

# Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls in West Africa

December 7–9, 2015

A Carter Center Human Rights Defenders Forum  
Hosted by the National Chief Imam of Ghana



THE  
CARTER CENTER





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# Acknowledgments

This conversation would not have taken place without the leadership provided by President and Mrs. Carter, who together envision a world in which women and girls are afforded the same opportunities, respect, and dignity as men and boys. Their efforts have mobilized a movement in which actors from all segments of society are forced to examine their roles in upholding structures that discriminate against and harm women and girls and to take concrete steps to produce change.

The Human Rights Program wishes to acknowledge the outspoken support provided by some of West Africa's most senior religious leaders, including Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niasse, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, and especially Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, the national chief imam of Ghana, whose kind and sincere invitation sparked this conversation and called many local religious leaders to action.

This important regional conversation was postponed twice due to extraordinary circumstances, including the 2014–2015 Ebola epidemic, which was beyond the control of any individual or organization. However, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Carter Center staff and our incredible partners, both old and

new, we were able to execute a powerful event. The Human Rights Program staff, Danielle Taylor and Karin Ryan, and consultant Melinda Holmes were crucial to the actualization of this conference. We are deeply appreciative of George Akanza and all of the staff at the Mövenpick Ambassador Hotel Accra, who ensured that all logistics were executed flawlessly and every last-minute request was accommodated. The forum would not have been possible without the generosity of many dedicated individual and institutional donors committed to supporting human rights defenders worldwide.

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Danielle Taylor was responsible for writing this report.

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The oppression and abuse of women and girls are recognized globally as a serious impediment to sustainable development and human security, contributing to the suffering of entire families and communities. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has often argued that the mistreatment of women and girls is the number one human rights abuse of our lifetime. He has blamed this abuse largely on the misinterpretation of holy texts, which relegate women to secondary positions to men.

In December 2015, The Carter Center joined West African partner organizations and institutions for a Human Rights Defenders Forum to explore these issues in a regional context. Hosted in Accra, Ghana, by the Office of the National Chief Imam of Ghana, the forum provided a space for actors from diverse segments of society to exchange understandings and resources on the abuse and oppression of women and girls in the region as well as a means of countering narratives and interpretations of faith-based teachings that perpetuate inequality and gender-based violence. The forum promoted efforts by regional and local organizations to mobilize their

communities to transform harmful social norms. The goal was to move beyond scholarship and rhetoric; participants sought to develop a regional strategy for academics, the media, civil society, and religious and traditional authorities to actively and concertedly address violence and discrimination against women and girls. They paid special attention to the role that religious and traditional leaders can and should play in this effort.

Of significance to participants from Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Senegal, and Ghana was the role religious and traditional values can and should play in advancing peace and respect for every human being. Given the high levels of religiosity in the region—and religious and traditional leaders' prominence at all levels of life—many participants were distressed that this influence and reach have not been better employed by those seeking to improve respect for human rights. They expressed understanding that although religion has been traditionally viewed as a driver of conflict, religious leaders have been involved in peace and human rights work for years. They were eager to hear the testimonies of religious and traditional authorities on



Ronald Borden

Participants in the 2015 Human Rights Defenders Forum: Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls in West Africa

their attempts at addressing human rights violations against women and girls and to learn how they could support one another in addressing these challenges.

Three complementary focal areas were addressed in panel discussions and working groups: socially imposed limitations on the girl child, women's access to leadership positions, and the need to address the religious and gender dimensions of conflict prevention and resolution in the region.

### The Life of the Girl Child

As in other parts of the world, the girl child in West Africa faces inequality in many life opportunities, ranging from less access to education to the threat of early forced marriage. This ongoing gender inequality has been attributed to families making the most of the realities of life in underdeveloped communities, traditional conceptions of the roles of women, and religious misinterpretations of the capacity and rights of women. Poignant arguments were presented to negate these perceptions and promote understanding of the spiritual and practical importance of opening opportunities for girls. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that ensuring the sustained respect for and empowerment of women and girls required teaching and sensitizing boys to destructive social biases and the true teachings of holy texts. If not, Dr. ChiChi Okoye noted, we will continue “raising 21st-century girls who end up marrying 18th-century boys.”

### Women's Leadership

Participants highlighted the empirical data that demonstrates the value of women's leadership and active participation in all facets of society. Their exclusion from decision-making spaces, especially in deliberations on security, defense, violent extremism, and legal and judicial policies, allows for the perpetuation of injustice and incomplete responses to societal challenges. Looking to examples from Africa's rich history and religious traditions, delegates considered the social systems and beliefs that once allowed strong female leaders to make critical contributions to their

societies' security and advancement. In turning to the present, participants considered whether their current communities, families, and belief structures are creating environments for women to achieve greatness in all realms of life, including the political and spiritual. Leading women from across diverse fields testified about the challenges to, and resources available for, empowering African women to lead the region toward sustainable and inclusive development and peace.

**The duty falls on us to educate our boys, so that they see God in the eyes of every girl, so that they understand that within her lie the keys to our collective progress. She has so much to give our world, and we, men and the boys who will follow us into manhood, must not block her path with physical, social, spiritual, or psychological violence.**

—Jimmy Carter

### Gender and Faith in Conflict

With increasing international focus on the violent tactics of nonstate actors across West Africa and the Sahel, discussions of inclusive governance, human security, and sustainable development are being overshadowed by the “war on terror” narrative and the narrow, often misguided, securitization agenda. Participants discussed their definition and experience of security and how that differs for women and men. They explored the interplay between toxic masculinity and militarism and addressed how decision

making that is inclusive of women and youth might result in different, more effective, security policies. Their discussions also examined youth disengagement and the feminization of poverty as outcomes of policies that privilege violent mechanisms for resolving conflict.

### Commitments to Action

A sense of urgency was evident in the conversations held among participants over the three days of the forum. They recognized that while improving respect for the human rights of women and girls was a meaningful and worthwhile endeavor in and of itself, it was also critical to ensuring the realization of their hopes and dreams for the region, including being safe, healthy, just, and economically robust. By engaging with different voices and perspectives, participants gained an enhanced understanding of the arguments used to defend and counter discrimination and abuse of women and girls, thereby better equipping themselves to actively address these arguments in their communities. By giving participants access to leadership and influencers not typically found in the same working spaces, the forum encouraged new partnerships between disparate segments of West African society.

### Poetry Competition

A poetry competition was held during the forum to give young writers a chance to showcase their original work on the key topics under discussion. The winning submissions have been included in this report.



Ronald Borden

Participants in the Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls in West Africa 2015 Human Rights Defenders Forum signed a declaration outlining their commitment to advancing the rights of women and girls.

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# Opening Remarks

## Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

Good morning, and greetings from The Carter Center in Atlanta. Although I regret that because of illness, I cannot be with you in person, I am pleased that you are gathered together this week to continue this important work.

We should not forget the profound words of the late Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijjani Niass, whose mother and father are among you today. During our forum in 2013 he said this: “Men need to support women in the issue of equality by sometimes just being silent.” He was reminding us that true leadership begins with humility, justice, and love.

In my recent book “A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power,” I wrote that violence has become normalized in society, from our entertainment to our criminal justice system and in our relations with other nations. No wonder violence in the home is so prevalent and destructive, with one in three women facing physical violence in her lifetime.

I have spoken out in my own country about this, urging citizens to commit to peace and mutual respect among women and men. I believe we must prosecute those who have committed sexual assault in the home, on college campuses, in our military, and elsewhere.

Moving forward, if we are going to create peaceful and prosperous societies, we must value each person by granting her or him the same access to education, economic and public participation, and leadership roles.

Each of you, as religious and traditional leaders, has more influence and power than most to realize this vision.

Our gathering is about the advancement of peace and the well-being of women and girls, but I would like to talk to you about our boys.

The duty falls on us to educate our boys, so that they see God in the eyes of every girl, so that they



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understand that within her lie the keys to our collective progress. She has so much to give our world, and we, men and the boys who will follow us into manhood, must not block her path with physical, social, spiritual, or psychological violence.

We must teach our boys that a girl is not inferior, nor is she something to be owned or dominated. She, too, is a child of God. And we must help each boy understand that the loving relationship he seeks with a girl and one day a woman is only possible when he treats all girls and women with utmost respect. If we do this together, our communities and our world surely will transform in peace.

I look forward to receiving a report from our Carter Center colleagues about this important gathering.

I am grateful for the hard work it took to organize this important gathering.

**Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, Archbishop of the Sokoto Diocese, Nigeria**

Hello. I bring you warm greetings from Nigeria, specifically from Sokoto, where I reside. I really, truly regret my inability to be physically present at this very wonderful event organized by The Carter Center. Let me first wish President Carter a healthy life, a peaceful life, a happy life, and assure him of my personal hope—and I guess the rest of us who are praying for him—that he enjoys the rest of his life in peace.

I'm very proud to be associated with The Carter Center. I'm very proud of the great things that President Carter himself is doing both in praise of democracy and in praise of the Christian faith. I'm very happy that this conversation will be focusing on the issue of the situation of women around the world. I live in Nigeria. The tragic situation and condition of the Chibok girls have brought to the fore the very serious issues surrounding the well-being and welfare of our young girl children. In Nigeria, a lot of these young girls are on the streets as what we call "petty traders." They are hawking goods. They are under very difficult situations and very hazardous weather conditions. A lot of them also are beggars on the streets. Some of them serve as housemaids, often victims of very severe and serious domestic abuse by the women for whom they work. Also, occasionally they are victims of rape by the husbands of the women and families with whom they work or sometimes by other men who constantly prey on them. So everywhere we turn, a lot of our young girls are victims of sexual slavery.

For married women, the situation is slightly different, but they are no less vulnerable. We see it every day. What we can say of Nigeria, we can

say of other African countries: As a result of bad governance, women are working the hardest but earning the least, with very limited access to bank loans and credits. They have very limited support when their husbands die and they become widows. They have to raise children under very terrible conditions, and in a lot of our societies, widow practices are quite severe and stern. They, too, are victims of domestic violence and victims of rape.

**I'm happy to lend my voice to this trouble to end not only violence against women but to open the frontiers of opportunity so that our young girls, who are the future of tomorrow, can actually live in peace, freedom, and security.**

**—Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah**

There is a culmination of very serious issues. I'm happy to lend my voice to this trouble to end not only violence against women but to open the frontiers of opportunity so that our young girls, who are the future of tomorrow, can actually live in peace, freedom, and security. To that extent, I want to congratulate The Carter Center and all of you who are gathered for this conference. I wish you a very happy time in the great city of Accra. God bless you. Thank you very much.



Ronald Borden

Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niasse, Khalifa of the Tijjani Order, signing the Accra Declaration

**Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niasse,  
Khalifa of the Tijjani Order<sup>1</sup>**

Bismillahi Rahmani Rahimi  
Praise Allah Almighty.

May peace and salvation be upon the Prophet Muhammad Allah sent as the token of His mercy to all His creatures, and for a highly humanitarian mission.

Distinguished representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ghana,  
Distinguished representatives of President Jimmy Carter,  
Eminence Sheikh Osman Sharubutu,  
National chief imam of Ghana,  
Distinguished leaders of The Carter Center,  
Distinguished participants in the forum on human rights,  
Ladies and gentlemen, all protocols duly respected,  
Assalamu aleikum Rahmatullah war.

I am delighted to be here today among you to participate in this joyful initiative of The Carter Center to celebrate the dignity of the girl child and of women.

The relevance of our work is measured against the evidence that, even today, women are the first victims of conflict, ignorance, violence of all kinds, and of the ostracism that excludes them from decision making. This observation requires us, and more particularly policymakers and religious and traditional leaders, to reconsider the underlying causes of gender-based inequalities in order to lay the foundations of an action that will provide women with an effective and sustainable solution.

My contribution to your initiative will be to present my interpretation of the positions formulated by Islam on the proposed themes.

To achieve this, I will be recalling the words of Allah in the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam.

“O mankind, we have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another.”

The Qur'an also states in Surah 33, verse 35, 10 degrees of devotion for which women are equal to men. These references in the holy book are

<sup>1</sup> See remarks in original French in Appendix B.

particularly strong in legitimizing the status of women as being equal to men in their humanity, not from a biological standpoint but in terms of their social and spiritual responsibilities.

But the first step toward the enjoyment of these responsibilities is to gain access to quality education. In Islam, education does not discriminate between men and women. The Prophet Muhammad himself, peace and salvation be upon him, dedicated his time to women's education by offering, every week, two classes that he officiated in person, as we are taught by a *hadith* narrated by the following authentication chain: Moussadid, Abi Ouwanata, Abdourrahmane Ibnil Asbahani, Abi Salih Zakwan, Abi Saidin.

Furthermore, it appears consistent in the prophetic tradition that many women were holders of knowledge. For instance, Seyda Aisha was known to master 2,210 *hadiths*; Oumou Seyda Salama, 378 *hadiths*; Seyda bint Abi Sufian Ramlatu, 65 *hadiths*; Seyda Hafsatu bint Umar, 60 *hadiths*; Seyda Maimouna bint Haz, 46 *hadiths*; and Seyda Zeinabu bint Jahsin, 11 *hadiths*.

This practice of educating girls and women is still widespread throughout the Muslim world. My community as a whole gives girls the same education as the one given to their brothers. Thus, the vast majority of girls educated by Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse are highly enlightened. The presence of my sister Seyda Roqaya Ibrahim Niasse in this forum, a graduate in all disciplines of religious studies, outstanding writer and director of the Institute of

Higher Education in favor of girls and boys, is the evidence of such a successful education.

On another level, I wish to recall that all forms of violence against women are strongly prohibited by Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him) said, "Whoever honors the woman is honored with Allah, and whoever bullies the woman is culpable with Allah." In his last sermon, he also said, "I recommend insistently that you ensure the rights of the two weak, the woman and the orphan."

I wish to recall that Islam does not discriminate on the basis of gender regarding the responsibilities of this world. Thus, in the history of Islam, Khadija Seyda has had duties of paramount importance as a wealthy businesswoman who successfully employed and supervised numerous men in addition to being the first believer. Even today, many women across the Muslim world occupy leading positions, including that of head of state. For biological reasons, they do not have access to the functions of imams and khalifs,

**Despite the difference between the male and female physical bodies, men and women's equality is perfect with regard to their souls.**

**—Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niasse**



Ronald Borden

but this limitation does not diminish the importance of the role they play in society.

To illustrate this, I will quote our master, Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé, who said to his daughters, “Compete with men in the search of faith, knowledge, skills, and righteousness.” The consequence of this guidance is that today our community comprises a large number of women at the head of training institutions and nongovernmental organizations. Through their skillfulness and seriousness, they greatly contribute to the

**If the injustices against women considered during this forum can be considered to be rooted in an interpretation of religion, a close examination will show that their justification on the basis of Islamic texts is not legitimized.**

**—Khalif Sheikh Ahmed  
Tidiane Ibrahim Niassé**

training of our community’s elites and to the social actions benefiting the people.

Finally, it should be recalled that forced marriages are not condoned in the basic texts of Islam.

Hence, ladies and gentlemen, if the injustices against women considered during this forum can be considered to be rooted in an interpretation of religion, a close examination will show that their justification on the basis of Islamic texts is not legitimized. Instead, the review of the status of women in pre-Islamic societies demonstrates that Islam actually allowed women to acquire a human status complementary to that of men, even if a distribution of their tasks in society has been dictated, in certain cases, by their biological differences.

The Muslim poet Hammada, who sang about the essential equality of all beings, reminded us that all beings are made of a soul and a body. Despite the difference between the male and female physical bodies, men and women’s equality is perfect with regard to their souls. Our community being built on the foundations of the education of the soul, it perfectly adheres to this vision of the human being.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all the success in your endeavor.

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# Keynote Address

**Hafsat Abiola-Costello, Founder of the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy**

Across West Africa, women and girls struggle daily to ensure that their rights are recognized. Urban centers offer more protection than rural areas, where patriarchy largely goes unchallenged. But the widest disparity is not the urban–rural divide but the divide between the expectations of those of us who fought for democratic change and the reality we discovered under democratic regimes.

Naively perhaps, we had expected that women and girls’ rights would be added on in our countries once democratic systems were secured. Yet, now we find that while most countries in West Africa are democratic, the rights of women and girls are not

**Neither cultural stigma, religious beliefs, nor inadequate planning by the state or society can be allowed to trap girls in ignorance. All girls must be able to go to school!**

**—Hafsat Abiola-Costello**



Ronald Borden

being advanced as a matter of priority. With the Arab Spring, we discovered why. Since democracy gives power to the people, women and girls' rights become subject to what the majority believes.

What do the majority of people in West Africa believe? Going by the fact that no West African country is in the top 10 for gender equality in Africa, whereas six are in the bottom of the ranking done by the African Development Bank, it would seem that they do not believe in equality of women and girls.

That's the bad news. The good news is that positive change can be rapid, and the key is leadership that drives change. I experienced this firsthand over the last few days during my first-ever visit to Rwanda, where I was invited to speak at the preforum to the African Union Commission's Dialogue on Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights.

As you know, Rwanda now leads the world in the proportion of women in Parliament and ranks second after South Africa, according to the Africa Gender Equality Index. To visit Rwanda is to enter a country transformed from the genocide of 20 years ago, during which 1 million people were killed in 100 days, to a country that has not only recovered but grows and excels.

The question for us in West Africa is: How can we build a movement where leaders, wherever they are found, take principled positions and exercise power responsibly to uphold the human rights of women and girls?

I would like us to look briefly at three issues calling for leadership and action.

- Child marriage
- The culture of violence in the home and in society
- Women's political participation

Child marriage is a problem in the region. In Nigeria, according to a National Population Council report, child brides account for as many as 48 percent of young girls who are married off before their 18th birthday.

Southern Africa has offered us an inspiring example of a female traditional chief who challenged

the practice and was able to overturn all such cases in the communities under her jurisdiction, returning the girls back into classrooms where they belonged.

In contrast, in Nigeria, a major advocate for women and girls' rights and one of the most powerful religious and traditional kings in the country came under some controversy recently when he contracted a royal marriage with a princess from the Adamawa caliphate. The king, the Emir of Kano, is 54; the bride, 18. Some critics were pacified to learn that the bride will not begin married life until after completing her university education in three years, by which time she will be 21. However, many continued to express reservations due to the expected power difference between the couple.

To my mind, they missed a golden opportunity to highlight the fact that 18 or 21 is not 12 or 13—just six years at the minimum, but enough time to ensure that giving birth doesn't claim the mother's life; enough time to enable the girl child to complete her secondary school and have that much more knowledge and tools for taking care of the children she will bear; and enough time to create more options for herself. Considering that the challenge in remote parts of the north and among poor rural families across Nigeria is whether to marry off girl children, that bigger danger must be at the forefront of our thinking. What is gained by seeking to alienate a leading authoritative voice whose advocacy can probably do more than that of any other figure in the region for our quest to end child marriage?

Related to ending child marriage is the need to secure the right of all girls to an education. In post-Ebola Sierra Leone, as many as 5,000 girls were found to have become pregnant over the course of the year when schools were closed to contain the epidemic. So far, the girls are still out while the government vacillates between condemning them and promising to make special provisions for their continued education. It is worth noting that none of the boys who were involved in getting the girls pregnant are being kept out of school. We cannot on one hand ask parents to keep their daughters in school and on the other condone the fact that there are no schools for girls

who become pregnant. Neither cultural stigma, religious beliefs, nor inadequate planning by the state or society can be allowed to trap girls in ignorance. All girls must be able to go to school!

Secondly, there is an urgent need for leadership to push back on the culture of violence in the home and in public spaces.

Over the last 10 years, there is growing awareness about violence against women across West Africa. There is also increasing recognition that it is wrong, although many people, women included, continue to believe that a man has the right to “correct” his wife by beating her. However, key in changing mindsets is the adoption of legislation to criminalize violence against women and girls in all its forms and enforcement of this law.

Guinea, where government forces sexually violated at least 109 women during a peaceful protest in September 2009, inspires us all with the June indictment of the then-president, Mousse Dadis Camaro, for this atrocity. In this case that saw the judicial system of Guinea supported by the United Nations, the region has been able to establish the fact that there will be no immunity for those leaders who violate the rights of their female citizens.

However, whether women and girls in the region can expect to live in safety and security and can have their rights recognized and protected depends significantly on political decisions: decisions taken in an arena in which many in the society believe that women and girls do not belong.

Which brings me to the third of the three issues—women’s political participation.

We cannot claim to have a democratic system when half of the population—women and girls—are excluded from effective participation. Unfortunately, more and more, we see how women and girls “not belonging” in the political arena translates into a diminishing quality of life. Lacking representation, they lack voice. Women and girls cannot afford to continue to accept the notion that they do not belong in a space where decisions that will affect their lives are taken.

Consider the crisis of Boko Haram’s insurgency in Nigeria: partly a result of the dysfunctional campaigning practice of politicians mobilizing unemployed young men who they arm to intimidate their opponents and who they later dump once the elections are over; partly a backlash from the extrajudicial killing of the leader of a fringe religious sect by the police; and partly the unexpected fallout of the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya that saw the influx of mercenaries and arms into the Sahel.

The result of these three factors, the first two caused by poor decision making by male politicians and government security officers in Nigeria, has now resulted in a crisis that has claimed 20,000 lives and displaced 2.3 million people. Women and girls suffer disproportionately. Of the 276 girls in the school in Chibok who were abducted in April 2014, 219 are still captive, 600 days on, along with hundreds, if not thousands, of other captives. And worse still, the Boko Haram sect has started using young girls as suicide bombers.

Thuggery is no substitute for campaigning. “Cash and carry” electoral tactics, where vote buying is the norm and negligence the democratic dividend many politicians deliver during their term, must give way to performance-oriented leadership.

Initiating a dialogue between people and leaders around how we can practice a more responsible form of democracy and governance has the potential to transform our societies. Women are skilled at fostering dialogue. Now more than ever, they need to step forward to help shape the public space so that the democracy is more representative, the economies more inclusive.

So it is on this challenge of political participation that I would like to conclude my remarks. It took a civil war that decimated Liberia before the people there conceded political leadership to a woman. Now President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is in her second term. She may not have a perfect record, but no one can say her administration isn’t an improvement on the two predatory, murdering regimes that preceded hers. While she stands alone as the only female president

West Africa has produced, from Senegal we have had two effective female prime ministers, both of whom had served as justice ministers. In the role of attorney general of the nation, the first managed the process that produced a new constitution for Senegal, while the other successfully prosecuted political office-holders for corruption. From Burkina Faso, we had a female interim head of government, and in Nigeria, potentially the first female elected governor of a northern state.

Influence isn't only restricted to elected and appointed political officials. Ekiti state in Nigeria benefited from a feminist first lady who supported civil society groups to ensure the passage of the gender-based violence and the equal opportunity bills. Beyond the political arena, all those who have a

voice in our economic, political, traditional, and civil society spaces can and must galvanize their constituents to work for a more gender-equal West Africa.

Women and girls are like the canaries in mine shafts. They are the first to be affected when things start to go wrong in a society, and because of their gender-imposed limitations, they are often most adversely affected by poor governance and communal conflicts. Ensuring that they can be heard, that their rights can be protected, and that their needs can be met will foster social resilience and positive change. Let us use the opportunity provided by The Carter Center in convening this conference to share information and ideas and to commit to work together to make real the promise of democracy for the women and girls of our region.

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# Working Group Report I

## Protecting and Developing the Girl Child

Though many issues were discussed over the course of the conference (access to education, menstrual care, female genital cutting, and other topics), of particular interest to this working group was early child marriage. This was perhaps due in part to a recent high-profile legal case involving a 14-year-old girl from a rural, Islamic community in Kano state, Nigeria. Deeply impoverished and uneducated, this young girl was married off to a man more than two decades her senior. Afraid of his sexual advances, the girl devised a plan to kill him. Just a few days after their wedding, she laced his dinner with rat poison. Unbeknownst to her, he shared his dinner with three friends. All four men were soon found dead. This young widow was quickly charged with murder, and death penalty rumors swelled, much to the outrage of local and international human rights defenders.

**It starts at home. As fathers, we need to equip our daughters and give them the self-confidence they need [to respond to human rights violations].**

**—Alhaji Mamah Gado Mohammed**

Although the charges against her were eventually dropped, the case sparked a firestorm of conversations about the many societal failings that led to this tragedy. Participants were frustrated with the wide-ranging acceptance of the practice that led to a high prevalence of child brides, with estimates as

high as 76 percent<sup>2</sup> in northern Nigeria alone. In breaking down this problem, participants sought to determine how the abundance of research and teachings on the harmful impact of child marriage could be more effectively disseminated to communities at the grass-roots level in a way that encourages the average citizen to abandon the practice. They questioned how diverse segments of society could collaborate more effectively to address the factors that encourage child marriage—namely poverty, limited access to both secular and religious education, and harmful social norms that penalize and discriminate against girls.

A variety of efforts have been taken to ensure that the girl child is protected and developed across West Africa, though many utilize a top-down, state-centered strategy. In the face of reported corruption and poor management from government officials across the region, participants revealed the many ways in which communities have been looking internally at what they can do to make sustainable changes within their own spheres of influence. Most significantly, they critically explored the role local religious leaders can and should play in ensuring respect for girls' human rights. Participants were honest in their desire to interrogate the scripturally and culturally mandated responsibilities of religious and traditional leaders and to learn how that could be leveraged to address the condition of girls in the region. They explored tactics for disseminating accurate religious teachings and holding communities accountable for adhering to these standards. They also exchanged personal experiences on working across sectors and countering harmful narratives.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/nigeria/>

## Challenges to Moving From Rhetoric to Action

It is clear from these discussions that the challenges faced by women in their adult lives are the direct result of missed opportunities and trauma they faced in their youth. Religious and traditional leaders have a unique authority to intervene in harmful and unjust societal practices because in many communities, they wear multiple hats: spiritual leader and guide, conflict mediator, agenda setter, and arbiter of community norms. This final point was highlighted by Mohammed Cherif Diop, an Islamic rights specialist and child protection program officer with the Senegal-based nonprofit organization, Tostan. As an expert in Qur'anic exegesis, human rights, and Islamic social development, Diop contributed to an effort that engaged traditional and Islamic leaders in rural villages across Senegal and the Gambia to collectively reject genital cutting in young girls. In these countries, nearly 7,500 villages jointly issued public commitments to ensuring that the practice is eradicated in all areas under their influence.

In light of the immense leverage and reach that religious and traditional leaders wield in their communities, why are there so many who do not intervene to ensure the rights of girls? One participant, Oluwaseun Ayodeji, founder of the Stand to End Rape Initiative, described how time and time again, Christian leaders in and around Lagos, Nigeria, looked past instances of sexual violence against girls while making excuses for the perpetrators. They questioned what victims did wrong to make themselves vulnerable to assault (e.g., dress inappropriately; allow herself to be found in a dangerous environment) and warned the families of violated girls that reporting the incident could have a disproportionately harmful effect on perpetrators' lives and families. In instances like these, how do we put human rights on the agendas of these religious leaders? Of those few leaders who do speak out on human rights violations, how can their effectiveness and impact be increased?

## Limited Capacity

Those religious and traditional leaders who are, in fact, well-informed often lack the ability to strategically coordinate community engagement with their peers and constituents. Because these issues are complex and deeply ingrained in societies, collective action requires a robust platform to exchange ideas and harmonize action. Referring to the example raised by Mohammed Cherif Diop, the Senegalese and Gambian communities were able to take collective action because Tostan served as the backbone organization that propped up the process and encouraged sustained efforts.

## Lack of Sensitization

Other participants argued that social norms are often so engrained in everyday life that leaders simply don't recognize discriminations against women and girls. They reported encounters with religious leaders who still believe that "boys will be boys" and who do not want to cause community or family distress over the punishment of a man or boy for abusing a woman or girl. Others leaders believe steadfastly in the right of women and girls to be free from physical harm, but because they do not recognize the contributions that women and girls can make to their communities, they do not advocate for investment in girls' upbringing. Alhaji Mamah Gado Mohammed, chairman of the national chief imam of Ghana's advisory board, issued a call for leaders to "be aware of discriminations so that we can address them effectively." This speaks to the need to sensitize communities and leaders alike to harmful practices and beliefs that stifle girls' human rights.

## Reduced Rates of Community Engagement

There has been an increasing disconnect between formal, institutionalized religious leadership and their constituents. Positive, human-rights oriented, faith-based teachings fail to impact the lives of average community members because of religious leaders' limited accessibility, especially to women and girls.

This is particularly alarming given the rise of unqualified religious authorities emerging in West African communities. These pop-up leaders are increasingly shown to lack proper religious education or training and, therefore, disseminate teachings based on ancient traditions that lack the critical interpretation of holy texts. Their interests lie not in building up their communities but rather in building their own influence and authority. They tend to be the loudest, most consistent, and well-engaged through local networks and telecommunication outlets, but their preaching often overlooks the reality of the contemporary issues faced by their communities. Conversely, the moderate and informed religious authorities have struggled to find a homogeneous voice that resonates within the various segments of their communities.

## What Can Be Done

Participants drew up and debated a list of rules and strategies that religious and traditional leaders could manageably incorporate into their teachings and community engagement that will protect the girl child and ensure she has equal access to opportunities. They settled on the following, which they believed could be practically implemented in a timely manner.

- Report and publicly condemn acts of sexual or gender-based violence, regardless of the potential impact on the family of the perpetrator.
- Highlight scriptures that condemn violence in all its forms in churches and mosques.
- Listen to followers when they justify harmful practices with faith-based teachings. Use this to inform preaching and public statements.

- Reflect on and modify the language being used in religious and community ceremonies, such as birth or marriage celebrations, so that it does not reinforce harmful social norms.
- Mainstream gender issues in sermons and prayers.
- Embrace many roles outside the church or mosque so as to be better immersed in the beliefs and practices in the community.
- Integrate livelihoods and economic empowerment for women in programs wherever possible.
- When engaging policymakers, advocate for girls.
- Study religious texts and doctrine for context that will inform interpretation.
- Give special attention to women's religious literacy so that they can effectively advocate for the rights of girls.
- Mentor girls or delegate female elders to mentor girls.
- Make yourselves more accessible and approachable, especially to young people.
- Highlight female role models who have achieved diverse roles in society.

**We are raising 21st-century girls who end up marrying 18th-century boys.**

—*ChiChi Okoye*



Ronald Borden

- Publicly recognize people who have been exemplary advocates for girls.
- Consult with community members (not just high-level leaders) for understanding of unique challenges faced by women and girls. Create safe spaces to listen to women and girls.
- Teach boys from an early age about the importance of gender equality for the advancement of their community and as a religious mandate.

Knowing what to do is only part of the challenge for religious leaders. They need support in understanding how to implement these rules and strategies. They need community partners to support these efforts and ensure they are successful. For this reason, participants agreed to develop an informal network to accomplish the following goals: 1) support religious leaders in implementing these rules and strategies, 2) support activists and community leaders who need the backing of religious legitimacy, and 3) document experiences and lessons for others to apply in their unique contexts.

**One of the challenges that religious leaders face is the multiplicity in interpretations of teachings of the religion. There's this inability to speak with one voice. And unfortunately for the kind of work we do, the voice of the rigid and the ultraconservative is much louder than the voice of the moderate and the temperate.**

**—Fatima Aliyu**

## A Girl Has Been Born

Abirah Zakaria

The misfortunes began right from the moment my birth was announced!

"A girl has been born!"

A girl?

I could imagine the look on their faces...

"Why not a boy?... A human!"

But is it my doing for coming a girl?

Why has society since degraded my birth and existence?

Just because I was not born "human." A human indeed!

Yet, the heavens rejoiced to my birth.

Oh! surely they did,

For a center for the spread of God's creation was born.

So I went through the struggle...

The struggle of having to keep up a home,

The struggle of having to go through circumcision... depending on which part of Africa I was born,

The adolescent struggle,

The unchecked bleeding,

The stigmatization...

But here I am.

I grew through the moments of pain and of joy,

Here I stand dancing to the rhythm of life,

The melodious rhythm,

The sound of which my ears could not gather years back.

Faith is what my womb harbours.

I am the girl on the street,

Struggling in the market!

Walking barefooted!

Exposed to the cruel hands of the cold nights!

I am the girl exposed to robbers, insects and heartless rapers!

I am the girl who is exposed to the inhumane acts of "trokosi" and the outdated puberty rights!

I am the girl who cries to the brutalization of innocent souls!

Where is the world?

Is anyone giving us a listening ear?

We are the girls who refuse to be accomplices of inhumane acts of terrible killings and terrorism.

We are the girls who say "No!" to rape, stigmatization and oppression!

I am the girl who says "No!" to defeat,

I hold the power to fight the world or retreat,

I hold the power to unite lost souls,

And to fill the empty holes.

Do not oppress me!

Do not underestimate my thoughts!

Do not underestimate the weight that carries me!

I am the tool of change the world currently needs.

So please...

Do not push me to the warfront!

Do not oppress me... Please do not.

Do not kill my innocent brothers as well as my weak sisters.

Do not make me evil or leave me with a gun or a dagger.

All I need now is love.

So set me free, let me flee like the dove,

Break me from oppression and make me strong,

Walk with me as I continue my tales.

The tales of an African child.

This is my story,

In which lies glory,

So please, never let me feel sorry.

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# Working Group Report II

## Women in Leadership

All of the participants in this working group recognized the importance of women serving as leaders across all segments of society. Research has shown that the way a state's women are treated is the best predictor of its peacefulness and stability—better than the state's wealth, democracy, or ethno-religious identity. This is directly related to the number of women with decision-making authority. It has been empirically proven that women tend to be more risk-averse, and they temper irrational and heated discussions. Yet the reality is that women continue to be grossly underrepresented, particularly in the region's media, political, and educational sectors, which participants deemed to be the most critical to achieving sustainable development. What bothered most members of this working group was that too often women are not meaningfully involved in the policymaking that has direct effects on their lives. For example, many constitutions were drafted to meet the interests of those already in power; because women were not present, their opinions and ideas were not heard and, therefore, are not present in their own country's founding documents. This working group also found that some of the necessary components of fostering women's participation in leadership are also the barriers that prevent their involvement. This included nongovernmental organizations, media, and religious and traditional leaders.

### Challenges to Fostering Women's Leadership

#### International Nongovernmental Organizations

The members of the group acknowledged that much of the work being done on women's participation in leadership, especially women's participation in political processes, has been done by international nongovernmental organizations. However, as many participants pointed out, a number of policies and

strategies of these organizations have resulted in significant barriers that prevent or obstruct the very people they are trying to help. Many described the inconsistency in work on this issue by nongovernmental organizations, giving accounts of abrupt cessation of work when funding dried up, which resulted in short-term, unsustainable, nontransformative exercises that did not allow for learning about context and best practices. It takes time to change mindsets, identify and encourage strong female candidates, and get them elected into political positions—and then to remain engaged as they gain allies and work to affect systemic change.

Another concern about the work nongovernmental organizations are doing to increase women's access to leadership is that they fail to respond to local concerns first or primarily. For example, many international nongovernmental organizations work closely with national governments. Some participants highlighted concerns from their communities that government influence could corrupt the objectives and work of these organizations by allowing them to become complacent with the government's inaction. Additionally, members of this group described the territorial nature of nongovernmental organizations, which limits collaboration that could have greater impact on communities. As one participant stated, it is more important for these organizations to work together on ideas that can advance to a national level than to fight over small projects that are firmly under their control.

For these reasons, the participants in the working group agreed that instead of relying so heavily on outside organizations, grass-roots organizations should be better equipped to take on this work. The challenge would be in freeing themselves from the limits of foreign funding tied to external agendas. Participants decided to issue calls to wealthy

stakeholders in their own countries to contribute funds to this cause.

### Media

Strategic and sustainable engagement with the media is a necessity for both males and females seeking to acquire leadership positions, especially in politics. However, the working group expressed concern that despite the media's ability to serve as a change agent in favor of women's leadership, it tends to act as a propagator of harmful stereotypes about women and is increasingly influenced by the wealthy and powerful. Media houses, like other enterprises, are businesses and are driven by power and profit, which makes them susceptible to influence and corruption. Corruption was deemed the most critical issue for the media in the region, given its tremendous influence on public opinion by highlighting or ignoring certain candidates.

In committing to engaging and holding the media accountable for fair and accurate reporting and coverage, participants discussed how to go about doing this. One example was to patronize those media outlets that do honestly explore gendered perspectives on issues, especially from a Christian or Islamic framework. Imam Muhammad Bagnya and Imam Abdul Karim Abass served as examples of this as hosts of two of the most popular Islamic television shows in Ghana. Their programs, IQRA and Islamic Hour, discuss various issues facing the Islamic community. In each program, they make a point to highlight the gendered perspective of issues and regularly invite women to speak alongside men. This

has played a crucial role in countering misconceptions about Islam. By also highlighting work being done by women, media practitioners like Imam Bagnya and Imam Abass have the potential to elevate awareness of women who are interested in becoming political candidates by giving them experience and helping to shape a positive image of them.

### Religious and Traditional Leaders

As has been established throughout this report, religious and traditional leaders are crucial partners for social change that allows women to fully participate in public life as leaders. Thus it is important that they are involved and motivated to change perceptions and create safe spaces for women to pursue leadership positions and act in that capacity. These leaders have historically been some of the biggest barricades to women's empowerment, either by actively speaking out against it or by intentionally not taking action to encourage it. The reasons for this—adherence to patriarchal norms, concern about

**Liberia is on the map! Women and the marginalized people are coming on top because of the leadership and courage of those who had been left behind.**  
—Ella Musu Coleman



Ronald Borden

the loss of power, misinterpreted scriptural teachings—have been debated for years, so participants worked to understand what this looked like in their respective environments. They then learned about Tostan’s approach to community development, which informed their own thinking about how locals can engage and educate religious and traditional leaders.

Tostan, an Africa-based nongovernmental organization with 99 percent African staff, works for community empowerment in communities across

**Once they learn how to be leaders at the community level, [women] can learn how to be leaders in the larger diaspora.**

—*Birima Fall*

West Africa. Upon invitation by a community, a Tostan trainer conducts an inclusive consultation in which each member of the community is invited to offer ideas about the community’s desired future, followed by a carefully curated series of discussions about what it would take to get the community to realize this future. The community then works together with the Tostan trainer and religious and traditional leaders to design unique programs that respond to the desired outcomes, which often requires changing or eliminating harmful practices. For example, domestic violence against women and children has become the exception in Tostan communities; democracy has been ingrained, resulting in an upsurge in political participation by both men and women; and SMS texting programs have been used to share knowledge on religious teachings that encourage respect and dignity for women and girls. This serves as an excellent example of the benefits grass-roots organizations can achieve by building on the trust and connections in communities. Participants worked in smaller groups to discuss how this could be replicated in their own contexts.

## What Can Be Done

The larger work group broke into smaller groups to discuss the issues that affect women’s participation in leadership and what steps can and should be taken in encouraging this necessary involvement. Some of their recommendations for next steps are as follows:

- Provide training for women, especially women who have the interest and potential to become leaders.
- Provide training for traditional and religious leaders so they are aware of what steps they can take to encourage women’s leadership. They should be able to educate women about leadership opportunities and needs.
- Gain support from lawmakers. They must be shown how women’s increased participation in leadership is in keeping with their other interests.
- Engage the media in highlighting women’s successful efforts as leaders.
- Highlight the success stories of women’s empowerment, including in Rwanda, Liberia, and Sweden, which could help inform future efforts. Share knowledge about organizations, countries, and people that have made strides in this area to prevent reinvention of the wheel.
- Commit to greater collaboration between nongovernmental organizations and local grass-roots organizations so they are able to focus on long-term structural outcomes.
- Foster coalitions among nongovernmental organizations, state government, media, grass-roots organizations, religious leaders, traditional leaders, and others to achieve collective impact.
- Use the media (both traditional and new media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) as a tool to educate the public and encourage women’s participation in leadership.
- Reward media outlets that challenge the current harmful narrative on women’s role in Islam and Christianity by increasing viewership and readership.

- Create safe spaces for discussions among traditional and religious leaders and women so that these leaders can be informed about the reality of life for women in their communities.
- Encourage women to vote as a first step in involving them in politics and decision making.
- Encourage successful female leaders to make themselves accessible to other women to serve as role models.
- In any space, educate women about their rights to speak out and lead others under state law and under the teachings of their respective religion.

## The “Every Woman” Me

Angelica Naa Fofu Djanie

I am an every woman,  
Yes! I am the wise and intelligent every woman.  
If you think I’m illiterate and thus I’m ignorant,  
Then you will be disappointed because,  
Through my encounter and interaction with  
knowledge and wisdom,  
I keenly observe and get well acquainted,  
In a way that my creator is pleased,  
And that makes me a wise every woman.

I am an every woman.  
Yes! I am the striving mother every woman.  
If you think I’m in a way ignorant of my religion,  
So I can’t morally raise my children,  
Then you will be disappointed because,  
I prayed for righteous children way before my  
union with a man,  
And now my children count among the  
morally upright,  
And that makes me a well-defined every woman.

I am an every woman.  
Yes! I am the virtuous every woman,  
If you think I’m highly educated with  
various qualifications,  
And therefore I won’t submit to my husband,  
Then you will be disappointed because,  
I yearn to be with him in Jannah, where my  
qualifications are inconsequential.  
Thus I stand to gain the Rahma of my creator,  
And that makes me a humble every woman.

I am an every woman.  
Of course I am the God fearing every woman.  
If you think I’m too religious and morally inclined,  
So I’m not sexy and romantic in my matrimony,  
Then you will be disappointed because,

It is my duty to build a harmonious and a  
welcoming home,  
So to benefit more reward from my creator,  
And that makes me a real every woman.

Again, I am an every woman.  
Yes! I am the hardworking every woman.  
If you think I have many firms I run on my own,  
So I don’t do house chores and manage my home,  
Then you will be disappointed because,  
The well-being of my family is my utmost priority,  
And to them I pledge fulfilling services,  
And that makes me a focused every woman.

I am an every woman,  
Yes! I am the substance every woman.  
If you think I’m deeply rooted in the worldly affairs,  
So I have lost touch on my spiritual uplifting,  
Then you will be disappointed because,  
I am Jannah focused and will not compromise on  
the hereafter.

This is why I always seek Istigfar from my creator,  
Because I am a God conscious every woman.

I am an every woman.  
Yes! I am the every woman me.  
At every stage of womanhood I patiently endure,  
For every virtue of womanhood I fully represent,  
In every aspect of womanhood I firmly stand tall,  
By every standard of womanhood I am an  
every woman.

Because I have learnt perfection from  
my imperfections,  
And by the grace of my creator I’ve become an  
every woman,  
In a way that my creator wills.

Be an every woman!

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## Working Group Report III Gender, Faith, and Conflict

It is important to note that although this working group was intended to address the violent tendencies of a variety of nonstate actors (including both religious and secular groups) across West Africa and the Sahel, participants organically decided to focus on those conflicts that are typically colored as Islamic in the international press but that do not have a true basis in the teachings of Islam. While concerns were raised regarding tensions in the self-proclaimed Biafra, the Niger Delta, northern Mali, and other areas, the main issue for this group was the violent extremist group Boko Haram. The group's attacks have left millions displaced, and the effect has spilled

over into neighboring Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Participants wished to move beyond discussions that simply highlighted the misguided “war on terror” narrative that they agreed has produced harmful results (particularly a hypermilitarized securitization agenda across the region). Instead, they focused their energy on exploring how inclusive governance at all levels, a human security framework, and multifaceted sustainable development commitments would produce more stable environments for all.

### Factors Contributing to the Rise in Violent Extremism

Drawing upon their shared experiences and understandings, participants attributed the regional rise in violent extremism to four factors. The first was the ongoing political and economic marginalization of certain groups. For example, northern Nigeria has some of the worst social and economic indicators in the world, with alarming rates of extreme poverty and illiteracy compared to the southern half of the country. This has left the population with a sense of unresolved grievances that they hoped could be solved with the implementation of Sharia law across the north. Of course, Sharia law didn't remedy these development challenges and left communities even more dissatisfied, particularly with their own local leadership.



Ronald Borden

**Women must be seen as educators: A mother is a school. The more educated she is, the better the school.**

*—Pastor Esther Ibanga*



Ronald Borden

**When it comes to tackling extremism, there is nothing more important than the trust and the interpersonal relationship between the scholar and his community. Development and counter-terrorism move at the speed of trustworthiness: Trust is the currency.**

**—Nurudeen Lemu**

The group also agreed that their respective states' neglect for education had resulted in a generation of young people who are unable to understand their communities' unending poverty and unable to address it in a productive and peaceful way. They are left with no meaningful identity and become hungry for a sense of belonging. These young people are highly susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups whose leaders often tout inaccurate and noncontextualized interpretations of faith-based teachings and draw on the broader feeling of injustice and inequality. This phenomenon was referred to as the rise of "Sheikh Google," untrained and uneducated men who become religious authorities on the strength of their ability to look up quick facts about faith-based teachings on the internet. They have the charisma and consistency to grow followers from communities who are themselves religiously and secularly uneducated and, therefore, ill-equipped to respond to the onslaught of misinformation.

There was also concern about the media's tendency to characterize conflicts in fragile communities as interfaith or ethnic clashes and to misreport the extent of the violence and the actors involved. As one participant put it, "If it bleeds, it leads." Media outlets often sensationalize stories at the expense of accuracy and community welfare. Many of the media practitioners lamented the decline in journalistic standards and wanted to better understand how they could influence their community of practice to consider the implications of this trend on community well-being.

Finally, the group expressed grave concerns regarding the silencing of voices that sought to address these grievances with the government. They complained about an inability to peacefully engage their governments on issues that mattered to them because of the propensity of state actors to respond to what they perceived to be challenges to their authority with disproportionately heavy-handed militarized action. They argued that there was greater interest in maintaining a perception of absolute power than in responding to urgent needs in communities.

In all of these conversations, participants continued to come back to the roles that women and trained religious leaders can and do play in addressing these challenges. Looking first at the role of women, participants were keen to note that women have been limited in their ability to contribute to early warning of conflict, mitigation of tensions, and negotiations for peace. This is astounding, given the evidence showing that women are exceptionally capable in all of these areas because, as Pastor Esther Ibanga noted, women tend to be the most tapped into the “ground truth” in their communities. She recounted an experience in the northern city of Jos in which market women expressed concern about the increasing number of people who were purchasing dried tomato powder. This gave the women cause for concern because tomatoes grow in abundance in northern Nigeria, so there is no need for this nonperishable form of tomatoes unless there was anticipation of crop failure or conflict. Given that the community was enjoying a strong crop season, the market women suspected that Jos, until that point spared from Boko Haram’s attacks, would soon fall victim to its violence. When they attempted to report this to local authorities, the market women were shooed away. Shortly after they reported their concerns, two bombs that were attributed to the terrorist group exploded in the city.

Members of the group were disheartened to acknowledge the fact that women have been underrepresented as leaders in all segments of life across West Africa, particularly in the areas of politics, education, and the media—the three areas they agreed were most critical to preventing or mitigating conflict. This is concerning because when women have input into decision making, they tend to be more interested in sharing social responsibility (not merely power) and creating environments that respond to the need for human security, which they define holistically as food security, freedom from physical violence, freedom of religion, and access to health care and schools. Their absence from the corridors of power limits their ability to positively influence and prioritize policy decisions on these matters.

These insights were espoused in the list of recommendations participants developed.

## What Can Be Done

- Build women’s capacity and support them in developing their inherent strengths as mothers and community leaders; strengthen their authority and influence.
- Engage religious authorities and media to promote this idea.
- Address harmful traditional norms on all fronts—in the home, the community, houses of faith, and so forth. (Sometimes women themselves are the guardians of harmful social norms that keep them out of decision-making spaces.)
- Use the media (both traditional and new media such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) as a tool to educate the public and to change the narrative on conflict and perceptions of the “other.”
- Work with local journalists to encourage a return to ethical and responsible reporting even in the face of threats and hardships.
- Sensitize media professionals to the way in which their portrayals of women impact society’s perception of women and their capabilities. Stop depicting them solely as victims.
- Avoid top-down strategies, because they don’t respond to the realities on the ground.
- Don’t discuss issues in the abstract. Get very practical; be honest about the lasting impact of colonialism and relations between different groups.
- Reflect on African traditions of peacefully resolving conflict through local forms of governance.
- Standardize religious education so that people are taught the rules of scriptural interpretation within modern contexts.
- Create safe spaces for dialogue in communities so that an honest exploration of grievances can take place.

- Encourage governments to build trust in the community by using military intervention as a last resort.
- Call for the international community to support existing local initiatives instead of top-down efforts.
- Call for all religious leaders to put peace and development work on their agendas.
- Call for closer ties between scholars and leaders of religiously oriented peace movements to document successes and lessons learned.

## A Dream From the Future

Suhad Salih Abubakar

I can hear the drums of destruction!  
I can sense the touch of solitude!  
I can feel the imminent danger!  
I can see the drawing nigh of a dark cloud,  
Circling and dancing around our efforts.  
Yes! It gazes pitiless at our solidarity.  
It mocks our chance for redemption.  
And it sneers its glare at our existence.  
That is the sound of conflict I hear.  
Slowly conquering territories.  
Majestically gaining grounds.  
Wishfully sipping the souls of the innocent,  
But not the souls of many.  
Able men are its firewood,  
Used to rekindle flames of conflict.  
Women are its play toy,  
Used to keep hot bloods satisfied.  
Children are its future,  
Used to assure perpetual confusion.  
The strength of able men channeled into wasteful ventures,  
The morality and mildness of women turned into intoxicants,  
The vulnerability of children plunged into flames of constant anarchy.

O! How I wish we all had common grounds,  
A common stand where we can all be safe,  
An oval table of sensible and rational leaders.  
We all revere a supreme being after all.  
Both factions of the eager zones do agree.  
Religion has always been the opium of the masses,  
they say.  
Why not capitalize on our common denominator?  
Why not put away our selfish interests?  
Why not join hands?  
Not out of friendship or brotherhood,  
But out of respect for our doctrines.  
The doctrine which abhors callousness.  
The doctrine which disapproves of bloodshed.  
The doctrine which preaches tolerance.  
The doctrine which chooses selflessness over selfishness.  
Why not spare our statisticians the body count?  
Why not restore our children's naivete?  
Why not cherish our women's dignity?  
Why not allow our men into fruitful ventures?  
So we can be proud to call our world our own,  
So we can walk and dream freely.  
And dream of a safe world,  
Where posterity can be assured and guaranteed.

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## Closing Remarks

### Jordan Ryan, Vice President, Peace Programs, The Carter Center

This forum has been too rich not to try to capture a few things that I've heard. The first is President Jimmy Carter's message. It's a message that drives at peace. Everyone must be involved in this effort: men, women, girls, boys. It's not just a government duty or just a religious duty; it's about all of society coming together.

In the past three days, we learned from our speakers that the Prophet (peace be with him) emphasized the value of love and peace for all—not just men and boys. We heard from Jimmy Carter that the Lord Jesus Christ had the same view about the importance of women. In fact, the first person to whom Christ announced his revelation was the Samaritan woman. Religious leaders need to appreciate the issues that confront women and girls, and it is important that we all listen to them and hear what they have to say.

I, fortunately, am the father of a 21-year-old young woman. Long ago, she put a magnet on the fridge that said, "Girl power. Get used to it." This tells us something about women, young girls, being trained to feel they have the confidence to express themselves. We know, at times, that the voices of bullies in the political arena and of rigid men in communities are too often much louder than the more temperate. We need to amplify the voices of moderate scholars and



leaders. Moderate doesn't mean they are wrong or weak; it means they have been able to consider all the issues and are able to bridge different views.

We also learned of the need to educate boys. Yes, it is important to educate girls. But let us be reminded of the saying from one of our colleagues that we are only fighting half the battle when we raise 21st-century girls who end up marrying 18th-century boys. It is time to leap forward in educating young boys to respect women and girls so that women are not burdened unequally in life. As fathers, we can and must support our girls and teach our boys as the Scriptures say.

I was pleased to hear about the need to mainstream women in leadership positions in a way that focuses on accountability. Women most often bring a renewed commitment to justice. Their predecessors, the men, have usually been the ones who stole resources or who have been involved in corruption. So how do we make sure new women leaders really are able to do the job better? We heard from Chief Zanzan Karwar that Liberia is on the move and evolving in traditional forms of leadership for women. This is an example for women around the world.

We heard a lot about the challenges—such as the lack of inclusivity, the inability to reach out to the media, and the inability to gain support to run effective political campaigns—that women face when they attempt to access leadership positions. We heard quite bluntly—and I'm glad our colleagues were blunt with us—that as an international partner, we need to support training and build capacity in these areas. We know that our job at The Carter Center is to listen and to be humble in the face of these great challenges.

In terms of strategies to prevent and eliminate violent extremism, it was wonderful to hear about the women who have been promoting peace in their societies, but it was frustrating to realize the extent to which the world has failed to pay attention to what these women are doing. Women must be visible,

heard, and respected and their accomplishments heralded. Yet far too often, journalists report only on the stories of war rather than the stories of peace. Peace is put on the back page in a human interest story. We are looking at developing a journalism program for war reporters who can find and report on women peacemakers.

Among us, there are scholars, including the chief imam, His Eminence Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, and Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niasse; activists; media practitioners; religious authorities; and others waging peace for women and girls. So looking forward, how can we use our various areas of expertise to work together? We must continue to ask ourselves this question and embrace opportunities to try innovative and collaborative community actions.

I want to thank each of you for your honesty and frankness. Moving forward, I hope that you never stop telling The Carter Center about how our partnership can benefit your work as well as what we are not doing right. We want to hear it from you in the spirit of openness and candor that characterizes Jimmy Carter as a president and in his post-presidency.

We hope this event encouraged networking and solidarity. So much has been discussed here, but now is the time for action.

**His Eminence Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu  
Sharubutu, National Chief Imam of Ghana**

The Carter Center program has been so successful, educative, and insightful enough to awaken the sleeping mind and enlighten the confused mind and heart on the religiously backed, legitimate rights of women, girls, and children and the elimination of violence against them.

We need such forums in our communities regularly. The West African region, in particular, needs such open discussions for fear of violent religious extremists distorting religious texts, disbanding secular education, and creating Western allies.

**Khalif Sheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ibrahim Niassé,  
Khalifa of the Tijjani Order**

I am impressed and satisfied with the religious leaders' commitment and efforts to thwart an ideology long rooted in the minds of men that they are superior over women. I believe that the world will soon witness flocks of men of Allah and traditional leaders who will be championing the course of women's leadership for the betterment of the day and world peace, if we continue this way (organizing such forums and conferences). I am grateful to The Carter Center for inviting me and making me one of the special hosts of the program.

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# Conclusion

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has asserted that universal love and equal dignity for all are at the heart of all major religions, and he has urged people of faith in every part of the world to reassert this essential truth through their words and with their deeds. In response, over 60 scholars, activists, religious leaders, donors, and members of the media came together in agreement that the oppression and abuse of women and girls are serious impediments to sustainable development and human security, contributing to the suffering of families and communities. Furthermore, participants recognized that these harmful acts are contrary to the teachings of the region's major faiths. Participants agreed to produce this declaration addressing the need for diverse segments of society to work together in honest and innovative ways to ensure respect for the human rights of women and girls. This declaration, therefore, emphasizes fundamental principles for and commitments to the social, economic, and political rights of women and girls, including the right to peace.

As the scourge of militarism, war, and violence challenges all nations and peoples, we call on religious, civic, and political leaders to examine underlying causes of conflict and to dedicate their efforts to promoting comprehensive and effective remedies. Women and girls face the most severe consequences of war and violence as well as conflict in the home. However, women demonstrate leadership that is far too frequently ignored, and their voices are not sufficiently heard in the corridors of power where policies that affect them are debated and decided.

## The Girl Child

As in many other regions of the world, the girl child in West Africa faces inequality in many life opportunities, ranging from less access to education to the threat of early or forced marriage. Over 700 million women alive today were married as children.<sup>3</sup> The

trends show that the practice may increase significantly in coming decades unless corrective steps are taken. The signatories of this declaration agree that the investment in girls must come not only from the government but from our own communities. It is the responsibility of all to ensure that girls are able to access and stay in school and live safe and healthy lives, vested with power and influence in our society.

## Women in Leadership

The exclusion of women from decision-making spaces allows for the perpetuation of injustice toward them and deprives society of their vital contributions to problem solving. Most nations have very few women in political office or in positions of religious authority. Since one in three women will face sexual violence in her lifetime,<sup>4</sup> her voice and involvement are crucial in making and enforcing laws necessary to end impunity for this fundamental violation of human rights. Empowering women to contribute on social, political, and economic matters helps families and communities do better. Our communities and families must create environments for women to participate actively in all realms of life, including the political, religious, business, and cultural.

## Gender, Faith, and Conflict

As global counterterrorism operations escalate, security policies focus on short-term, militaristic approaches. While military and police action are necessary at times to protect communities from violence and aggression, effective and sustainable solutions require long-term, community-based approaches built on dialogue, inclusivity, and respect for humanity. The signatories of this declaration

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

agree that decision making that is inclusive of women results in more effective security policies. Women are uniquely capable of engaging disputing parties in collaboration with key stakeholders, media, and religious leaders to confront issues that typically go unaddressed in peace talks, such as the rebuilding of schools, psychological rehabilitation, and food security. Women are well-placed to foster social peace and cohesion in a manner that can prevent, resolve, and help recover from conflict.

### Our Commitment

Community and religious leaders, currently mostly men, can act to help eliminate violence and discrimination against women and girls and ensure their inclusion in decision making.

To advance the above, we, the undersigned, wholeheartedly commit to:

1. The inalienable human rights of women and men.
2. Demonstrating this commitment with our own words and deeds in our homes, in our work, and in public.
3. Engaging and sensitizing our communities, religious and traditional leaders, scholars and researchers, the media, our governments, and our families on the rights of women and girls.
4. Encouraging and supporting the protection of women and girls in our communities against injustices perpetrated under the guise of faith, culture, or tradition.
5. Exerting every effort to prevent violent conflict and extremism through community-based dialogue that fully integrates women as vital actors.
6. Encouraging and supporting women's participation in decision making in all areas of life.
7. Encouraging and supporting girls' equal and consistent access to a quality education.
8. Devoting significant attention to educating boys and young men about equality and inclusion.
9. Working to address issues that impact women and girls in a holistic manner.
10. Convening and participating in regular forums or other ongoing dialogue with diverse members of society to review achievements and new areas for cooperation in the common effort to protect and elevate women and girls.



Ronald Borden

Reading of the Accra Declaration by Ayisha Osori and Sheikh Diery Cisse

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## Appendix A

# Core Participant Biographies

**Abdel-Manan Abdel-Rahman, National Program Coordinator, Council of Muslim Organizations of Ghana**

Abdel-Manan Abdel-Rahman is the national program coordinator of the Council of Muslim Organizations of Ghana, an umbrella group for Muslim organizations affiliated with all sects in Ghana. He serves as the international deputy general secretary coordinator of the Network of African Islamic Organizations in Population and Development, a group founded by the United Nations Population Fund. Abdel-Rahman is also chief executive officer of the Center for Creative Leadership Africa, a consultancy, marketing, and publication firm and the author of two books on time management and productivity. He assists civil society organizations and corporations with branding and repositioning and is currently studying for his master's degree in global marketing. He hopes to pursue further studies in leadership and entrepreneurship in the future.

**Ayishetu Abdul-Kadiri, National Secretary, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Ghana**

Hajia Ayishetu Abdul-Kadiri is a scholar of religions focusing on women and Islam. She is national secretary of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Ghana and a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Abdul-Kadiri teaches at the Methodist University College in Accra and has previous teaching experience with the Islamic University College and University of Ghana. She received her master's of philosophy in religions from the University of Ghana in Legon in 2008. She was also a teaching assistant at the University of Ghana from 2007–2008. Abdul-Kadiri participated in an exchange program in the United States where she studied in the department of urban and environmental policy and planning at Tufts

University. She remains a staunch advocate for the secular education of Muslim girls.

**Habiba Muhammad Abdulkadir, Broadcast Journalist, Freedom Radio, Nigeria**

A political journalist, Habiba Muhammad Abdulkadir is a production assistant with Freedom Radio in Kaduna state, Nigeria. She is a presenter for the program "Kowani Gauta," a Hausa language political program produced by Freedom Radio, where she also works as a health reporter, Hausa language newscaster, and translator. Originally from Kano, she previously worked with Freedom Radio's branch in that state. Abdulkadir also leads "Gatan Mara Gata," another Hausa radio program that focuses on helping the needy, especially children.

**Hafsat Abiola-Costello, Founder, Kudirat Initiative for Democracy, Nigeria**

Hafsat Abiola-Costello is a Nigerian-born human and civil rights activist. She founded Kudirat Initiative for Democracy, which works to strengthen civil society and promote democracy in Nigeria. She is also the founder of China–Africa Bridge and China Africa Forum, two organizations that promote cross-collaboration to foster mutual growth in both economies. Abiola continues to engage in social entrepreneurial work and has been honored for her efforts numerous times; namely, she was recognized as a Global Leader of Tomorrow at the World Economic Forum in 2000 and elected to be a fellow with Ashoka, an organization, network, and community that seeks out young social entrepreneurs to foster and support their work.

**Ibrahim Khalil Abubakar, Chairman, Council of Ulema, Kano State, Nigeria**

Sheikh Ibrahim Khalil Abubakar is an Islamic scholar who has spent most of his adult life teaching and promoting the Islamic way of life. He holds a master's degree in Islamic studies. He has always

preached a moderate and simple approach to religion and has tried to move people away from fanaticism. He is regularly featured on the radio in Kano state, hosting programs ranging from religion to current affairs programs. He is currently the chairman of the Council of Ulema in Kano state and serves as the special adviser on special duties to the executive governor of Kano state.

**Naa Koteitsoo Afrasomanso I, Queen Mother, Ghana**

Naa Koteitsoo Afrasomanso I, Queen Mother of Koteiman under the Nikoi Olai Stool of Asere in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, is the national representative of the Queen Mothers in Ghana, who play a central role in traditional community governance. The role of the queen mothers is to ensure the welfare of everyone in the community, particularly women and children, and they are widely recognized and respected to this day. Naa Afrasomanso I has achieved postsecondary certificates in conflict resolution and psychology, counseling and home-based care training, community mobilization and engagement skills, reproductive health, and comprehensive abortion care education for women and elders. A successful businesswoman, she has applied these skills in her leadership and public education efforts by convening programs in schools and at community events. Naa Afrasomanso I is the queen mothers' representative to the Public Interest and Accountability Committee and a member of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee, part of Ghana's national architecture for peace.

**Aisha Akanbi, Member, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria**

As a volunteer member of the Committee on Election Activities, Good Governance, Human Rights, and Gender Issues within the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, Aisha Akanbi is dedicated to the betterment of the lives of women and girls in her community. She works to promote free and credible elections in Nigeria. Before her retirement, Akanbi was an associate professor

of business education at the Federal College of Education in Kano, Nigeria. She holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Ibadan.

**Fatima Akilu, Expert in Countering Violent Extremism**

Fatima Akilu is a university educator and an advocate for marginalized groups, working in psychology and health for more than two decades. She has had extensive experience working with forensic dually diagnosed mentally retarded women, violent offenders, and sex offenders. Previously head of communication for the senior special assistant to the president on the Millennium Development Goals, she is currently chairman of the editorial board of Leadership newspapers. Akilu was, until recently, the director of the Behavioral Analysis and Strategic Communication unit that has developed a multipronged approach to countering violent extremism that consists of prison deradicalization, counterradicalization geared at building community resilience, and a strategic communication effort, including public diplomacy and messaging. Nigeria's countering violent terrorism program, which she has designed, also includes policy changes in the areas of education and mental health through the provision of posttraumatic stress disorder counseling. Akilu is also a children's writer and hosts a weekly radio show, Radio Psych, which discusses social and psychological issues. She holds a bachelor's degree in English, a master's in research methods in psychology, and Ph.D. in psychology from Reading University.

**Rashidat Adenike Akinwande, Coordinator, Market Da'wah in Oyo, Nigeria**

Rashidat Adenike Akinwande holds a master's degree in language education. She is a teacher with the Oyo State Teaching Commission, giving instruction in Islamic studies and the English language in secondary schools. She currently serves as the coordinator of market *da'wah* or Islamic outreach. Her experience includes serving as the zonal amirah from 2009–2015 and mosque coordinator at Saint Andrew's College of Education in Oyo. She continues to study Islam

whenever possible through intensive courses. Akinwande is passionate about education, positive social change, and peace building.

**Mohammed Baba Alhassan, Director,  
Ghana–Lebanon Islamic High School**

Alhaji M.B. Alhassan is the director of Ghana–Lebanon Islamic High School in Accra, Ghana, and a chief examiner for the West African Examination Council. He is a writer with a number of publications to his credit, including the Ghana Association of Science Teachers and general agricultural book for senior high school students. Alhassan is an educationist and has been at the forefront of the educational system of Ghana since 1979. He has taught in schools in Ghana and Nigeria, including Okat Secondary School in Eket, Nigeria. Alhassan serves on the board of numerous community organizations, including the Ghana Muslim Academy. He has served for over five years as the general secretary of the Coalition of Muslim Organizations in Ghana. He also serves as a trainer in family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases with Muslim Family Counseling Services. He holds a diploma in education and a bachelor's in agriculture from Cape Coast University, and an MBA in human resources from the University of Ghana. He received his training in guidance and counseling from the Center for Development and Population Activities in Washington, D.C.

**Muhammed Awal Al Hassan, Deputy  
Spokesman, National Chief Imam of Ghana**

Sheikh Imam Muhammed Awal Al Hassan is the deputy spokesman for the national chief imam and Grand Mufti of Ghana, Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu.

**Fatima Aliyu, Advocacy Component Manager,  
ENABLE2, Nigeria**

Fatima Aliyu currently manages the Department for International Development (DfiD)–funded project, ENABLE2, a program to foster the business environment, in six Nigerian states where she works

to improve the quality of public–private dialogue. Previously, she served as the special adviser to the governor of Kano state for child welfare, designing health and education programs for children and implementing a micro-credit scheme for mothers, among other responsibilities. Aliyu has worked on youth health programs in northern Nigeria with both the United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations Development Program. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Buckingham in England and a master's in international relations from the University of Leeds, England. A strong advocate of women's participation in governance and the political sphere, Aliyu has participated in numerous radio programs on gender and social inclusion as well as conflict resolution. As a Muslim woman, she has worked to advance the role of Muslim women in society and promote their vital contributions to the social and economic development of the community in line with Islamic teachings.

**Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, Senior Lecturer,  
Department for the Study of Religions,  
University of Ghana**

Rose Mary Amenga-Etego is currently a senior lecturer in religious studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. Prior to her appointment, she worked as a gender and development coordinator for the Navrongo–Bolgatanga Diocese of the Catholic Church in Ghana. This experience sharpened her research interest in African indigenous religions, gender, and religious pluralism, resulting in the writing of “Mending the Broken Pieces: Indigenous Religion and Sustainable Rural Development in Northern Ghana” and co-editing of the volume “Religion and Gender-Based Violence: West African Experience,” among other publications. It also opened her to engagement with the discourses of sustainable rural development. Amenga-Etego obtained her doctorate from the school of divinity at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom after completing her bachelor's and master's degrees

in religions at the University of Ghana. She is the current Ghana representative of the African Association for the Study of Religions and a member and former executive of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Amenga-Etego's current projects include research on intersections between religion, identity, and traditional rites with gender-based violence and authoring "*Akoko bere so nim adekyee: Women's Interpretation of Indigenous Oral Text*" in the forthcoming book, "Unravelling and Reweaving Sacred Canon in Africana Womanhood," which she is also co-editing.

**Chinedum (ChiChi) Aniagolu-Okoye, Country Director, Girl Effect Nigeria**

A sociologist with over 20 years of experience in development, Dr. ChiChi Aniagolu-Okoye is presently the Nigeria country director of Girl Effect, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the situation of girls. Prior to her current position, Aniagolu-Okoye served as Nigeria's country director for Oxfam; director for the Canadian International Development Agency Program Support Unit; deputy program director for the Support to Reforming Institutions Program; and representative for West Africa with Ashoka, which supports social entrepreneurs with innovative ideas with the potential to transform the social sector. Before returning to Nigeria, she was a lecturer at the University of Limerick in Ireland, teaching undergraduate and post-graduate students of Women's Studies and Sociology of Development. Prior to Limerick, she was a lecturer in the University College Cork and a researcher at the Center for European Social Research in Cork. Aniagolu-Okoye has extensive consulting experience with agencies such as the European Union; the United Nations Population Fund; International Pregnancy Advisory Services; and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and has produced education materials on gender and HIV/AIDS. She sits on the board of the Sister Guardian Initiative, a community-based response to violence against women. Aniagolu-Okoye holds a Ph.D. from the University College in Cork, Ireland.

**Samuel Aruwan, Special Assistant for Media and Publicity, Governor of Kaduna State**

Samuel Aruwan is a journalist who previously covered Nigeria's ethno-religious and political crises for Leadership Newspapers Group and later Blueprint Newspapers Limited. In 2014, he was appointed spokesman for the political campaign of then-candidate El-Rufai and, following victory, was appointed spokesman for the new governor and also for Kaduna state government. Aruwan's experience in journalism spans more than a decade, throughout which he has advocated for human rights.

**Asmau Ayub, Project Coordinator and Peer Educator Trainer, Rayuwa Foundation**

Asmau Ayub has worked for over four years as a school counselor, providing guidance and counseling services to primary, junior high, and senior high school students of the Ghana-Lebanon Islamic High School (GLISS) in Accra, Ghana. She provides academic, career, and college opportunities as well as emotional and psycho-social adjustment skills. Her special interest in training and mentoring young girls led her to establish the Peer Counselors club and the Girls in Science club in the senior and junior high departments of GLISS, respectively. Ayub is an advocate for girls and child rights and has volunteered in different organizations, including the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit, a division of the Ghana Police, as a counselor assistant. She is currently the executive director and project coordinator for Rayuwa Foundation, a community nongovernmental organization that works to improve the well-being of communities, especially the girl child, through the provision of psycho-social services, training, and mentorship. Ayub holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Ghana and a master's in guidance and counseling psychology from the Methodist University College-Ghana.

**Morufu Onike Abdul Azeez, Deputy Chief Imam, Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih Society, Nigeria**

Imam Morufu Onike was born into a renowned imamship lineage, Akeugberu and Ajokidero, in Oyo,

Nigeria. He received his early Qur'anic and Islamic education under the tutelage of Sheikh Abdul-Hameed Onike for nearly 15 years at the School of Arabic and Islamic Moral Training. He later became the imam of Government Technical College in Osun state and an active member of the Muslim Students' Society at the University of Benin in Edo state. For the past 10 years, Imam Azeez has studied under the former grand *qadi* of Niger state, Sheikh Ahmad Lemu, and has attended various courses and workshops on *da'wah*, dialogue, Islam, and personal development at the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria and Islamic Education Trust. Imam Azeez considers his passion for learning and research on Islamic contemporary issues to be a continuous journey and part of his responsibility as the current deputy chief missioner of the Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih society of Nigeria and as the coordinator of its Qur'anic and Arabic institute. An engineer by training with over 20 years of professional experience, he holds a master's degree in engineering management and is currently pursuing a second master's in industrial engineering at the University of Benin in Benin City, Edo state, and a postgraduate diploma in Islamic banking and finance from the Institute of Islamic Banking and Insurance in the United Kingdom.

**Sadiat Onike Abdul Azeez, Coordinator,  
Da'wah Training Program, Lagos, Nigeria**

Sadiat Onike Abdul Azeez is a certified *da'wah* (religious outreach) trainer and a secondary school teacher in Lagos, Nigeria, where she teaches geography, civic education, and social studies. She has a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Lagos. Azeez has coordinated the *da'wah* training program and gives monthly lectures to the women of the Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih, an Islamic religious society based in Nigeria. She has experience training Muslims in Islam, *da'wah*, and dialogue at the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, among others. Azeez is actively involved in tele-*da'wah* and is passionate about imparting her knowledge of Islam to others.

**Muhammad Hussaini Bagnya, Host,  
IQRA, Ghana**

Sheikh Muhammad Hussaini Bagnya holds a B.A. in Islamic studies and Arabic and a master of governance and leadership from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, where his thesis focused on Islam and women's leadership. He hosts the IQRA program, a weekly Islamic talk show broadcast by the Ghanaian channel, TV3, which aims to inform and educate listeners of all religious and social backgrounds and has wide viewership among Muslims and Christians alike. In 2012 Bagnya served as a radio presenter for the Al-Fijiri Breakfast Show on Marhaba FM, discussing topics ranging from politics and development to human rights and religion, to name a few. Bagnya has worked as a liaison officer for the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services in Accra, where he has organized national conferences. He has also taught Islamic and Arabic classes at the Rayaan International School in Accra, Ghana. Bagnya served as imam for the Asoma Banda Mosque from 2009 to 2012, where he conducted sermons in Arabic and English, counseled congregants on Islamic doctrine, and conducted tutorials in Arabic. A true advocate for the rights of women who has spoken on several platforms in this regard, he currently works with the Madina Institute of Science and Technology as a public relations officer.

**Harriette Williams Bright, Acting Executive  
Director, Femmes Africa Solidarité**

Harriette Williams Bright is currently acting executive director and advocacy director at Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS). In that capacity, she is responsible for the overall management of FAS and for FAS advocacy work on women, peace, and security at the African Union, the United Nations Security Council, and the United Nations Human Rights Council. She works closely with African and international women's networks, governments, youth groups and international institutions to strengthen women's participation in peace processes in select countries in Africa,

as well as women's engagement in economic and political development. Among her extensive experience with advocacy initiatives, Bright is an organizing member of the Gender Is My Agenda campaign, a consortium of 55 leading African organizations working to advance gender equality at the African Union and in member states and is responsible for the implementation of the advocacy strategy of the campaign. Prior to joining FAS, Bright led in-country operations in Burundi for the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. Bright is Sierra Leonean and has worked with the government of Sierra Leone to design a national strategy for public sector reform and served as a consultant with the World Bank.

**Usman Bugaje, Convener, Arewa Research and Development Project**

Since 2011, Usman Bugaje, has served as convener of the Arewa Research and Development Project, following his tenure as secretary-general of Action Congress of Nigeria. A former parliamentarian and chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, he earlier served the government as a special adviser to the presidency and special envoy to the Sudan. He has previously held the positions of lecturer in Islamic studies at Ahmadu Bello University, director of the Islamic Trust of Nigeria, chief executive officer of Network for Justice—a human rights organization, and as a member of the G18 and G34 anti-military movements and the Transition Monitoring Group. Bugaje has a Ph.D. in Islamic and African intellectual history and an M.A. in African studies from the University of Khartoum, Sudan. He attended Harvard Kennedy School of Government for mid-career studies from 2001–2002 and has produced numerous publications, academic and otherwise.

**Cheikh Diery Cisse, General Secretary, African American Islamic Institute, Kaolack, Senegal**

In his capacity as general secretary to the United Nations accredited nonprofit organization, the African American Islamic Institute, and executive secretary to the late Sheikh Hassan Ali Cisse,

its founding chairman, Cisse has contributed to numerous initiatives on the role of Islam and Muslim leaders in advancing health, development, peace, and human rights. A member of the steering committee for the African Network of Muslim Organizations in Population and Development, he has contributed to events addressing female genital cutting or excision, breastfeeding, girls' education, maternal and infant mortality, drug abuse, child protection, and violence against women and children, among others. He also participated in a joint meeting of the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Congress with religious leaders on combating extremism and international terrorism in addition to numerous international peace conferences. Cisse studied in the faculty of law and economics at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar and was a teacher with the Ministry of Education for over a decade before assuming his post with AAIL in 1988. His Qur'anic studies were undertaken in Kaolack.

**Ella Musu Coleman, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Services, National Traditional Council of Liberia**

Ella Musu Coleman is assistant secretary-general for social services at the National Traditional Council of Liberia. Previously, she has served as a member of the Task Force for Free and Compulsory Primary Education in Liberia, encouraging young people, especially girls, to go to school. Coleman has also served as a community coordinator in West Point township for the Forum for African Women Educationalists, encouraging girls to go to school and monitoring students on the various campuses to ensure safety from sexual harassment. In addition, she works to educate women from traditional communities on their rights and responsibilities.

**Mouhamed Chérif Diop, Program Coordinator, Tostan, Senegal**

Sheikh Mouhamed Chérif Diop is an Islamic rights specialist and child protection program officer with Tostan. An expert in Qur'anic exegesis, human rights, and Islamic social development, he has

focused his efforts on children, beginning with access to education. Diop has contributed to developing Senegal's religious education system to ensure child rights are protected. He promotes awareness through Tostan's strategy for achieving positive change in social norms and community empowerment. Additionally, he hosts his own religious education program, *Le Message du Coran*, on Radio Sénégal Internationale, 92.5, answering questions from the public regarding religious law and human rights.

**Birima Fall**, *Training Delivery Manager, Tostan Training Center Somalia*

Birima Fall is the training delivery manager at Tostan Training Center. He is responsible for both training logistics and smooth delivery of course content. Through the training center, Tostan helps catalyze like-minded individuals and organizations. Before working with the Tostan Training Center, Fall was the national coordinator of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program in Somalia. Through engaging community members and leaders, culture, and religion, the program made considerable strides in beginning to reduce the practice of female genital cutting. Fall invested his career for the betterment of young women and girls in Somalia to reduce child marriage and increase women's rights. He works to bring women's voices to the table in order to increase social inclusivity for women and children.

**Sidiq Gimala III**, *Paramount Chief, Wangara Community of Greater Accra, Ghana*

Chief Sidiq Gimala III is the paramount chief of the Wangara community in Greater Accra and vice chairman of the National Council of Muslim Chiefs in Ghana. He has played a prominent role in the building of the national mosque underway at Kanda. Chief Gimala is a member of the national advisory board to the national chief imam of Ghana and a member of the dispute resolution committee of that body, which manages and resolves disputes in the Muslim community in Accra. A businessman and trader, he is a dressmaker by profession and fosters numerous apprentices and trainees through his work.

**Melinda Holmes**, *Project Adviser, Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls Initiative, The Carter Center*

Melinda Holmes is a consultant with The Carter Center, where she advises on the engagement of religious and traditional beliefs, actors, and communities in advancing peace and human rights, with a focus on women and girls. Holmes contributed to the design and development of the Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls initiative, launched in 2013 by the Center's Human Rights Program. Holmes holds a master's of arts in law and diplomacy from The Fletcher School at Tufts University, where she focused on the gender and religious dynamics of conflict and peace building, and a bachelor's degree in geography and anthropology from the University of Southern Maine. Her master's thesis used original research to examine the role of structural factors in Islamic leadership for positive peace in Ghana and explore how norms of religious leadership evolve. She has previously lived in Egypt, where she studied Arabic and served as a refugee legal caseworker, and in Switzerland where she was a youth educator.

**Esther Ibanga**, *Founding President, Women Without Walls Initiative, Nigeria*

Pastor Esther Ibanga is the senior pastor of Jos Christian Missions International and the president and founder of Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI), an organization established to address the persistent ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau state. Under her leadership, WOWWI has provided a platform for women across different ethnic and religious groups to activate their voices in the call for peace. Ibanga spearheaded an all-inclusive and nonviolent approach to conflict resolution and peace building through women. Women Without Walls Initiative is the first to have introduced and conducted community policing successfully in four volatile communities in Jos, Nigeria, and has successfully led interfaith collaborations. Ibanga has her master's in business administration and had previously worked with Central Bank of Nigeria for 16 years

before she retired to pursue her ministry full time in 2001. She is the recipient of various peace awards in recognition of her work with Women Without Walls Initiative, including the Niwano Peace Prize 2015 from Japan.

**Hauwa Ibrahim, Human Rights Lawyer, Aries Law Firm, Nigeria**

Hauwa Ibrahim is a human rights lawyer, having completed her bachelor's of law at Nigeria Law School in Lagos, her master's in international law and diplomacy from Jos University, and a Master of Laws degree from the Washington School of Law at American University. In her early career, Ibrahim worked with the Nigerian Ministry of Justice as principal state counsel for eight years. As founder and senior partner at Aries Law Firm, Ibrahim has defended over 150 Sharia-related cases, many involving women accused of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning and children sentenced to have limbs amputated. She is a recipient of the prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, awarded to her by the European Parliament in 2005, among other honors for this work. She is the author of "Practicing Shariah Law: Seven Strategies for Achieving Justice in Shariah Courts," which she wrote while a research associate and visiting lecturer at the Harvard Divinity School from 2010 to 2013, among numerous articles. A member of many international and Nigerian associations and boards, Ibrahim has served on several committees of inquiry, including in 2014 the presidential fact-finding committee on the kidnapped Chibok girls. She regularly consults with nongovernmental and multilateral organizations on issues of Islamic law, human rights, and gender and has testified before the U.S. Congress. Most recently, Ibrahim is a senior fellow working on issues of social justice and women's empowerment at the invitation of His Royal Highness, Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, a visiting professor at the University of Rome, and a member of the policy think tank, Buhari Support Organization in Nigeria.

**Mustapha Ibrahim, Chairman, Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services, Ghana**

Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim is the chairman of the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services, an organization he founded that builds schools, runs an orphan program, and offers a Sharia-compliant microfinance program for women entrepreneurs. He is also the chairman of the executive council of the Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu Education Trust Fund, which is committed to supporting the education of disadvantaged Muslim youth. A prominent opinion leader and role model, Sheikh Mustapha is a key member of the advisory board to the national chief imam of Ghana. His religious education was undertaken in Ghana. A widely published author in English, Arabic, and Hausa languages on subjects such as some personalities in the Holy Qur'an, history of Qur'an, Zakat, and inheritance as well as women's rights within the Holy Qur'an. Mustapha has represented many international charitable foundations such as the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent, Kuwait International Charitable Organization, Raf of Qatar, among others, and also has worked in Nigeria, Togo, Senegal, Liberia, and Benin.

**Nakoa Nazareth Ansah Jameson, President, Prophets of Spiritual Churches Council, Ghana**

Nakoa Nazareth Ansah Jameson is president of the Prophets of Spiritual Churches Council. The spiritual leader and founder of Israel King of Jews Church, which was founded in 1999 and now has three branches in Ghana and one in Italy, totaling over 2,000 members. Jameson is a disciple of Pastor Mensah "Osofo Kye," Bishop Osei Bonsu, and Prophet Odiyifo Asare of the Lord is My Shepherd Church in Kumasi, Ghana, where he was born and raised. Nakoa became a spiritual leader during travel in Europe, after which he returned to Ghana to enter into business.

**Mamensie Fomba Kabba, Founder, Mamensie Kabba Foundation for Equal Justice, Liberia**

After graduating from secondary school in 2012, Mamensie Fomba Kabba became deeply invested in advocating for the rights of people and for a better Liberia. She had struggled to receive support to pursue her studies throughout her teenage years. Her father maintained the customary belief that a female's purpose was to wed and bear children rather than obtain an education. Kabba went after her education despite his resistance, but in 2003 the civil war in Liberia erupted and put her schooling on hold. She was not able to return until 2007, when she continued to face monetary and gender-based challenges. With diligence and dedication, Kabba prevailed and is now a member of the renowned intellectual forum in Liberia, the Center for the Exchange of Intellectual Opinions. Kabba has also continued her advocacy for women by petitioning for the intervention of the U.S. government into the alleged trafficking of Liberian girls to Lebanon as well as demanding the Liberian government bring justice to the victims of sexual abuse. She is currently working toward launching her foundation, the Mamensie Kabba Foundation for Equal Justice.

**Fatma Zohra Karadja, President, Association Nationale de Soutien aux Enfants en Difficulté en Institution**

Since 1974, Fatma Zohra Karadja has directed a welcome center for children separated from their families, which facilitates reunification or adoption, mediation of family disputes, and support to single mothers facing rejection from and stigmatization by their communities. In her capacity as the president of the Association Nationale de Soutien aux Enfants en Difficulté en Institution (ANSEDI), Karadja has created a care unit that provides basic necessities and psychological treatment to victims of violence, focusing on women, especially single mothers, by working to prepare them for their parental role. ANSEDI also facilitates training sessions for women from opposing factions to come together

for sensitization and dialogue on human rights. Karadja studied clinical and social psychology at the Social Sciences Institute of Algiers University and remains involved in academic and scholarly work as a professor of psychology, social science researcher, an international consultant on psychology for conflict resolution, and an elections observer. She has served as president of the National Commission on Governance for the African Peer Review Mechanism in Algeria and member of the High Committee of Audit for the African Union. Karadja is also a member of the African Women Committee for Peace and Development and is currently the vice president for the African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council.

**Zanzan Karwar, Chairman, National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders, Liberia**

Chief Zanzan Karwar is chairman of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders, an independent group within the Liberian National Legislature created in 2012 that represents the traditional authority of Liberia. The council's function is to help preserve positive aspects of Liberia's traditional culture, assist the government in achieving sustained peace and reconciliation, and provide independent advice on national issues. Karwar worked to stem the Ebola crisis in Liberia through merging public health and traditional cultural practices. The Carter Center has partnered with the National Traditional Council at national and local levels for the past four years in a dialogue on issues related to custom and the rule of law, including women's rights and traditional practices, and has supported the council at national and local levels to resolve disputes and improve local governance.

**Abdul Aziz Kebe, Director, Center for Research on Islam, Society, and Movements, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal**

Dr. Abdul Aziz Kebe leads the Center for Research on Islam, Society, and Movements at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal. He received his doctoral degree from the same institution in the

study of people and society with a specialization in law and Islamic civilization and previously served as the head of the Department of Arabic there. During his master's studies, Kebe focused on human rights, citizenship, and humanitarian law at the Institute for Human and Peoples' Rights. In addition to serving as a technical adviser on religious affairs to the prime minister of Senegal, he has contributed to numerous international studies and conferences convened by multilateral organizations, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Children's Fund, to which he contributed expertise on gender and human rights in Islam. Kebe is an alumnus of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program and has participated in numerous international research groups and initiatives.

**Muhammad Nurudeen Lemu, Director of Research and Training, Da'wah Institute of Nigeria**

Muhammad Nurudeen Lemu is director of research and training at the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria and the assistant general secretary of Islamic Education Trust in Minna. He is also director of several other organizations, including Lotus Capital (Halal Investments) Limited, Prostart Consultants Limited, the Development Initiative of West Africa, the Inter-Faith Activity and Partners for Peace, and a member of various committees with Jama'tu Nasril Islam and the Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria. He was one of those nominated by the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to represent Nigerian Muslim leaders at the last National Conference (CONFAB 2014). Lemu develops contents and conducts train-the-trainer courses in understanding the principles and objectives of Islamic jurisprudence, enhancing interfaith dialogue and engagement, intrafaith cooperation, clarifying misconceptions about Islam, and countering various forms of religious extremism. He has given talks and facilitated training programs in more than 20 countries on all continents, on topics related to Islam, comparative religion and interfaith understanding, environment and ecology,

resource management, agriculture, social and gender issues, personal development, and leadership. He has also been a frequent guest speaker on radio and TV programs, both domestically and abroad, and has moderated a number of television programs. He holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria, a master's of science in resource management from Edinburgh University in the United Kingdom, and is a fellow of the Africa Leadership Initiative of West Africa and of the Aspen Leadership Institute.

**Shefiu Abdulkareem Majemu, Founder and Co-Executive Director, Strength in Diversity Development Center**

Imam Shefiu Abdulkareem Majemu is a religious leader, peace worker, and communication expert. He is the founder and co-executive director of the Strength in Diversity Development Center in Lagos, Nigeria. He is also the joint zonal coordinator for the southwest zone for the Interfaith Mediation Centre and the amir and chief imam of The Islamic Platform Society of Nigeria. Majemu has worked on various peace and interfaith projects on religious literacy, understanding, countering violent extremism, and interfaith dialogue. He is an alumnus of the United States International Visitor Leadership Program on Religious Freedom and Interfaith Dialogue and is currently working on his Ph.D. thesis on media and the effective management of religious conflict in Nigeria at the Pan Atlantic University, Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria.

**Bolanle Makanju, Founder, Scarlet2Snow, Nigeria**

Bolanle Makanju founded her own ministry, Scarlet2Snow, a faith-based organization with the primary objective of reaching and rescuing victims of human trafficking in Nigeria. The organization runs a safe house for victims wishing to escape prostitution and provides ministry and resources to help them rebuild their lives. Most of the women and girls served by Scarlet2Snow come from rural areas and have been trafficked to the city of Lagos. As a

survivor of domestic abuse, Makanju also advocates for faith leaders to speak out against gender-based violence.

**Arthur Martins-Aginam**, *Executive Director, Kukah Center for Faith, Leadership and Public Policy Research*

Arthur Martins-Aginam is the executive director of the Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah Center for Faith, Leadership, and Public Policy Research, a think tank dedicated to building a safe, just, and democratic society in Nigeria and the broader continent of Africa, where citizens can live in true freedom unencumbered by any structures of exclusion on the basis of ethnic, religious, social, economic, or gender differences. A communications scholar who previously lectured at Simon Fraser University Canada, his interdisciplinary research interests cut across media and conflict, global communication, international development, civil society, and democratization (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa) and social movements. Martins-Aginam contributed a chapter, *Neoliberalism, Nongovernmental Organizations, and Power in Sub-Saharan Africa*, to the volume “Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy” and *Media in Globalizing Africa: What Prospects for Democratic Public Communication?* in “Global Media: One World, Many Struggles.”

**Penda Mbow**, *Associate Professor, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal*

Penda Mbow is an associate professor of history at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, where she has published widely on African political and social issues, often focusing on the role of Islam in Africa. She previously served as Senegal’s minister of culture and as cultural adviser to the Senegalese Department of Ethnography and Historical Heritage. Mbow has received numerous academic awards and recently received the Jean Paul II Peace Prize from Boston University to honor her considerable work to advance peace building and conflict resolution. In recognition of her achievements as a scholar, thinker, and political activist, she was named Chevalier de la

Légion d’Honneur Francaise (Knight of the French Legion of Honor) in 2003 and Commandeur de l’Ordre National du Mérite in 1999. Among her many areas of expertise are African intellectual history and Islamic gender studies.

**Mamah Gado Mohammed**, *Chairman, Advisory Board to the National Chief Imam of Ghana*

Alhaji Mamah Gado Mohammed graduated with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Ghana and proceeded to obtain his master’s degree in marketing from Columbia University in New York. He worked at the Cocoa Marketing Company of Ghana for over 30 years, rising from the position of clerk to become the managing director of the company, a position he held for 11 years. Now retired, he currently serves as the chairman of the national chief imam of Ghana’s advisory board, which is the highest decision-making body in the Muslim community in Ghana. As the official spokesman of the national chief imam of Ghana for over 13 years, Mohammed regularly delivers welcome addresses at the largest annual Islamic programs such as Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha. He is also the vice chairman of the national chief imam’s educational trust fund and a member of the technical committee advising the ongoing construction of the national mosque at Kanda. A popular opinion leader within the Ghanaian Muslim community, Mohammed is a gender-equality advocate and a champion of the need for Muslims to embrace secular education to the fullest to empower the community and overcome poverty and unemployment.

**Aminah Muhammad**, *Founder, Nurturing Fitrah Foundation, Nigeria*

Hajia Aminah Muhammad is a broadcaster with three decades of experience at the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the largest television network in Africa. She has designed and anchored several leading programs in her capacity as head of the programs department of the network’s 24-hour news station, NTA Lagos, Channel 10. Notable among these is the award-winning program, “Today’s Baby,” aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality in

Nigeria. In addition, Muhammad has worked with United Nations' organizations to advance health goals through the media, including an annual project during International Breastfeeding Week, hosting nursing mothers on her programs to raise awareness of exclusive breastfeeding in cooperation with UNICEF. She is also the designer and anchor of "Al-Muslimat," a television talk show for Muslim women. To expand the impact of her work on maternal and child health, Muhammad founded the Nurturing Fitrah Association, through which she conducts seminars on children's and women's issues in Nigeria and internationally. She studied at the University of Ibadan and conducted postgraduate work in mass communications at Leicester University in the United Kingdom. Previously, she has served as the president of the Movement for Islamic Culture and Awareness, among other positions. Muhammad is a role model and mentor for women and youth in her society.

**Amina Niandou, Secretary-General, Association of African Professional Communication in Niger**

Amina Niandou is a journalist by training and an activist working for the promotion of human rights and women's rights. She is a former member of the National Observatory of Communication of Niger—current Superior Council of Communication—under the collective of women's organizations in Niger. She is also secretary-general of the Niger section of the Association of African Professional Communication, an organization of female media professionals from 17 Francophone African countries. Niandou is also the publishing director of the magazine *Women and Governance*, which addresses themes such as gender equality and women's empowerment. She initiated the Charter for Improving the Image of Women in the Media in Niger, the main objective being the engagement of key stakeholders in the country to develop a media culture that advances equality between women and men and respect for the dignity of women. Niandou previously worked at the Office of Radio and Television of Niger and as the representative coordinator of the Panos Institute of West Africa, a regional

civil society organization with the mission to build communication spaces for change and social justice.

**Babacar Niang, National Secretary, Annadjah for the Education of Girls, Senegal**

A journalist by training, Babacar Niang is the author of several books and articles in Arabic and French. The son of Senegalese writer and religious guide Seyda Roqaya Ibrahim Niass, he is a specialist in public relations. Niang currently serves as the national secretary of Annadjah for the Education of Girls, a movement founded by his mother in Kaolack, Senegal. He is the deputy head of the media group Almadina and director of Mediacom, a communications agency based in Dakar. Niang works to link global development with effective policies and religious freedom.

**Afiyatou Usman Niass, Opinion Leader, Tijaniya Sufi Order**

A widely respected opinion leader within the Tijani Muslim community in Senegal and Ghana, Sayyada Afiyatou Usman Niass is wife of the Khalifah Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani Niass of the Tijaniya Sufi Order and an adviser to him. Since 2009, Sayyada Afiyatou has worked to address and advise Muslim women on the issue of polygamous marriage. The daughter of the national chief imam of Ghana, she was raised in the home of her grandfather who was also then a national imam, giving her vast experience and insight on the role and responsibilities of a prominent religious leader's household. In memory of her late son, Sheikh Omar Ahmed Tijjani Niass, who was devoted to advancing the causes of human rights and peace, she founded a center for orphans in Accra and is committed to continuing the work on behalf of women and girls that he felt was so important.

**Ahmad Tijjani Ibrahim Niass, Khalifah, Tijaniya Sufi Order**

Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani Ibrahim Niass is the eldest living grandson of Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani, the founder of the Tariqa Tijaniyya (Tijaniya Sufi Order). As the khalifah, he is the leading authority for the political and religious affairs of the estimated 100 million

Tijjani Muslims throughout West Africa and the diaspora worldwide. Sheikh Niass founded a charity organization in Senegal in the late 1980s, establishing farms, which employ primarily women, and dedicating the proceeds to support the vulnerable in Daaru village and the religious community, including a school and accommodation for the teachers. Under his leadership, the Faidatu Tijjaniya Ibrahimiyya has expanded guest housing capacity and reconstructed several sites important to the community, including the residence and mosque of Sheikh Ibrahim in Dakar, Alhaji Abdullahi Niass Institute of Quranic and Islamic Studies, and the noble house of Sheikh Ibrahim Niass in Madina Baye, Kaolack. He has also personally financed the establishment of a specialized school for the teaching and memorization of the Holy Qur'an in Madina Baye.

**Seyda Roqaya Ibrahim Niasse, *Islamic Scholar and Author, Tijjaniya Sufi Order***

Seyda Roqaya Ibrahim Niasse is a prominent woman Islamic scholar from Senegal. She is the author of "Huquq Al Marati Al Islam" (Rights of Women in Islam), which was published locally in Senegal and is in preparation to be translated and republished abroad. Niass has been advocating for women's rights and greater inclusion for leadership within her community for over 50 years. Her commitment to the issue came from her personal experience growing up as a devoted female member of a prominent religious family. She is the sister of Khalifa Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani Niass.

**Ashionye Ogene, *West Africa Producer, Al Jazeera***

Ashionye Ogene is an international TV journalist and reporter. She has worked for major international broadcasters in the United Kingdom and across North America, Africa, and the Middle East. These include the BBC, Sky News, ITN, Al Jazeera English, The Times, and the U.K. Guardian. In 2011, Ogene moved to Nigeria to work as Al Jazeera's West Africa producer. She has traveled extensively across the region, covering conflict and other issues in countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire,

and Congo DRC. Ogene has reported extensively on the Boko Haram crisis in northern Nigeria. She has first-hand experience of the insurgency, having reported from all three emergency states, including Maiduguri in Borno state, the epicenter of Boko Haram violence. Ogene has interviewed Boko Haram victims, former Boko Haram members, the Nigerian government, military, and community and religious leaders brokering peace in the region. She currently resides in Abuja.

**Khuzaima Mohammed Osman, *Executive Secretary, Islamic Peace and Security Council***

Alhaji Khuzaima Mohammed Osman is executive secretary of the Islamic Peace and Security Council (IPASEC), general secretary to the Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu Education Trust Fund, and the personal assistant to the national chief imam of Ghana. IPASEC is working to sustain and maintain peace and security through collaboration with law enforcement and work within the Muslim community in Ghana. Osman conducted graduate studies at the London School of Accountancy and Management and the College of Central London, receiving several graduate diplomas in organizational management. He also graduated with honors with a diploma in Islamic studies and theology from the Answaru Deen Academy Ghana. From 2004 to 2010, Osman served as projects development manager for African Support Network U.K. He also teaches Islamic studies for youth in his community in the Arabic and Hausa languages.

**Ayisha Osori, *Nonexecutive Director, Nigerian Women's Trust Fund***

Ayisha Osori is a lawyer and consultant with over 13 years of experience in corporate and regulatory practice, change communications, and gender advocacy. She is the former executive director and current nonexecutive director of the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund, a nonprofit organization focused on increasing the quality and quantity of women in government. Osori kept a weekly column for five years, in *Thisday* and *Leadership*, where she covered social issues, security, good governance, and

politics, among other topics. Under Kachifo, she has published a series of children's textbooks on social studies and a children's reference book on Nigeria. Osori is a regular media commentator on radio and television and has been involved in numerous campaigns to improve social justice for women and girls and to improve governance in Nigeria. She is currently working on a book to contextualize women's political participation in Nigeria through her experience contesting the 2014 primaries for the House of Representatives.

**Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi, *Gender Specialist and Founder, Stand To End Rape Initiative, Nigeria***

Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi is a gender specialist, blogger, advocate against rape, and the executive director of the Stand To End Rape (STER) initiative. Under her leadership, at the 2014 Social Media Awards Africa, STER won the Best Use of Social Media by a nongovernmental organization in Africa. Osowobi has a master's degree in international relations, with a specialization in gender studies from Swansea University in the United Kingdom, and a B.A. in local government and development studies from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. She has previously worked for a number of international organizations, including the United Nations headquarters and Half the Sky movement, New York.

**Amos Olugbenga Oyedokun, *Lecturer and Researcher, Obafemi Awolowo University***

Amos Olugbenga Oyedokun is a Nigerian lecturer and social researcher currently working at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria. He had his tertiary educational training in demography, population studies, and social statistics and earned his Ph.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is a DAAD, Fogarty, and Tertiary Education Trust Fund scholar and has several fellowships to his credit, such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa fellowship, Sexuality Leadership Development fellowship, and Netherlands Organization for International Co-operation in Higher Education

fellowship, among others. He has attended workshops and conferences, both in Nigeria and abroad, and has published several journal articles. He is a member of a number of professional bodies, including the Population Association of Nigeria, Union of African Population Studies, International Union of Scientific Study of Population, and Population Association of America. Oyedokun has been a consultant for International Organization for Migration in Pretoria, South Africa, and has worked on various projects as a supervisor in Nigeria. He is interested in research relating to women, youth, and children.

**Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, *Director, Institute for Developing Nations, Emory University***

Sita Ranchod-Nilsson is director of Emory's Institute for Developing Nations (IDN). In 2006, IDN began as a collaboration between Emory University and The Carter Center. Since 2007, she has lead IDN's efforts to build a community of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who are committed to work together to fight global poverty. Before coming to Emory, Ranchod-Nilsson was director and associate professor of international studies at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. For the past 20 years, her research has focused on gender politics in sub-Saharan Africa, and she has published widely on the liberation struggle, nationalism, and state consolidation in Zimbabwe. She is co-editor of "Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?" and her work has appeared in *Politics and Gender*, *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, *African Studies Review*, and the *Journal of Women's History*. She received her Ph.D. in political science from Northwestern University, and she has held postdoctoral fellowships at Ohio State University and the University of Chicago.

**Jordan Ryan, *Vice President, Peace Programs, The Carter Center***

Jordan Ryan is vice president for peace programs at The Carter Center. He was named an assistant secretary-general for the United Nations in 2009, serving as the assistant administrator of the United Nations Development Program and the director of

the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. Ryan had a long and distinguished career with the United Nations, where he brought a wealth of development experience, including in post-crisis settings. He served as the deputy special representative of the secretary-general (Recovery and Governance) and the U.N. resident and humanitarian coordinator in Liberia. Earlier in his career he served with UNDP in Vietnam, China, and New York. Before joining the United Nations, Ryan worked as an international legal consultant in China and Saudi Arabia and as an attorney in the United States. Ryan has a master's in international affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, a J.D. from the National Law Center at The George Washington University, and a B.A. in anthropology from Yale University. He was a visiting fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2001.

**Karin Ryan, Senior Adviser for Human Rights, The Carter Center**

Karin Ryan joined the Carter Center's human rights initiatives in 1988. As senior project adviser, Ryan works with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter on a range of issues, including assisting their efforts on behalf of victims of human rights violations through personal interventions with heads of state. She has represented the Center in many international negotiations, including the International Criminal Court, the human rights of women, the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and most recently on the establishment of a U.N. Human Rights Council, and has worked closely with the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to organize expert consultations designed to strengthen the role of the OHCHR within the U.N. system. She has coordinated the Carter Center's Human Rights Defenders Policy Forum since 2003. Ryan earned bachelor's degrees in political science from Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., and in contemporary writing and production from Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mass.

**Bakary Sambe, Coordinator, Observatory on Religious Radicalism and Conflicts in Africa**

Bakary Sambe is an assistant professor in the Center for the Study of Religions at Gaston Berger University in Senegal, where he teaches in the department of civilizations, religions, arts, and communication and is the coordinator with the Observatory on Religious Radicalism and Conflicts in Africa. Sambe received his Ph.D. in political science and international relations, master's degree in Islamic studies, and bachelor's degree in Arab civilization and foreign literature from the University of Lyon in France. As a senior fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels and the associated research group for studies on the Mediterranean and the Middle East, he specializes in researching Islamic movements and ideologies, trans-national movements, and the process of radicalization in West Africa, comparing Islam's religious and traditional practices with modern democratic values and principles. Sambe published the first report on radicalization in Senegal, along with many books on his research regarding regional threats from extremism. He serves as an adviser to international organizations and governments, including France, Canada, the United States of America, the United Nations, and the European Union, on the threat of Islamic radicalization. He is the author of "Islam and Diplomacy" (2011) and "Boko Haram: From a Nigerian Problem to Regional Threat" (2015).

**Fatou Kiné Sambe, Secretary-General, Advisory Council Department of Mbour, Senegal**

As secretary-general of a new governance structure created from the recent administrative reformations in Senegal, Fatou Kiné Sambe works on strategy for the promotion of access to financing for women and supporting the emergence of female leadership within West Africa. A graduate of economic statistics and a specialist in finance with experience in the management and evaluation of developmental projects, Sambe has worked for various banks and financial institutions in France and has aided with the finance of enterprises and businesses.

**Sherrif Dankukar Samory, Programs Coordinator, African Support Network**

Sherrif Dankukar Samory is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in communications from the Islamic University College of Ghana. He works with the African Support Network as the programs coordinator and head of task forces. Samory has received training from a faith-based organization and traditional authorities. He has worked with youth in Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Mali to counter radicalization and address social grievances from an Islamic perspective.

**Janet D. Sarney-Kuma, Director of Capacity Development and Outreach, National Peace Council of Ghana**

Janet D. Sarney-Kuma works at the National Peace Council as director in charge of capacity development and outreach. She worked with the National Commission for Civic Education as deputy director at the department in charge of research and gender activities. She holds a degree in sociology and a master's degree in adult education. She has also undergone training in peace with the West African Peace Building Institute. She acknowledges the cultural and financial challenges most African women face. She has a keen interest in ensuring that women are able to achieve their visions for life.

**Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam and Grand Mufti of the Republic of Ghana**

The national chief imam of Ghana, Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, was selected by consensus as the Deputy National Imam of the Republic of Ghana in 1974. Dedicated to his work as an Islamic educator, he deferred the post until 1993 when he was appointed as the national chief imam of the Republic of Ghana. Sheikh Sharubutu has founded seven educational academies in the Greater Accra region and supported religious institutions in all of Ghana's 10 regions. He was integral to the establishment of numerous institutions and organizations to empower Muslim youth and address their humanitarian needs, personally sponsoring hundreds of children from disadvantaged and vulnerable Muslim communities. Sharubutu has been a vocal advocate

for peace, establishing positive peace promotion as a norm of religious leadership and education, shifting social norms toward the embrace of education for both boys and girls. He has encouraged the integration of Islamic knowledge and practice with secular education. The representative of Ghana's Muslim community in national affairs, he is a member of the National Peace Council and is regularly requested to offer ceremonial prayers during national events. Sharubutu continues to support programs that sensitize people to their social responsibilities and build bridges between Islam and other religions.

**Joyce Larko Steiner, Director of Human Rights and Gender, Christian Council of Ghana**

Joyce Larko Steiner is the program manager of the human rights and gender unit of the Christian Council of Ghana, based in Accra. Steiner has planned and implemented the distribution in Ghana of the Strategies for Hope film, "What Can I Do?" and spearheaded the unit's major HIV/AIDS project.

**Abdul Kadir Tahir, President, National Council of Muslim Chiefs, Ghana**

Chief Abdul Kadir Tahir is the president of the National Council of Muslim Chiefs, the collective body of over 900 Muslim chiefs nationwide. The paramount chief of the Dagomba community in the Greater Accra region, he is a key member of the national chief imam of Ghana's advisory board and a senior opinion leader in the Ghanaian Muslim community. Chief Tahir also serves as a signatory to the National Mosque Committee, permanent chairman of the national *mawlid* organized by the national chief imam of Ghana, and chairman of the Dagomba Youth for Development and Peace Association in Accra, among numerous other organizations. In addition to his role as a religious cleric and spiritual leader in the Tijaniyya community in Ghana, he is a successful businessman.

**Danielle Taylor, Human Rights Program Associate, The Carter Center**

In her capacity as human rights program associate, Danielle Taylor oversees the design and

implementation of initiatives that engage traditional and religious leaders in advancing the human rights of women and girls in West Africa. Danielle has spent the past decade researching the intersections of religion and gender with sexual and gender-based violence, effective community engagement, and access to quality education across sub-Saharan Africa. Before joining The Carter Center, Danielle worked with the International Rescue Committee to facilitate the immigration of East African refugees. Prior to that position, she served as a corps member with Teach for America. Danielle received her master's of international policy from the University of Georgia.

**Yusuf Tijjani, Broadcast Journalist, BBC Hausa**

Yusuf Tijjani is a broadcast journalist with BBC Hausa, covering a range of issues, including the Nigerian National Assembly. Since 2008, he has worked closely with the BBC Hausa team and other BBC agencies to ensure high-quality news content production and distribution. Prior to this position, he worked with Nagarta Radio Kaduna to produce programming in English and Hausa. Tijjani holds two postgraduate diplomas, from Kaduna State University in mass communications and from Kaduna Polytechnic in international relations and diplomacy.

**Abdul Karim Abass Umar, Deputy Imam, Cantonment Police Mosque, Ghana**

Imam Abdul Karim Abass Umar is currently studying for a master's of philosophy in the study of religions at the University of Ghana in Legon and a master's of philosophy in development communications at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. He is conducting ongoing research on strategies to advance Muslim

communities in Ghana, including poverty reduction and social change from an Islamic perspective, mosque administration and management in contemporary Ghana, and the mosque as an underutilized facility for community development. Umar is currently serving as the deputy imam for the Cantonment Police Mosque, a religious guide, and motivational speaker. In addition, he coordinates Islamic programs for the Metropolitan Entertainment Television channel (Metro TV) and acts as the corporate affairs manager in charge of the *hajj* for the Abusuaba Travel and Tours/Hajj Agency. Umar has attended several leadership trainings for Arabic tutors, imams, and spiritual guides.

**Doris Yaro, Chief Executive, Gabasawa Women and Children Empowerment Initiative, Nigeria**

Doris Yaro has, since 1999, committed her life to taking care of orphans and vulnerable children as well as indigent women in the country. The chief executive of Gabasawa Women and Children Empowerment Initiative, a charity organization, she started this as a passion following her graduation from school and experience in the National Youths Service in Kaduna state. Yaro carried out a national campaign for girl child education across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, which increased the school enrollment of girls in Nigeria. She has contributed to the work of multiple national and regional organizations, including presenting at the U.N. headquarters in New York on the impact of AIDS on girls' education. Since 2014, her organization has contributed to rehabilitation and reintegration of six of the Chibok girls who escaped Boko Haram, through counseling, medical therapy, and education.

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## Appendix B

# Khalif's Opening Remarks in Original French

### **Bismillahi Rahmani Rahimi**

#### **Louage à Allah le très haut.**

Que la paix et le salut soient sur le Prophète Muhammed qu'Allah a envoyé en gage de Sa miséricorde envers toutes Ses créatures, et pour une mission hautement humanitaire.

Mesdames et Messieurs les Représentants du Gouvernement de la République du Ghana,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Représentants du Président Jimmy Carter,

Eminence Cheikh Osman Sharubutu, national chief imam du Ghana,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Responsables du Carter Center,

Mesdames et Messieurs les participants au forum des Droits de l'Homme,

Mesdames et Messieurs, tous protocoles dûment respectés,

Assalamu aleikum war Rahmatullah.

Ma joie est immense de me trouver, ce jour, parmi vous pour participer à cette heureuse initiative du Carter Center en vue de célébrer la dignité de la petite fille et de la femme.

La pertinence du thème de nos travaux se mesure à l'aune du constat que, de nos jours encore, la femme soit la première victime des conflits, de l'ignorance, de violences de toutes sortes et de l'ostracisme qui l'éloigne des centres de décision. Ce constat nous impose à tous, mais plus particulièrement aux décideurs politiques, et aux chefs religieux et coutumiers de revisiter les causes profondes des inégalités fondées sur le genre afin d'asseoir les bases d'une action qui leur trouve une solution efficace et durable.

Ma contribution à vos travaux consistera à exposer mon interprétation des positions de l'Islam sur les thématiques proposées.

Je le ferai en rappelant la parole d'Allah dans le saint Coran, livre saint de l'Islam.

«O vous les humains, Je vous créés hommes et femmes et ai fait de vous des entités diversifiées afin que vous vous connaissiez les uns les autres».

Le Coran énonce encore, en sa sourate 33, verset 35, dix degrés de dévotion pour lesquels la femme égale l'homme.

Ces références dans le livre saint constituent une légitimation particulièrement forte du statut de la femme en tant qu'être humain égale de l'homme, non pas du point de vue biologique, mais sur le plan des responsabilités sociales et spirituelles.

Or, le premier pas vers l'exercice de ces responsabilités est bien l'accès à une éducation de qualité. Celle-ci, dans la religion musulmane, ne discrimine pas entre l'homme la femme.

Le prophète Mohammed lui-même, paix et salut sur lui, consacrait deux séances par semaine à l'éducation des femmes, et y officiait personnellement, comme nous l'enseigne un hadith rapporté par la chaine d'authentification suivante : Moussadid, Abi Ouwanata, Abdourrahmane Ibnil Asbahani, Abi Salih Zakwan, Abi Saidin.

Par ailleurs, il est constant dans la tradition prophétique, que de nombreuses femmes étaient détentrices de savoir. A titre d'exemple, Seyda Aïcha maitrisait 2210 hadiths, Seyda Oumou salama, 378 hadiths, Seyda Ramlatu bint Abi Sufian, 65 hadiths, Seyda Hafsatu bint Oumar, 60 hadiths, Seyda Maimouna bint Haz, 46 hadiths, et Seyda Zeinabu bint Jahsin, 11 hadiths.

Cette pratique d'éducation des jeunes filles et des femmes est encore largement répandue à travers le monde musulman. Ma communauté dans son ensemble octroie aux jeunes filles le même enseignement qu'à leurs frères. Ainsi, la grande majorité des filles de notre maître, Cheikh Ibrahim NIASS, sont dotées d'une grande érudition. Je n'en veux pour preuve que la présence, en ce forum, de ma sœur

Seyda Roqaya Ibrahim NIASS, diplômée dans toutes les disciplines des sciences religieuses, écrivain hors pair, et Directrice d'un Institut supérieur d'enseignement au profit des filles et des garçons.

Sur un autre plan, il me plait de rappeler que toutes les formes de violences envers les femmes sont fortement prohibées par l'Islam.

Le prophète Mohammed disait : « Quiconque honore la femme est honoré auprès d'Allah et quiconque brime la femme est blâmable auprès d'Allah ».

Dans son dernier prêche, il disait encore « Je vous recommande avec insistance de veiller aux droits des deux faibles, la femme et l'orphelin ».

Enfin, il me plait de rappeler que du point de vue des responsabilités de ce monde, l'Islam ne fait pas de discrimination reposant sur le genre. Ainsi, dans l'histoire de l'Islam, Seyda Khadija a occupé des responsabilités d'une importance capitale, en sa qualité de riche femme d'affaires employant à son service de nombreux hommes. En outre, elle a été la première croyante.

Aujourd'hui encore, de nombreuses femmes, à travers le monde musulman occupent des postes de leader, y compris de chefs d'Etat. Certes pour des raisons biologiques, elles n'ont pas accès aux fonctions d'imams et de Khalifs, mais cette limitation n'enlève en rien à l'importance du rôle qui est le leur dans la marche des affaires de la cité.

Pour illustrer ce propos, je citerai notre Maître, Cheikh Ibrahim NIASS qui disait à ses filles : « Compétissez avec les hommes pour la recherche de la foi, de la connaissance, de la compétence et de la droiture ». La conséquence de cette directive est

qu'aujourd'hui notre communauté compte un grand nombre de femmes à la tête d'instituts de formations et d'ONG. De par leur compétence et leur sérieux, elles participent grandement à la formation des élites de notre communauté et à l'action sociale au profit des masses.

Enfin, il importe de rappeler, à l'entame de vos travaux, que les mariages forcés ne trouvent pas leur fondement dans les textes de base de l'Islam.

Vous le voyez donc, Mesdames et Messieurs, si les injustices envers la femme que le présent forum se propose d'étudier ont pu trouver leur source dans une interprétation de la religion, un examen attentif démontre que leur justification au regard de textes de base de l'Islam n'est pas avérée.

Au contraire, l'examen de la situation de la femme dans les sociétés anté islamiques démontre que la religion musulmane a permis à la femme d'acquérir le statut d'être humain complémentaire de l'homme, même si une répartition de leurs tâches dans la société a pu être dictée, dans certains cas, par leurs différences biologiques.

La poétesse musulmane Hammada, chante de l'égalité essentielle de tous êtres, rappelait que ceux-ci sont faits d'une âme et d'un corps. Si du point de vue de leur enveloppe charnelle, l'homme et la femme sont différents, leur égalité est parfaite du point de vue de leur âmes.

Notre communauté étant bâtie sur les bases de l'éducation de l'âme, adhère parfaitement à cette vision de l'être humain.

Mesdames et Messieurs, je souhaite plein succès à vos travaux.



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