more than 37 Boko Haram terrorists were killed and more than 56 were wounded.• In a joint operation involving the civilian JTF group and the SMJTF of 192 Battalion in Kusarha-Zalidava village. Both the civilian JTF group and the 192 Battalion killed 5 Boko Haram terrorists and they recovered a belt of 7.62mm (NATO) ammunition containing 42 rounds, 2 General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) with registration number FN 132125 and many 7 Boko Haram terrorists were killed.
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The researchers however concluded that the low numbers of patients affected by arms usage was an under representation of the real picture because in a place like north-east region, it is generally considered futile to take people with gunshot wounds to hospital because of the lack of money and also because of the conviction that the victim will die anyway. In addition, custom and tradition dictates that a person be buried immediately after they are confirmed dead and thus Muslim victims are not taken to hospital.

Finally, poor record keeping and inadequate available data, incorrect coding and incomplete files decrease the reported incidence (Ocheche, 2005). Between August 1980 and June 2014, more than 30 incidents of religious crime were reported in the local newspapers. More than 9 of these were carried out with firearms, 34 with other tools and 2 even involved bombs (Ibrahim, 2003). In these incidents, a total of hundred people while other were reported missing (Ibrahim, 2003). Bearing in mind that this local news was carried out on reported in the real arms harm is much higher. They also observed that the biggest negative impacts were suffered by unarmed citizens while armed perpetrators did not incur as much serious consequences. The end result is that unarmed civilians, the majority of the Nigerian population in the north-eastern region live in perpetual fear and cannot count on the forces of law and order to guarantee a minimal security. And because the latter are incapable and/or unwilling to deliver, the whole situation becomes a vicious cycle as citizens seek to protect themselves from becoming victims through other means. Some turn to forming vigilante groups or arming themselves with arms as the only way of fighting against armed robbers and thereby contributing to arms proliferation and the cycle of religious violence that breeds and sustains fear and insecurity. Arms have made religious extremists in the region much easier for the perpetrators, more lethal for the victims and more complicated for law-enforcement officers to apprehend the extremists with devastating effects on the economy, politics and social life.

There is also the question of the human development cost of arms, especially as they do damage to infrastructure, displace people and cause decline in economic activity. The negative impacts of religious conflicts and the highhandedness of an increasingly militaristic federal government, along with the increasingly daring posture of the Islamic extremists, all using arms to settle their religious conflicts arising from the inequality and relative deprivation, will only further exacerbate the core problems of poverty and underdevelopment in the north-eastern region.

Concluding Remarks: A Collective Resolution

Religion is a major factor in the conflicts and threats of war in any society. Superiority and discrimination in religious group often create patterns and feelings of marginalisation. For a society that is used to settling even the most

minor dispute with arms, it should be expected that religion could spawn and sustain major conflicts. The fact that arms have done and continue to do more harm than good to north-eastern region and Nigerian society in particular. Thus several attempts have already been made to address the issue more or less successfully. However, the fact that the problem still remains prevalent on the region means that the steps taken were not effective, not far-reaching enough or may still require some time to bear fruit. In order to make valuable recommendations for effective future action, it will be necessary to take a glimpse at some of the most important measures that have already been taken by the federal government of Nigeria to solve the arms problem. This is obvious in the case of Nigeria's north-east region where the superiority and discrimination in religious group has generated an on-going problem of Boko Haram insurgent group made worse by unregulated use and easy access to arms. The foregoing notwithstanding, there are opportunities for the realisation of a north-eastern that is free from the proliferation and use of arms: First, the government should create the necessary conditions for the genuine dialogue required for the resolution of the parlous state of underdevelopment which led to the violence in the region. Although the past civilian administration has made some major policy interventions in the north-east question such efforts have become a hollow, time-wasting, television show, where serious contributions are ridiculed and participants are harangued and shouted down by an all-knowing and comical moderator.

Second, the federal government should demonstrate genuine commitment to stop the flow of arms in the north-eastern. For instance, while it is true that Nigeria has established a national committee on the implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Small Arms, indications are that the efforts made so far lack strategic coordination and consistent implementation (ECOWAS Commission, 2006). Thus, beyond the mere signing of the ECOWAS principle not to allow importation, exportation and manufacturing of arms, the government should strengthen its control over arms in its armoury and work out necessary measures that would guarantee border security with its neighbours.

Third, it is necessary to ensure that only the Nigerian army is deployed to the north-eastern region of Nigeria to keep peace. Even then, it should be the duty of the federal government to ensure that those that are so deployed act professionally and in accordance with international standards. Fourth, there is a need to ensure that concrete steps are taken to get private companies in the region to operate within the framework of international best practices by protecting the region and to promote community development projects following the principles of corporate social responsibility. Such efforts should include a comprehensive road network that would open up the region and promote infrastructural transformation.

Finally, as a matter of urgency, there is a need for job creation to

guarantee the socio-economic security of the vast army of jobless youth in the region. This step, apart from helping to give the desired sense of belonging and partnership to the Nigerian project, would also help to anchor the north-east states policy in a political process that stresses human capital development and security rather than the one that attempts to foist dubious law and order upon the population. As the country talks about local content in the industrial sector, the principle should be taken to a level that provides training in industry-related skills and enables these extremist youth to find relevance in the fight against the proliferation and use of arms and that finally allows the north-eastern region to achieve its full potential.

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