CONGRESS OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS (CNNC)

HISTORICAL PROSPECTIVES

Though Christianity has a long history in Northern Nigeria, a lot of struggles had been going on to unite them under a common umbrella to face their common incessant bitter challenges, not much was achieved until the emergence of CAN through the efforts of some prominent Northern Christians. As could be expected, this helplessness and quest for unity was fuelled by some negative religious developments some of which dated back to many years and the rest are contemporary.

Apart from religious marginalization, it is important to note also that Christians in Northern Nigeria are also socio-politically cum economically marginalised.

EXPECTIONS FROM CHRISTIAN BODIES

Even though more other Christian bodies emerged later to augment the efforts of CAN, much expectations have not been achieved as the above and other challenges that are affecting Christians in Northern Nigeria still exist and persist. These range from socio-political marginalization to very serious religious crisis that are today characterised by bloodshed and the enormous loss of lives and properties. The consequent of this negative development have other far reaching implication on the Christian Faith.

The unpleasant development continues to worsen by the fact that the Christians lack an independent and well coordinated central body that speaks for and defend them. This is because the few existing ones are either too weak or are acting independently of each other or have simply compromised as a result of the funding some of them receive from government.

Without any doubt, these bitter experiences and helplessness in the face of disunity, gradually paved way for a greater quest for a body that could

unite and speak for Christians in Northern Nigeria, to which this vision provides an answer.

EMERGENCE OF CONGRESS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA CHRISTIANS (CNNC) AND ITS VISION

For many years in the past, Christians in Northern Nigeria had been under systematic persecution as briefly enumerated above but the post-election crisis of 2011 which left many people dead and many churches destroyed was what triggered the vision. This is because the crises attracted the attention of all the Christians in Nigeria and many foreign countries.

Consequently, some very concerned individuals, led by Mr. Joshua Garba, who felt the great need for the Northern Christians to have a united force by which they could defend, speak and address their incessant problems, decided to visit Prof. Adamu Baikie with this vision and discovered that he was carrying the same burden for some years. After their meeting with him at his Zaria resident, they resolved of undertaking a sight-seeing of the aftermath of the (2011) crises in some Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, during which they discovered the amount of destruction of the Christians' lives and properties. They further discovered and confirmed from briefing by other individuals as well as reports of similar happenings and helplessness of Christians in the core Northern States (Katsina, Zamfara, Bauchi, Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, etc); that the sad experiences was not peculiar to Kaduna State alone but universal in the North.

This discovery heightened the need to pursue the vision without any further delay. Consequently, meetings and some series of consultations with Christian Elders and other stakeholders started. The result arrived at a unanimous agreement that there was need for a formidable body that could champion the cause of Christians in the North. Hence, the crystallisation of the vision and the intensification of contacts and meetings to get the Congress properly established.

Under the ably Chairmanship of Prof. Adamu Baikie and effective mobilisation by Mr. Joshua Garba, series of meetings were held in Zaria by a few people that progressively recorded the following pioneering members:

- Prof. Adamu Baikie
- Mr. Joshua Garba
- Elder Saidu Dogo
- Elder Steven B. Bangoji
- Pastor Aminu Yusufu
- Barr. Danladi Ali
- Prof. Istifanus Y. Chindu
- Dr. Emmanuel E. Gaba
- Prof. Yohannah Tella
- Mr. Polycap Didam
- Eng. Abdullahi M. Baikie
- Mr. Jonah Abarshe
- Barr. Emmanuel Subilim

The major outcome of the meetings was the blue-print for realizing the vision of the Congress, outlined as follows:

- Appointment of members of Board of Trustees and a Chairman
- Appointment of Patrons
- Election of National Executive Council
- Creation of States and LGAs branches
- Registration with Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria

The aims and objectives of the vision were also outlined as follows;

- To bring Christians in Northern Nigeria under one umbrella called **CONGRESS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA CHRISTIANS (CNNC),** irrespective of denominational and tribal differences.
- To receive grievances from Northern Nigerian Christians affected by one problems or the other.
- To assist affected Christians to be heard and be given redress.

- To serve as the mouth piece of Northern Nigerian Christians and to encourage them to stand firm and resist any discrimination against them, through any legitimate means.
- Other than the points raised above, other operational activities of the Congress are detailed out in the Constitution as well as in the Article of Memorandum of Association of the Congress.

EXPANSION OF THE VISION;

As a result of the increase of members, the meeting moved to Kaduna and started in Bible Fellowship Ministries (Church) Kamazou, on the 25th October, 2015. Through the influence of Rev (Dr) Emmanuel N Dziggau, the retired President of HEKAN, the meeting moved to HEKAN Headquarter, Katsina road, Kaduna, on the 6th August 2016.

The HEKAN meeting drew more members from the nineteen Northern States and Abuja. Wider sensitisation and consultation were therefore enhanced. Elder Saidu Dogo (late) was appointed the Deputy Interim Chairman. After his demise, Elder Steven Baba Bangoji took over. Barrister Danladi Ali was the first acting Secretary. When he could not continue with the meeting, Mr. Joshua Garba took over from him. Because of his tight engagement as the coordinator of the meeting, Mr Joshua transferred the responsibility of the Acting Secretary to Pastor Aminu Yusufu. The position was later confirmed as the Interim Secretary.

A Steering Committee was established by the Interim Chairman and was saddled with the responsibility of implementing the resolutions of the meetings of the Forum. The Members included, Prof. Adamu Baikie as the Chairman, Elder Stephen B. Bangoji, Mr Joshua G. Garba, Prof Yohanna Tella, and Pastor Aminu Yusufu as Secretary.

The HEKAN meeting was a turning point of the establishment of the Congress as it continued to record an overwhelming increase in attendance, especially from Nasarawa State.

The highlight of the success of the meeting in HEKAN includes;

a) Drafting of the Constitution by learned legal practitioners, headed by Barr. Emmanuel Subilim,

b) Approval of Board of Trustees

c) Processing the Registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria.

d)The meeting of 8th July 2017, sparked up the intense desire for the Inauguration of the Congress and an Inaugural Committee was formed with the following members; **Prince (Dr) James Angbazo as Chairman, Dr. Labaran Dawa, Pastor Garba Umar, Mrs Rhoda Adamu and Mr Aboki Galadima as Secretary.** There after the Committee sprang into action with the formation of Sub-committees and mobilisation of all members for the planning of the Inauguration.

e) Registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission was effectively accomplished on the 13th Nov. 2017.

For the need of a larger venue, the Congress meeting was moved from HEKAN Headquarters to New Life Christian Assembly, No. 17B PAN Avenue, Kakuri Industrial Estate, Kaduna, on the 19th August 2017, by the generous permission of the General Overseer of the Assembly, Rev. Chris Gwamna. Several meetings were held thereafter, recording great attendance in each meeting. The agenda of the meetings focussed mainly on the Inauguration of the Congress.

INAUGURATION OF CNNC

The Inauguration Committee under the Leadership of Prince (Dr) James Angbazo drew up its program with the following Sub-committees as its workforce; : **Venue, Finance, Protocol, Security, Entertainment, Program Printing, Ushers, Public address system, Accommodation, Church Mobilization, Transportation/Logistics, Medical, Media/Publicity, Strategy/Research, Inauguration Church Service, Youth Mobilization and General Contact Committee.** States Coordinators were also appointed for

the 19 States and Abuja for sensitisation and mobilisation of people at the states level to attendant the Inauguration.

The date of the Inauguration was 11th November, 2017 at Murtala Mohammed Square, Kaduna. The attendance from the 19 Northern States and Abuja, including delegates from other States was overwhelming. The Chairman of the Inauguration, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, inaugurated the Congress. In attendance were Rt. Hon Yakubu Dogara, the speaker of the House of Representative; several Senators and members of the House of Representatives and States house of Assemblies; Kaduna State Governor represented by the Deputy Governor, HE, Arch. Bala Bantex; Some States Governors, Deputy Governors, Army Generals, Northern Traditional Rulers led by their Chairman, HRH, Abdu Maisheru, (Maitangale Gombe) who was the Royal father of the occasion. The guest lecturer of the occasion was Prof. (Rev) Yusufu Turaki. Others included several Clergy men/women, Several Christians Organisations, International Communities, NGOs, Security personnel, Students, etc etc. The crowd was overwhelming and ground shaking.

PLAN OF ACTION AFTER INAUGURATION

The Interim Management Committee went into serious activities just after the Inauguration and drew up the following work plan.

1) **Appointment of Committees;** this includes,
    a. Interim Management Committee, as the Engine room of the Congress
    b. 15-member Elders Committee as advisory members to the Interim Chairman
    c. Election of States Representatives, one each from the nineteen States and Abuja, to form the Interim Working committee with the Elder and the Management Committees.
    d. CNNC Constitution Objectives analyses Committee; to expatiate the Objectives for the complete implementation of the Constitutional provisions of the Congress.

e. 11-member Patrons as the backbone of the Congress.
f. 12 Standing Committees to handle congress affairs in the following fields

- **Legal Matters; Security; Education; Religious Affairs; Political Affairs; Finance and Economic Matters; Agriculture and Rural Development; Land Matters; Women and Humanitarian Intervention; Youth Affairs; Communication and Information Technology; Research and Planning.**

2) With the above Committees on focus, the following Schedule of Meetings/Programs were planned and executed;

a) 24th Nov. 2017; First meeting of Elders Committee in Kaduna
b) 27th Nov. to 8th Dec. 2017; Election of States Representatives to serve on Interim Working Committee;
c) 16 Dec. 2017; First meeting of the Interim Working Committee in Kaduna
d) 20th Jan, 2018; Second meeting of Elders Committee in Abuja
e) 26th Jan. 2018; Second meeting of the Interim Working Committee in Bauchi State.
f) 15th to 27th Feb. 2018; Election and inauguration of the States Executive Officers. This was postponed to allow the States to register more members and prepare adequately for the election. Consequently, 5000 membership cards and 5000 constitution pamphlets were produced and distributed to the States for the registration of their members.
g) 10th March, 2018; third meeting of the Interim working committee. The decision to postpone States election was adopted and election dates scheduled for October, 2018.
h) 12th to 14th April; convention to elect National Officers. This program was not possible due to the postponement of the States election.
i) Appointment of an Interim Publicity Relation Officer in the person of Mr. Larry Yamai.

While the above activities were going on, the Interim Management Committee was also carrying out the following programs;

- Regular meetings to implement all decisions arrived at the meetings of all Committees,
- Planning of meetings and programs,
- Communicating and visiting various stake holders,
- Press briefings and Radio interviews
- Participating in some States and National functions,
- Regular meetings with committees at the States and Zonal levels
- ETC

PASTOR AMINU YUSUFU

Interim National Secretary