



## **PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTITUTION ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION FUELS DISHARMONY**

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### **MALTA -**

The partial implementation of the Nigerian Constitutions with regards to freedom of worship and choice of religion, by governments in the Northern part of the country has been described as a clog in the wheel of religious harmony and peaceful co-existence, among the adherents of the two major religions of Islam and Christianity, in the country.

The position was posited by the Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos while delivering a paper on: The Challenges of Religious Freedom in Nigeria, in Malta, recently. The Archbishop who was the special guest of the Church in Aid (CIN), a non Governmental Organization (NGO) based in the country, was speaking on the occasion of the launching of the 2018 Religious Freedom Reprt by the international Church agency.

While noting that the Constitution recognizes the freedom of Religion as a fundamental right of every Nigerian, irrespective of tribe and place of residence, the Archbishop declared: "Sadly, this constitutional provision is only partially translated into reality. Religious freedom in Nigeria is somehow allowed if one considers that the Muslims have Sharia Courts established up to the Court of Appeal with judges paid from government coffers; Muslims have enjoyed official government patronage for pilgrimages long before their Christian counterpart. While Christians observe Sunday as a work-free day and celebrate Easter and Christmas as public holidays, the Muslims too enjoy their Sallah as national public holidays whenever it occurs."

While stating that the principle of freedom of Religion in the country is well known and accepted; the Archbishop of Jos stated that” “the bone of contention is the difficulty to curb the excesses of some religious groups which infringe with impunity on the rights of others to freedom of worship and to peacefully live and work in any part of Nigeria. He added that there is religious pluralism is clear in the fact that Nigeria has diplomatic relations with the Vatican and equally is a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Archbishop Kaigama also spoke extensively on the influence of the fall-out from the Jihad of 1804; the inequality of sharing of political power and offices which favours the Muslim north than the Christian south ; alleged discrimination against Muslims in Southern Nigeria and efforts at promoting and accepting religious plurality and freedom.

The guest speaker however, concluded with optimism: “We must continue to work together transcending religious divides in collaboration with bodies such as Aid to the Church in Need and other organizations of goodwill to support persecuted persons, the millions of internally displaced persons and positively strengthening faith communities.”