There Is Now Hope for Peace

Contributed by Anza Phillis
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Sanni Murdi, spokesman of the Muslim Community in Plateau State, speaks to Anza Phillips, assistant editor, on the perennial Jos crisis: Excerpts:

Newswatch: President Goodluck Jonathan has taken steps to arrest the spate of violence in Plateau State. He has also directed the CDS to take charge of the security in Jos. What is the take of the Muslim community on the federal government’s move? Murdi: Well, we welcome the federal government’s move as it stands and we believe it will go a long way in arresting the security problem in the state. We welcome not just the taking charge of the security situation in the state by the CDS, but the federal government’s decision to implement the decisions of the various panels set up earlier to look into the crisis. The first was the Emmanuel Abisoye panel and then the Solomon Lar panel. There is a lot of confidence in the works of these panels as they were not mired in controversies. The other thing, of interest to the Muslim community was also the directive to National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, to come in and assist victims of the crisis. This is one aspect that has always been neglected in the past – the issue of assistance to the affected persons or victims of the crisis. No matter the level of reconciliation, it is better when you assist people who are victims of such mishaps. It is a good thing that government is now showing its concern. We commend the government over this and we are assuring the federal government of our support towards ending the crisis. Newswatch: Is it the absence of these things which the federal government is now poised to do that encourage the crisis? Murdi: We believe that the genesis of the present phase of the Jos crisis which dates back to as far as 2001 has done a lot of damage to the socio-political and economic life of our people. The crisis has caused a lot of deprivation, marginalisation and discrimination. There were perceived issues of threat and domination. There was this feeling that when you accommodate or integrate certain people into the system they will overwhelm you later in life, a thing which I think was sheer misgivings. These are the issues. And all the previous panels before that of Lar failed to proffer solutions to these issues. Rather, they concentrated more on the criminal aspects of the crisis, trying to apportion blames as to who and who was responsible for this and that. But the Solomon Lar was quite different. It was not a fact-finding panel. It was a panel made up of stakeholders, particularly eminent people from various groups in Jos and its environs where we have been having this crisis. The panel looked at all the issues. The issues of indigeneship, traditional institution, issues of economy, unemployment, local government, religions etc. The panel dealt with all these issues and it also looked into the works of all previous panels on Jos crisis set before it. So, in the Lar report you can find largely all the solutions or references to those reports. So, we believe the Solomon Lar report is very good and if implemented will ensure a lasting peace in Plateau State. It was one panel which had the confidence of the generality of the people. So, by implementing it means one is addressing the socio-political, economic and religious issues that are at the root of this crisis which other panels have often neglected. And now, we have the federal government which is a neutral arbiter. It is a welcome development quite opposed to the state government which is deeply involved in the crisis. There is loss of confidence in the Plateau State government. So, when you have the federal government coming to intervene and come up with solution, it means we are addressing the root causes of the problem in Jos. Newswatch: Are you, therefore, promising that peace is going to return to Jos and its environs? Murdi: That is our expectation and hope really. Newswatch: But beside the clashes between Muslims and Christians in Jos and environs, there have been clashes amongst Muslims themselves. For instance, at the Ungwan Rogo settlement area behind the University of Jos, a predominantly Hausa community, there has been incessant breakdown of law and order within the Muslim youths. Murdi: This is unfortunate. When you have a crisis that spans over 10 years in a place, it’s dangerous, particularly to the youths of such an area. The Nigerian civil war ended in 30 months, and quickly the government embarked on rehabilitation and reconciliation programmes. Now, when you have a crisis that has lasted for 10 years, maybe that a boy who was five or six years old when the crisis started is now 15 or 17 and he doesn’t know anything other than crisis deteriorating from one stage to another. What do you expect from such a youth? This is not limited to the Hausa community. It is applicable to all sides of the divide in the crisis. I tell you, there is youth restiveness and unemployment. Parents who were before now used to paying their children’s school fees now have no jobs, schools have been on and off, markets have been burnt down, commercial activities have come to a halt in the city. The family system has collapsed. I pity these children. It means their future has been ruined. This is something that should be addressed. So, the issue of youth restiveness is worrisome to all of us on both sides and it should be addressed. Newswatch: You have expressed a lot of optimism on the Lar report. Will it ensure lasting peace in Jos if it is implemented? Murdi: It is the most comprehensive report so far and if implemented can bring lasting peace in the area as it is capable of addressing all the contending issues. The first thing that is required is to build confidence among the people. For instance, just a mere pronouncement by President Jonathan directing the CDC to take control of affairs in Plateau calmed down a lot of nerves. That shows the power of government’s commitment. As soon as the measures being announced by the government begin to come into play, you will see peace coming back to the state. If you take the first right step, the people will help you take the next two, three right steps in the right direction.