

**COMMUNIQUE OF THE CHRISTIAN LAWYERS
FELLOWSHIP OF NIGERIA (CLASFON), REACHED DURING
THE PRESIDENT-IN-COUNCIL (PIC) MEETING HELD ON 6TH -
8TH MARCH 2025 AT KANO STATE**

1.0 THE ISSUE OF THE REMOVAL OF THE BENUE STATE CHIEF JUDGE BY THE BENUE STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

- 1.1 CLASFON observes with dismay, the blatant violation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended by the Benue State House of Assembly in their attempt to remove the Chief Judge of Benue State in a manner inconsistent with the procedure laid down by the Nigerian Constitution.
- 1.2 While CLASFON does not hold brief for the Chief Judge of Benue State, and is not against disciplinary actions being taken against erring judicial officers, including removal of such officers in deserving cases, however, we believe that in doing so, the procedure laid down by law must be strictly followed.
- 1.3 In view of the above, CLASFON therefore condemns in totality, the actions of the Benue State House of Assembly who appear to be breaking the law, even as law makers. We believe this action is a clear invasion on the independence of the judiciary and negates the much-cherished principle of separation of powers enshrined in our constitutional democracy and should not be heard of from the legislative arm of Benue State government. We urge the parties to follow the laid down procedure under the law in carrying out their respective constitutional duties.

2.0 THE ISSUE OF ONE MONTH RAMADAN FASTING/HOLIDAY FOR BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN SOME NORTHERN STATES, AFFECTING BOTH MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM STUDENTS

- 2.1 CLASFON also observed with displeasure, the arbitrary closure of public and private schools in some Northern states in Nigeria in the name of Ramadan Fasting/Holiday in a country which is constitutionally a secular state.
- 2.2 CLASFON respects the rights of our Muslim brethren to observe their religious practices as guaranteed by the Constitution. But we believe the actions of some state governments in declaring long public holidays without consultation with other critical stakeholders on issues which affect the constitutional rights of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is totally inappropriate and insensitive. CLASFON believes that such actions are in total breach of the constitutional and child rights laws of Christian Students and their parents or guardians to education, and is also in violation of the Constitutional principle of secularity of the Nigerian state under S.10 of the 1999 Constitution as amended.

- 2.3 In this regard, CLASFON supports the resolution and position expressed by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on the issue, and also condemns the baseless accusation of the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) who accused CAN of double standards for speaking against the shutting down of schools for Ramadan Fast among other accusations. CLASFON believes that it is rather MURIC, an organization that believes in the protection of Muslim Rights that is displaying double standards. CLASFON is aware that even under Islamic Law, the Rights of non-Muslims is of paramount importance in Muslim decisions, as enshrined in the Holy Quran and the Hadiths of the Holy Prophet Mohamed (SAW). This has not been observed in the decisions of the State governments concerned.
- 2.4 CLASFON notes that past records have shown that Ramadan fast have been successfully observed in Nigeria without shutting down schools, and, we also note that there is not any nation known to us in the entire world where schools have been shut down as a result of Ramadan fasting.
- 2.5. CLASFON also disagrees with the position of the Sharia Council in justifying the schools' closure on the ground of the weather conditions in the affected northern states. We believe that this cannot be justification for total shutdown of schools, as these weather conditions have always been around but have never stopped successful fasting and school operations in the past. We believe the complete shutdown of schools is not the most constructive way to address this effect of weather on Ramadan fasting, especially when it negatively affects the rights of non-Muslims.
- 2.6 We urge the affected State governments including but not limited to Bauchi, Jigawa, Kano and other concerned State governments to review these decisions with immediate effect and allow students to resume their studies.
- 3.0 THE ISSUE OF CUSTOMARY COURTS TO BE SEPARATED FROM SHARIA COURTS IN AFFECTED STATES**
- 3.1 CLASFON has observed the practices in some Northern states where Area Courts are used as both sharia court and customary court, but the laws applied in these courts is Islamic law, thereby subjecting non-Muslims including Christians to Islamic law and proceedings in matters that should be treated under native law and customs. This practice has been going on for a long time, in spite of the fact that the various Area Court Laws subjects the assumption of jurisdiction of the Area/Sharia Courts over non-Muslims to the consent of non-Muslims.
- 3.2 We believe this is an imposition of Islamic law and practice on non-Muslims and a denial of the rights for non-Muslims to have their matters adjudicated in accordance with their respective faiths, and/or native laws and customs.
- 3.3 In view of the foregoing, CLASFON strongly advocates for the complete separation

of Sharia/Area Courts from Customary Courts and/or for the creation of customary courts for non-Muslims in all the affected states of the Federation, with their respective jurisdictions clearly defined and limited in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This, we believe is the only way to address this important issue which will ensure respect for the Rights of Nigerians to practice their respective faith or native laws and customs as the case may be.

4.0 ON THE FORCEFUL ABDUCTION, CONVERSION AND MARRIAGE OF CHRISTIAN GIRLS IN SOME NORTHERN STATES

4.1 CLASFON is aware of the obnoxious practices where Christian young girls are forcefully abducted, converted to Islam and then married off to Muslims without their consent, and without the knowledge and consent of their parents. States like Niger, Bauchi and Katsina States have become notorious in this regard among other States in the North.

4.2 CLASFON believes that apart from being a violation of the Fundamental Rights of Freedom of Religion of the affected ladies, this practice also amounts to criminal conducts which should be dealt with as such. A clear and recent example of this dastardly act is the abduction, forceful conversion and intended forceful marriage of sister Mary Ishaya to one Bello Shuaibu Nasco, a supposed suitor and which case has been reported to the relevant security agencies, and yet, little or no meaningful actions have been taken to secure the release of the lady and prosecute the perpetrators.

4.3 CLASFON condemns this practice in the strongest terms possible in all the affected states, and urges the relevant security agencies to wade into the matter and prosecute the perpetrators in accordance with the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while policies must be put in place to ensure the respect and protection of the Constitutional rights of all Nigerian Citizens.

5.0 ON THE DENIAL OF CHRISTIAN STUDENTS OF THEIR RIGHTS TO PEACEFULLY ASSEMBLE AND HOST FELLOWSHIP ON CAMPUSES.

5.1 CLASFON is aware that in some Universities in Nigeria, Christian Students and particularly Christian Law Students are denied the opportunity to peacefully assemble and hold fellowship meetings on campuses. This we believe is in violation of the Fundamental Rights of Christian Students generally and particularly of Christian Law Students in various university campuses.

5.2 CLASFON notes that this is a not in tandem with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), which guarantees the fundamental rights to citizens including students to practice their faith anywhere in Nigeria, and denying students the opportunities to practice their faith in the campuses.

5.3 We therefore urge all Nigerian Universities campuses to kindly allow Christian students to hold their fellowship meetings in line with guidelines as may be given

by the management of schools in compliance with the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

6.0 DISCRIMINATORY LAWS IN SOME STATE E.G. SOKOTO STATE (CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION LAW)

- 6.1 CLASFON notes that some states in the Federation, especially in the North have passed some legislations which are statute of general application in their respective states, but these statutes are based on principles of Sharia (Islamic) Law, such that Christians and non-Muslims are unable to benefit from the application of the laws, are harmed by the application of the laws or are otherwise discriminated against by the application of the laws.
- 6.2 CLASFON reiterates that Nigeria is a Secular State, where all States in Nigeria without exception are not expected to adopt particular religion or religious principles as state laws or policies. All laws and government policies are expected to be fair and equitable to all citizens in the states without religious bias to any section of the citizens no matter the number of these citizens. We believe that Nigeria cannot progress in a positive directive with these kinds of practices.
- 6.3 We therefore call on all state governments, starting with Sokoto State to review the said laws with particular reference to the State Child Rights Law amongst other similar laws in the interest of peace, unity, development and progress of the democracy we all cherish in our country, Nigeria.



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President



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