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## **THE ROLE OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS IN MINIFYING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM FOR PEACE BUILDING AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Insurgency, religious extremism and other related religious crises become hydra-headed in Nigeria, which cause destruction of human lives and properties worth billions of naira, millions people were displaced and many school-going age are out of school. The Boko Haram terrorism is one of insecurity challenges in Northern Nigeria, which has negative impact on Nigerian education seriously and forced many children to abandoned schools in an already ill-educated region. The wrong teachings and misinterpretations of Islam by some Muslims fuel the spread of extremist ideologies and emergence of extremist groups. A multi-religious country like Nigeria to realise its development in all human aspects there must be unity and religious tolerance. Many agreed that changing the ideologies of insurgents and religious extremism will require intellectual role. Muslim scholars can play a vital role in promoting social reform and peace co-existence. This paper discusses the importance of unity among Muslims and non-Muslims community. The paper also reviews the relationship among Muslims and non-Muslims during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W.). The consequences of religious extremism, terrorism, sectarians and*

*intolerance on education are examined. To minify religious intolerance and extremism the paper identifies the roles to be played by Muslim scholars. The paper concludes that to realise Nigerian educational goals and objectives and to ensure education for all Muslim should shun away from any religious crises and embrace unity and religious tolerance. Finally, the paper recommends among others that only pious and learned scholars should be allowed to preach, Muslim should be patient, tolerance in dealing with Muslims and non-Muslims. National and international organisations should cooperate in reconstruction and maintenance of schools in recovered affected areas from Boko haram insurgency.*

### **Keywords**

Boko Haram, Educational Development, Muslim scholars, Peace Buildings and Religious Tolerance

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## **1. Introduction**

The Islam is a religion of peace, which aimed at bringing man into peace here and hereafter. From this background one can understand that Islam is a religion of peace, which advocates for total human emancipation, peace, justice, unity, love, equity, tolerance, and patience. These have been attested in several verses of the Glorious Qur'an and *Sunnah*. At the same vein the religion of Islam condemned any acts of violence, injustice, hatred campaigns, disunity, bloodshed, and terrorist acts. The essence of message of Islam and Prophet (S.A.W.) are Allah's mercy upon mankind irrespective their races, tribes, region and religion as Allah affirmed in the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an:

"وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ"

*"We have sent you forth as nothing but mercy to people of the whole world."*

(Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 21:107).

The verse above indicates that the Prophetic mission is solely to provide guidance for mankind which had existed in ignorance bewilderment with many barbaric and inhuman acts such disintegration, tribalism, immoralities of pagans Arabs, infanticide, economics extortion, adultery and fornication, homosexual, polyandry, marrying step mothers or sisters etc. In view of the above Yassin & Dahalan (2012) pointed out that within such a relatively period of 23 years, a community which was known as uncivilised before had evolved and was in its peaks of glorious phase. By the 13<sup>th</sup> *Hijrah*, history has revealed a high human civilisation among Arabs.

The importance of unity and religious tolerance for peace coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria as well as for overall human development be it political, religious, economics, and social could not be over emphasised. To destroy an organisation or country doesn't require the use of strong weapons and long range missiles but to create disunity and uncertainty amongst its members/citizens. Disunity is tantamount to many religious, political, ethnic crises today that caused the destruction of human lives, properties worth of billions naira and displaced millions people in the world and Nigeria in particular.

Despite that, Islam attaches great emphasis on the unity of Muslims and non Muslims to some extent, the current reality and social instability as results of insurgency, religious extremism, sectarians, armed bandits, kidnapping, religious and tribal violence become hydra headed in Nigeria. To address such issues effectively, Muslims should reflect on the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), as a role model of every believing person particularly in uniting Muslim Ummah from different ethnic communities within a short time. Since Muslim scholars are identified as the heirs of the Prophets (A.S.) and his custom's legacy have a significant role to play in minifying religious extremism for peace building and educational development in Nigeria.

## 2. Importance of Unity among Muslim and Non-Muslim Communities

Unity is identified as the fundamental tool for overall human development especially in this critical time. The word unity comes from "unit" which means compressed, compact, solid, dense, associated, (mixed, joined) and into one, integrated, strong (tough, intact) and resilient (Yassin, and Dahalan, 2012). Conceptually, unity of an entity of society refers to the situation whereby ethnic groups, religious groups and people from different location live harmony (Yassin, and Dahalan, 2012). They also pointed out that, Islam attaches great importance on the unity of Muslim *Ummah* and taught Muslims to remain united and emphasised that Muslims should live as one family by helping each other. In this regard the Allah (S.W.A.) has said the following:

" وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ "

*"The believers, both men and women, are allies of one another. They enjoin good, forbid evil, establish Prayer, pay Zakah, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Surely*

*Allah will show mercy to them. Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.*” (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 9:71).

In addition to the above verse, Allah the Most High has enjoined believers to make settlement of any dispute among themselves, where Allah said in the Qur’an as follows:

"...إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ "

*“Surely the believers are none but brothers unto one another, so set things right between your brothers, and have fear of Allah that you may be shown mercy.”*

(Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q.49:10).

Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah forged and cemented the unity and brotherhood among Muslim communities since in the early days of Islam. One of the important efforts realised by the Prophet (S.A.W.) immediately after migration from Makkah to Madinah was the establishment of Muslims brotherhood between the Migrants and the Helpers (R.A.). Consequently, in the Prophet’s last sermon he emphasised on the importance of unity of Muslim Ummah and humanity as a single entity as such *“ every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not therefore, do injustice to yourselves”* (Elturk, 2017, p. 3). Simultaneously, the Prophet (S.A.W.) enjoined Muslims to Islamic brotherhood and unity among Muslims *Ummmah*, in one of such tradition, where he is reported to have said:

"عَنْ أَبِي حَمْزَةَ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ خَادِمِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: "لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ رَوَاهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ"

*“On the authority of Abu Hamzah Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) — the servant of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) — that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.”* (No. 13 Annawawi, in Sunnah.com nd).

According to this *hadith* Muslims are enjoined to treat their fellow Muslim with respect, kindness, justice, love and sympathy. In another similar *Hadith* the Prophet (S.A.W.) reiterated that:

"...وَكُونُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ إِخْوَانًا"

“...*O servants of Allah, be brothers...*” (Bukhari Muslim and Abu Dawood in Saleh, 2013, p. 2)

Islam is a complete perfect religion that demands the unity of mankind. Since the human being is the greatest creation, certainly Allah do not want to see humans destruct and destroy themselves (Yassin, and Dahalan, 2012). Allah has discouraged and warned us against creating disunity and divisions in Islam. Allah (S.W.A.) has strongly condemned disunity among Muslim Ummah and declared a worst punishment for creating disunity amongst Muslim as attested in the verse below:

"قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ مِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِكُمْ أَوْ يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيْعًا وَيُدَيِّقَ بَعْضَكُمْ بِأَسْ  
بَعْضٍ ۗ أَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ نُصَرِّفُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَفْقَهُونَ"

“Say: *It is He Who has the power to send forth chastisement upon you from above you, or from beneath your feet, or split you into hostile groups and make some of you taste each others' violence. Behold, how We set forth Our signs in diverse forms, so that maybe they will understand the Truth.*” (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 6:65).

According to the above verse *Ibn Aseer* in Hassan (2015) is the opinion that: here by word groups/parties (*Shiya'a*) means to propagate dissection in Ummah. Allah (S.W.A.) has commended his Prophet (S.A.W.) to remain detach from these ilk of people who create differences, where he said:

"إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيْعًا لَّسَتْ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا  
يَفْعَلُونَ"

“*Surely you have nothing to do with those who have made divisions in their religion and become factions. Their matter is with Allah and He will indeed tell them (in time) what they have been doing.*” (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 16:159)

Cooperation and cohesion amongst society has a significant impact in the actualisation of human development in all aspects of human endeavour. *"No society can develop beyond its unity, towards achieving its goals and objectives. Solely, unity, harmony, accord and solidarity among the members and make their society able to function justly and further reinforce it toward progress; and, vice versa, disunity, discord and antagonism"* (Yassin, & Dahalan, 2012, p. 5). They also asserted that, this lead to weakness of society and thereby collapsing of civilisation.

Thus the intellectual linked the present-day weakness of Islamic world with spread of disunity among Muslims Ummah, and in order to retain its previous glory, emphasised on urgent need for unity (Akhmetova, 2015). It is now becomes necessary for Muslim to claim their previous glory and face current challenges, they need to be united and shun away any obstacles that may lead to disunity of its Ummah and society in general.

### **3. Relationship among Muslims and Non-Muslims during the Time of the Prophet (S.A.W)**

Islam is a religion that professes fundamental human rights, kindness, trustworthy, justice equity in dealing with any person whether Muslim or Non-Muslim. He has shown and demonstrated a great concerned on human right and freedom of religion. The Prophet Muhammad is an exemplary model in dealing with non-Muslims, he is very kind to them, treated them with justice, respected the parents, relatives and neighbours rights and discouraged injustice whether on Muslim or non-Muslim (Gunduz, 2013). The Prophet (S.A.W.) affirmed the aforementioned as such:

*“He who torments non-Muslims torments the Messenger of Allah. Accordingly, he who torments the Messenger of Allah torments Allah.”* (Gunduz, 2013, p. 6).

Therefore, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims traced its origin from the Prophet’s relations with non- Muslims based on the morality; patience; constructiveness; respect for basic rights and freedom; invitation to Islam; ruling with justice; and guarding the cultural differences which will be discussed below:

#### **3.1.1 The Prophet Patience**

The Prophet (S.A.W.) was well known about his patience and endurance through his mission, in this regard it was suggested that *“the Prophet showed endless patience while conveying the message of Islam to the non-Muslims. He never tired of speaking to people and sharing with them the monotheistic belief which is the essence of the religion. He was always sincere in his relationships and he abstained from useless polemics or quarrels. The Prophet always treated people well; he used kind words and avoided rude and aggressive behavior.”* (Gunduz, 2013, p. 9).

### **3.1.2 The Prophet Constructiveness, Respect for Human Rights and Freedom of Religion**

One of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) excellent behaviour is that he had never forced people to accept or practice his religion in the course of his Islamic preaching to non-Muslims. He had never used or encourage any other person to coerced people to accept Islamic religion. This is in line with the principle of *Da'awah* in Islam where Allah said:

*“There is no compulsion in religion”*

(Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 2:256).

Indeed, the noble prophet of Islam, Muhammad SAW has shown an exemplary character in terms of how he leaves and treats people of different faith and creed. His relationship with people in the Madinah, such as the Jewish tribes and the Arab polytheists was cordial and non-hostile. It's on record that Muhammad SAW has not violate any mutual treaties signed with non-Muslims. This is evident in this respect to a popular agreement known as “Dastur al-Madinah” (The Medina Document), which was signed by the different groups living there in the early Madinan period (Gunduz, 2013, p. 11).

## **4. Contemporary Insecurity Issues in Nigeria and their Consequences**

Safety and security of life are very crucial issues in Nigeria today. Life has become very difficult in our country, as a result insurgency, armed bandits' activities, religious and ethnic violence, political crises, kidnapping, etc. in those days people feared for the security of their property from thieves and armed robbers. But today people fear for their lives from the contemporary insecurity issues that triggered unnecessary destruction of human lives, properties, economic and political instability in Nigeria. *“The number of violence crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically motivated killings and violence, ethnic clashes, arm banditry and others has increasingly become the regular signature that characterises life in Nigeria since 2009.”* (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012, p. 6).

The major insecurity challenges in Nigeria is insurgency activities in the North by the dreaded Islamic terrorist group called *jama'at Ahl as-sunnah Li al-Da'awah wal-Jahad* known as Boko Haram with aim of establishing Islamic *Shari'ah* in the region and neighbouring countries. The activities of Boko Haram have caused a lot of destruction on human lives, properties, education, economic and political stability. As a result thousands people were killed,

thousands houses and schools were destroyed and millions peoples were displaced. The activities Boko Haram and cow rustlers in other part in the North have forced many children of formal education to abandon school in an already ill-educated and devastating region (Abdullahi & Terhemba, 2014). More than 20,000 people have been killed and about more than two millions have caused to fled their homes as result of Boko Haram activities since when they launched an armed campaign in the year 2009 with aim of to create an Islamic state in northeast part of Nigeria and neighbouring countries (Aljazeera, 2017). In addition to that, it was reported that *“Boko Haram’s increasingly brutal assaults on schools, students, and teachers since 2009 in Borno, Yobe, and Kano states, between 2009 to 2015, Boko Haram’s attacks destroyed more than 910 schools and forced at least 1,500 more to close, at least 611 teachers have been deliberately killed and another 19,000 forced to flee.”* (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Furthermore, religious intolerance, extremism and sectarians are among the insecurity challenges in Nigeria, and this creates enmity and disunity among various Islamic sects, Muslim and non-Muslim communities to the extent of blasphemy and sometimes bloodshed and destruction of properties. Political and economic related assassination, kidnapping, armed bandits and extrajudicial killings by security men now become an epidemic in Nigeria ( Bakwai, & Sarkin-kebbi, 2015). Ethno religious violence communal and social conflicts that *“have emerged as a result of new and particularities forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities. In all parts of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts have assumed alarming rates. It has occurred in places like Shagamu Ogun State, Lagos, Abia, Kano, Bauchi, Nasarawa, Jos, Taraba, Ebonyi and Enugu States respectively.”* (Eme, and Anthony, 2011). Just of recent some Hausa/Fulani Muslims have been attacked and killed in southern part of the country as a result of conflicts between Nigerian Army and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

## **5. Role of Muslim Scholars in Minifying Religious Extremism**

Curbing the menace of insurgency’s ideologies, religious extremism, sectarians and religious intolerance among different religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria requires a vigorous campaign and Muslim scholars’ interventions. This is because Muslim scholars are the heirs of the prophets and custodians of the Prophet’s legacy. Thus, to uproot and minimise these problems for peace coexistence in Nigeria, Muslim scholars have vital roles to play towards promoting social and peace coexistence among society in the light of the Qur’an and *Sunnah* of



the Prophet (S.A.W.), the Prophet (S.A.W.) has shown and demonstrated highest level of fundamental human rights whether Muslims or not Muslims, principles of unity and sense of Islamic brotherhood, religious tolerance, fairness and justice to others as enshrined in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Islam is identified as the panacea to all social and economic problems, it is the responsibility of Muslim scholars to stand and face these serious challenges courageously to address disunity among Muslims and non-Muslims communities which poses security threats in Nigeria.

Today misunderstanding and disunity prevail among different Muslim groups in Nigeria, to the extent of blasphemy, confrontation and attacks on each other, resulted from doctrines and ideologies of different Muslim sects, struggle for power among Muslims elites, selfish personal interests and ignorance. In order to unite Muslim *Ummah* under one platform, with sense of belonging, love and respect for each other Muslim brothers irrespective of their groups or sects. Muslim clerics (scholars) are in the best position, since they are most knowledgeable, intellectuals and pious of the rest Muslims. This has been affirmed in the Glorious Qur'an as follow:

"إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ"

*"From among His servants, it is only those who know that fear Allah. Verily Allah is Most Mighty, Most Forgiving."* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. al-Fadir, 35:28).

To reconcile amongst different Muslims sects and tolerate those differences among themselves, for peace coexistence for the benefit of Islam and Muslims and Nigeria at large, Muslim scholars should intensify their efforts towards unity of Muslim ummah irrespective of their opinions concerning some matters of religion, this has been encouraged by the Qur'an as follow:

"إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ"

*"The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you."* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q.49:10).

Beside the above, the Prophet (S.A.W.) severally, intensify his call on Islamic brotherhood and to shun away from any acts that may create enmity and weaken Muslim unity, as shown in the following traditions:

”وَكُونُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ إِخْوَانًا“

“...*O servants of Allah, be brothers...*” (Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawood,  
in Saleh, 2013, p. 8).

In another similar tradition the prophet also:

”لَا تَقَا طَعُوا وَلَا تَدَابِرُوا وَلَا تَبَاغَضُوا وَلَا تَحَاسَدُوا وَكُونُوا لِعِبَادِ اللَّهِ إِخْوَانًا.“

“*Do not hate one another, and do not be jealous of one another, and do not desert each other, and O servants of Allah! Be brothers...*” (Bukhari, in Saleh, 2013, p. 4).

From the aforementioned verses and Prophetic tradition it becomes obligatory upon Muslim Ummah to ensure unity and tolerance among themselves and non-Muslims to some extent. Since the changing of society is not a simple task and enjoining what is good and what is wrong is not feasible for an ordinary Muslims, but it requires intellectual capabilities from those whom Allah blessed with vast Islamic knowledge. Therefore, the responsibility of *Da'awah* should be carried out by pious Muslim scholars. This is in line with the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an:

”وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ“

“*And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.*”

(Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 3:104)

Propagating fundamental human rights, respect for Muslim brother/sister and kinship irrespective of their religion and fairness to all have been encouraged by Allah and Prophet (S.A.W.). Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong is necessary and recommended by Allah (S.W.A.). This is what has elevated our generation to the rank of best generation among all generations where Allah (S.W.A.) said in the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an:

”كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ“

“*You are now the best people brought forth for (the guidance and reform of) mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book<sup>89</sup> believed it were better for them. Some of them are*

*believers but most of them are transgressors.*” (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 3:110).

Forging unity amongst Muslims and Muslims groups or sects and amongst different religious and ethnics groups for peace building and national development requires tremendous efforts, particularly from the roles of Muslim scholars, who are going to acts as Muslim preachers, representatives, elders, parents, arbitrators and reconcilers in dealing with the lager society of different sects, religions, ethnics, and backgrounds. For good representation, they have to show a high level of intellectuality, tolerance, wisdom without bias. So as to be able to accomplish great achievements in propagating and spreading Islam, for better understanding of Islamic teachings among Muslims and non-Muslims, which is hope to yield peace and harmony among different religious and ethnics groups in Nigeria. In this regard Allah (S.A.W.) commanded the Prophet (S.A.W.) to call people to Islam wisely in a best manner of approach, where Allah said:

"أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجِدْلُهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ "

*“(O Prophet), call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner possible. Surely your Lord knows best who has strayed away from His path, and He also knows well those who are guided to the Right Way.”* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 16:125).

Muslim scholars in discharging their duty as Imam and Muslim leaders, they are responsible to ensure that; they stick on the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S.A.W.) by promoting peace, unity and harmony among Muslim Ummah and non-Muslims communities, respect to different Islamic school of thoughts, without been bias or discrimination to create enmity among Muslims groups. There is also need for them to emphasise the importance of Islamic brotherhood, love, respect and concern on the affairs of our Muslims brothers and sisters irrespective of their groups or sects. In this regard Allah (S.A.W.) said:

"وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرُّوا أَوْادِكُمْ وَأَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَالِمًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَالِمُ الْغُيُوبِ  
إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ "

*“Hold fast together to the cable of Allah and be not divided. Remember the blessing that Allah bestowed upon you: you were once enemies then He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brothers. You stood on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided to the right way.”* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 3:103).

In another verse Allah the Most High said:

وَاطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَأَصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ٤٦

*“And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not quarrel with one another lest you should lose courage and your power depart. Be steadfast, surely Allah is with those who remain steadfast.”* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 8:46).

One of the responsibilities of Muslim scholars is to ensure religious tolerance, as demonstrated by the Prophet (S.A.W.) during his days in Makkah and Madinah. Therefore, they need to preach and emphasise on religious tolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims and shun away from any religious violence, respect for kinships whether Muslims or not, respect for others religious beliefs, and treat them with justice and kindness, in line to the above, Allah the All Wise said:

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىَٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا وَإِن تَلَوُا أَوْ نَعَرْتُمْ أَوْ عَلَّمْتُمْ فَلِئِنَّ اللَّهَ لَكَنَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا"

*“Believers! Be upholders of justice, and bearers of witness to truth for the sake of Allah, even though it may either be against yourselves or against your parents and kinsmen, or the rich or the poor: for Allah is more concerned with their well-being than you are. Do not, then, follow your own desires lest you keep away from justice. If you twist or turn away from (the truth), know that Allah is well aware of all that you do.”* (Almawdudi, in Tafheem.net nd. Q. 4:135).

Another important role to be played by Muslim scholars is that, they should always discourage and condemn the ideologies of Islamic extremism and Islamic terrorist in day to preaching and *Khudbah*. This is because many scholars have the opinion that, changing

ideologies of the insurgents will require intellectual roles by the leading Islamic scholars with mass appeal, the Nigerian army is reported to have said; the wrong teaching and misinterpretation of Islam and ignorance have helped to fuel the spread of the extremist groups in Nigeria like *Boko Haram* (Abubakar, 2013). Therefore, to uproot these bad ideologies Muslim Ummah need to be aware of the status of terrorist acts in Islam and consequences for Muslims and Islam in general through the light of Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

## **6. Conclusions**

From the discussion so far, the paper concludes that the importance of unity among different Muslim groups cannot be over emphasised as attested in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Unity, cohesion, tolerance, cooperation, etc. become necessary among Muslims if we are to realise effective Islamic brotherhood for eternal salvation and face current Muslims challenges for overall human development. Muslims scholars are in best position and have a duty to call on Muslims to stick on the real teachings of Islam based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S.A.W.), so as to embrace peace, unity and religious tolerance and shun away from any religious crises.

## **7. Recommendations**

In the process of minifying religious extremism and violence to ensure unity and religious tolerance among Muslims, different religious and ethnic groups for overall human development and peace buildings in Nigeria the paper recommends the followings:

1. Government at all levels should collaborate with Muslims clerics in curbing the menace of insurgency's ideologies, religious extremism, violence, intolerance, and sectarians for peace building in Nigeria.
2. Government should ensure equity, justice, transparency and accountability among its citizens without any discrimination.
3. Muslim scholars should intensify their efforts in forging unity, Islamic brotherhood, de-radicalisation and religious tolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims.
4. Only pious and learned scholars should be allowed to preach in any religious gathering, so as to avoid unnecessary hatred campaign and misleading Muslim Ummah to religious violence.

5. Muslim should exercise patient, tolerance and justice in dealing with Muslims and non-Muslims.
6. Muslims should live by example from the teachings of Qur'an and the Prophet (S.A.W.).

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