



AFRICA/NIGERIA - Christians and Muslims warn of the danger of sectarian war

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - The current activities of the dreaded Boko Haram sect could trigger a broad sectarian conflict in Nigeria, says a report prepared by a joint Christian-Muslim delegation that recently visited Nigeria. The 12-member joint delegation was led by World Council of Churches, WCC, Secretary General of the Olav Fyske Tveit and Jordanian Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, chairman of the board of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

"There is a possibility that the current tension and conflict might become subsumed by its religious dimension, especially along the geographical religious fault-lines" said the report that warns: blaming only the religious element as the cause of the conflict is likely to create "a self-fulfilling prediction."

A typical "geographical religious fault-line" is the so-called Nigeria's Middle Belt, which is part of Plateau State, the area of central Nigeria on the border between the south, mostly Christian, and the north, largely Muslim. The latest massacres have been recorded in Plateau State, caused by old rivalry between Fulani Muslim breeders and Birom Christian farmers (see Fides 09/07/2012). The Christian-Muslim delegation noted that "although the violence is the worst between members of the two faiths since the Bosnian war of 1992-95, the root causes go far beyond religion." "Corruption, mismanagement, land disputes and lack of aid for victims or punishment for troublemakers as fuel for tension, especially in the so-called Middle Belt". In this area one releases the tensions caused by the "wealth gap between the oil- producing states in the South and the resource-poor North" to which are added the latent conflict between local farmers and breeders.

To try to promote reconciliation in Nigeria, the WCC and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought finally decided to publish books for the distribution to local schools to explain the theological foundations of peace in both religions, and to launch a poster for interreligious cooperation. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 12/7/2012)