

Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders



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ABSTRACT

Issues of religious diversity and interfaith relations take centre stage in today's postmodern world. The contemporary world has highlighted the need for peace and communal solidity. The intense longing for peace and harmony has also become prevalent in the Ghanaian society. This article justifies that religion is capable of ensuring and stimulating that peace much desired through decent and formidable interfaith dialogue because the religious devotees in the country are more than those who claim not to belong to any religion. Such initiatives to ensure societal peace and harmony can either be communal or individualistic. Right from the past to the present, there have been individual and collaborative efforts to ensure and enhance religious tolerance, harmony and equanimity in Ghana. This study discussed some of the initiatives or efforts that have been made by selected governmental and religious institutions or bodies and individuals to foster religious tolerance and peace in religious pluralistic Ghana. It concluded that the peace that Ghana currently enjoys has not occurred by accident but by the efforts of the various religious groups and individuals discussed in the article. It recommends that these interfaith organizations put in more effort to become proactive and not reactive in order to make them relevant in public discourse on fostering religious peace.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion has been a significant and indomitable social institution in Ghana. Religion defines and informs the life of several Ghanaians. Nonetheless, in some other societies in the world including Ghana, the “misuse” and “misunderstanding” of religion has been a source of conflict.¹ Although Ghana is known to be a peaceful country, the nation is faced with violent conflicts that have not fostered peace and harmony. Such conflicts are commonly ethnic, but recurrent religious violence has been recorded as well.² In the wake of these happenings, some efforts have been made by religious bodies in Ghana in an attempt to contribute to peace-

¹ Nora Kofognotera Nonterah, “The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of its implications for Peace-building in Ghana”, *Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue in the Twenty-first century*, (London; Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 197.

² Nonterah, “The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana..”, 197.

building and interfaith harmonization in Ghana. Such initiatives have been carried out through interreligious dialogues and peace talks in areas where there are conflicts. This article aims at studying the programs and activities of certain religious and non-religious bodies and personalities who have put in various efforts toward ensuring and promoting religious tolerance, co-existence and harmonization in Ghana.

METHODOLOGY

This paper highlights the communal, individual and collaborative efforts that have been made to ensure and promote religious tolerance and co-existence in a religiously pluralistic country such as Ghana. This literary work centres on the study and scrutiny of various secondary data resources that focus on interfaith relations and co-existence. This research is situated in the nation Ghana, a country characterized by religious pluralism. In the course of the study, information from published and unpublished literature in the form of newspapers, books and journal articles was patronized. This study is necessary because it brings to light the efforts of communal and individual institutions and personalities to ensure and enhance religious pluralism and interfaith harmony in Ghana from the past to the present.

The Nature of Interfaith Relations and Encounters in Ghana

The world has reached or entered into a system where it has become inevitable that human beings must continue to exist together irrespective of their religious traditions. In this case, interreligious activities may not be discounted. People of different faiths encounter each other spontaneously and in times of occasions and festivities, whether private or public, different religious adherents attend these ceremonies without checks of religious affiliation.³ Thus, in both the private and public spaces and institutions in Ghana, one can identify the presence of numerous and different religious practitioners.⁴

Religion characterizes the life of Ghanaians so critically that it is not easy or somewhat impossible to segregate it. Viewing the Ghanaian milieu, it can be observed that the nation has three major religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. These individual religions are also pluralistic in nature with various denominations.⁵ Aside that, there are other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Eckankar and Hare Krishna, that have gained ground in the country.⁶ The phenomenon of religious pluralism in Ghana dates back to the coming of the colonial masters in the fifteenth century. The colonial masters who introduced Christianity to the native dwellers met the majority who already practised African Indigenous Religion. In the eighteenth century, Islam joined the two already existing religions. Due to the high state of religiosity among Ghanaians, they gladly embraced these new religions (Christianity and Islam) and have lived peacefully to a certain extent over the years.⁷ Despite the seemingly peaceful coexistence between people of different religious beliefs, there are often instances where arguments have broken out due to the lack of tolerance and respect for the religious values of the different sects and this has fomented disturbances across the country at various times which needs to be curbed.

Measures to Ensure and Promote Religious Tolerance and Co-Existence in Ghana

Presently, people belonging to different faiths or religions encounter one another continuously and consistently in several instances and settings. In Ghana, it is not uncommon to find members of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam living together. Thus, Ghanaians, irrespective of their religious backgrounds have persistently collaborated in seeking lasting peace, reconciliation and harmony in the country.

³ Nathan Iddrisu Samwini,, “The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The case of Selected West African Nations”, *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* (Issue 6, Spring 2011), 1.

⁴ Adam Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and its Effects on Ghanaian society*, Munich, GRIN Verlag. Accessed on September 9, 2021. <https://www.grin.com/document/454170>.

⁵ Nathan Iddrisu Samwini , “I am Because We Are: A Precondition to Peace in a Religious and Political Pluralistic West African Country”, *Journal of Applied Thought: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Volume 3, No 1, 2014, p.44.

⁶ Samwini, “The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building,” 1.

⁷ Nonterah, “The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana,” 197.

It should be noted that, interreligious tolerance or harmony has not existed by happenstance; there are causes of the practice and things that are characteristic of the practice.⁸ All these have been due to the efforts of some organizations and individuals who have worked relentlessly over the years to create an environment where people, irrespective of religious backgrounds, can coexist, dialogue and collaborate in pursuance of their common interest and that of the nation.

This article, therefore, highlights efforts made by certain religious bodies, governments and individuals to ensure religious tolerance and harmonization in Ghana thereby ensuring a religiously pluralistic nation. It presents and assesses the efforts made by the Forum of Religious Bodies (FORB), the Roman Catholic Church – Interreligious Dialogue Committee (INDICOM), the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), various governments, Traditional leaders and religious personalities in ensuring religious tolerance and harmonization in Ghana.

i. The Forum of Religious Bodies (FORB)

The Forum of Religious Bodies comprises representatives from the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Ghana Pentecostal Council, the Council of Independent Churches, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana and the Federation of Muslim Councils of Ghana. The representatives are officially delegated by their respective religious organizations. Samwini is of the view that the idea of creating the umbrella Forum of Religious Bodies emanated from discussions that dated back to 1978.⁹

Mission and Vision of the FORB

According to Samwini¹⁰, the FORB aims at, among other things, promoting religious tolerance, harmony and understanding; upholding the principle of freedom of worship as a fundamental human right; promoting the oneness of mankind, eliminating all prejudice and discrimination and protecting cultural diversity; and encouraging the teaching of comparative religion in all educational institutions. The major concern the effective means to bring Muslim groups in the country into harmonious dialogue with Christians. The ability to establish such an organization was grounded on the fact that other religious councils already existed in the country and had performed well. It then became incumbent to create a forum at which members from the numerous religious organizations met periodically to redress religious concerns amicably and articulate views on matters of national interest with a common voice.¹¹

Activities of the FORB

Regarding its activities, it can be said that the leaders of the FORB have since their first meeting in 1978, hold occasional and emergency meetings as and when the need arises. Their main approach to socio-religious conflicts has been to hold joint meetings as Religious leaders and between them and the parties in question, prepare collective messages for Ghanaians, and to demonstrate that differences of faith and creed should not be allowed to work against the spirit of love, peace and the unity of the people of the nation.¹²

⁸ Adam Konadu, *An Overview of the Concept of Religious Pluralism: Case Study of the Ghanaian Milieu*, Munich, GRIN Verlag. Source. Accessed on September 9, 2021. <https://www.grin.com/document/387410>.

⁹ Interview with Rev. Dr. Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, the former Area Advisor of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) in Ghana. Interview date: 12/02/2022.

¹⁰ Nathan Iddrisu Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*. (Berlin: LIT VERLAG, 2006), 219-220.

¹¹ D. Owusu-Ansah & E. Akyeampong, 'Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Ecumenicalism in the Context of Traditional Modes of Tolerance', *Legon Journal of the Humanities* Vol. 30.2 (2019). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v30i2.1,13>.

¹² Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 220.

ii. **The Roman Catholic Church - Interreligious Dialogue Committee (INDICOM)**

Classical Catholicism has always maintained that salvation is only found in the Catholic Church.¹³ However, the Conference of 1949 and the First Plenary of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) of 1950 produced the first official document providing an obvious positive approach to the spiritual values of the world religions.

This document later became the foundation for the Vatican Council's position on other religions.¹⁴ Despite its exclusive theological stance, the Council affirmed the positive values found in other religions. It indicated clearly that there exists truth and goodness outside Christianity, for God has not left the nations without a witness to Himself, and the human soul is naturally drawn towards the one true God."¹⁵ This openness towards other religions gave an apparent opinion and further concise expression in Vatican II. In the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII "established that the Church must open doors and windows and let a fresh wind blow through the Vatican."¹⁶ Thus, the Council encouraged Christians everywhere to join with people of other faiths who seek the unknown God genuinely to engage in the ministry of peace and mercy.

Consequently, this official position was adopted for implementation by all the church's constituencies worldwide, including Africa and Ghana. Based on its policy to extend Christian charity to all people irrespective of race, social condition, or religious affiliation, the Catholic Church in Ghana seems to look with greater favour toward people of other faiths. Generally, the Interreligious Committees of the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana do not seem to have a separate working document on dialogue and bases its working principles on the laid down policy of the Catholic Church as found in Vatican II.

Mission and Vision of the Roman Catholic Church - Interreligious Dialogue Committee (INDICOM)

The mission and vision of the Interreligious Committee of the Catholic Church in Ghana are: "to promote peace and unity among followers of different religions; promote collaboration among religious bodies to comprehensively enhance the well-being of humankind; design participatory programmes and activities that would bring people of different faiths together and hence stimulate mutual friendship, adequate knowledge and love of one another; to promote interfaith dialogue of life to undertake projects cooperatively at national and local levels; and finally to provide a forum for all religious bodies to express their opinions on matters that concern their faith".¹⁷

Activities of the Roman Catholic Church - Interreligious Dialogue Committee (INDICOM)

In line with such aims and objectives, some branches of the Catholic Church in Ghana have Interreligious Committees that in spite of religious differences engage in interreligious programmes to support the church's stance in Vatican Council II that, non-Christians who seek God are related in several ways to God's people. For instance, the Kumawu Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana provides items, gifts and congratulatory messages to its Muslim friends during their festivities in fulfillment of their socio-religious obligations. There are occasions when some members of the church join the Muslims for worship in their mosques. Justus Abban, the Priest in charge of the Kumawu Rectorate of the Roman Catholic Church indicated in an interview that there are times that he joins the Muslims in the Kumawu town to discuss issues on interfaith dialogue and Christian-Muslim relations.¹⁸ Messages of congratulations are sent annually from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Muslim communities in Ghana through the Catholic Bishops in the country which is an indication of the Roman Catholic Church's level of good relationships with Muslims and Islam.

¹³ Glory, E. Dharmaraj, and Jacob, S. Dharmaraj, *Christianity and Islam*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 277.

¹⁴ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 211.

¹⁵ Dharmaraj and Dharmaraj, *Christianity and Islam*, 277.

¹⁶ Dharmaraj and Dharmaraj, *Christianity and Islam*, 278.

¹⁷ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*. 213-214.

¹⁸ An interview with Justus Abban, the priest in charge of the Kumawu Rectorate of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Interview date, 04/01/22.

iii. The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) is relatively the pioneer interreligious organization in the continent of Africa, with a specific focus on Christians' relations with Muslims.¹⁹ The origin of the organization could be traced back to the political and religious environment of Africa in the 1950s. During such time, Christianity was depicted greatly as the religion of the colonialists. Also, the presence of the missionaries was seen as a symbol of the continuous presence of colonialism.²⁰ In a circumstance like this, the churches were looking at how they would become self-governing, self-dependent and self-propagating once independence was achieved. It was in the area of self-propagation that the seed of PROCMURA was sown.²¹ In such a milieu, the churches became cognizant of the fact that in post-colonial Africa, nation-states would originate and citizens of individual countries would consist of Christians and Muslims and there would be a serious need for Christian-Muslim positive engagement as co-citizens.²² It was for this reason that the churches realized the need to develop a programme precisely concentrating on Christians' encounters with Muslims in independent Africa. As a result, the Islam in Africa Project (IAF) now known as the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) was started in 1959. The seed for the PROCMURA was sown on the campus of the University of Ghana in Accra where a group of ecumenical bodies held a joint missionary conference in collaboration with the International Missionary Council (IMC).

The PROCMURA is a pan-African Christian organization committed to Christian productive engagement with Muslims for peace and tranquility in the society, and diplomatic co-existence between Christians and Muslims. It operates along with almost all the churches in Africa irrespective of doctrinal differences, and relates productively with all the Muslim groups and organizations in Africa regardless of doctrinal or sectional differences as well.²³

PROCMURA's Vision and Mission

As an organization established in 1959 at a time when independent nation-states in Africa were on the rise, PROCMURA had already envisioned a situation where religion (especially Christianity and Islam) would become formidable forces in public life and that there was the need to establish a programme that would promote good neighbourliness.²⁴ According to Mbilla, PROCMURA is devoted to promoting within the churches in Africa devoted Christian witness to the Gospel in an interreligious environment of Christians and Muslims; and Christian productive encounters with Muslims for peace and harmonious co-existence. It is poised at ensuring a continent where faith communities irrespective of their differences work collaboratively for the total development of human society. It is centered on how the Church in Independent African countries could do missions amid Muslims, avoiding the pitfalls that characterized the relations between Islam and Christianity.²⁵ PROCMURA works towards the advancement of good neighbourliness, mutual respect and positive tolerance. It advocates that Christians and Muslims should constructively engage one another so as to ensure that any conflicts and misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims are tackled in a manner devoid of violence.

The mission statement of PROCMURA is; "To keep before the churches in Africa their responsibility for understanding Islam and Muslims in their region in view of the Church's task of interpreting faithfully in

¹⁹ An interview with Rev. Dr. Nathan Iddrisu Samwini.

²⁰ Johnson Mbilla, "Guidelines to Christian-Muslim Relations". Source: www.promura-prica.org. Accessed on 04/01/21. Johnson Mbilla is the former General Advisor of PROCMURA.

²¹ Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, *Our Mandate*, Accessed January 2, 2020. <https://www.promura-prica.org/index.php/en/about-us/core-mandate>,

²² Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, *Program Focus*, Accessed January 2, 2020. <https://www.promura-prica.org/index.php/en/programme-focus>

²³ Mbilla, "Guidelines to Christian-Muslim Relations".

²⁴ Mbilla, "Guidelines to Christian-Muslim Relations"

²⁵ PROCMURA @50, PROCMURA Publications, 49-50.

the Muslim world the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to effect the research and education necessary for this.”²⁶ According to Samwini, this mission statement seems to bring out five essential issues: in the first place the churches have a responsibility, perhaps a duty, to understand Islam and the Muslims in Africa; second, the churches are not prevented from their missionary mandate by the project’s position, and they should faithfully interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of Muslims in Africa; third, PROCMURA’s position differs quite radically from the position of the Roman Catholic Church which seems to seek collaboration with Muslims for justice and peace. PROCMURA aims to faithfully interpret the Gospel in the Muslim world – a missionary approach devoid of polemics but with the ultimate goal of achieving tolerance and recognition for the Muslims; fourth, the project also steers away from the concept of dialogue which appears to be understood as meaning “no evangelization”; and fifth, PROCMURA also steers clear from an overt all-out evangelization of Muslims as a target group.²⁷

Activities of PROCMURA in Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Relations

PROCMURA has since its inception in the past 56 years successfully aided the churches in Sub-Saharan Africa to tolerate, accept and appreciate religious plurality as an indispensable social phenomenon in Africa. It has also established with the Muslim communities forums for solving conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and mutual alliance to address national issues. They have achieved this through the combined efforts of the National Councils of Churches and PROCMURA Area (country) Committees around Africa. PROCMURA continues to co-operate with the Christian and Muslim societies in Ghana to find lasting solutions to the recurrent conflicts in the northern part of the country, and offer advice to conflict-related situations around Africa that concern Christians and Muslims. Aside its focus on assembling Christians and Muslims to talk peace and live peace, PROCMURA has been active in bringing together Christian and Muslim women, and Christian and Muslim youth to discuss issues of common concern.²⁸

In Ghana, it can be said that PROCMURA’s position to faithfully interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Muslim world appears to inform and form the basis for the Christian Council of Ghana and its member churches and affiliated organizations’ position. The official position with non-Christians includes Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religion.²⁹ Through the Interfaith and Ecumenism Committee of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), the PROCMURA supports the CCG to hold seminars and conferences on interfaith dialogue.³⁰

Since the 1960s, the Islam Committee in Ghana for PROCMURA has created forums through seminars, workshops, correspondence courses and publication of articles in newspapers and fliers for Christian-Muslim dialogue where conflicts between the two communities occur in the country. For Samwini, it may seem reasonable to suggest that the continuing reduction in the conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Ghana in the 2000s could be attributed in part, perhaps, to the effects of these programmes from the 1960s.³¹ In spite of the success stories of the PROCMURA, the contribution or work of PROCMURA has not been felt much because of some hindrances. In Christian-Muslim relations, one of the areas which provoke misunderstanding is the belief system of the other. According to Mbilla, in PROCMURA’s experience, statements of faith and practice of Christians are not always properly made clear to Muslims in a dialogical discussion.³²

²⁶ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*. 218.

²⁷ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*. 218.

²⁸ Interview with Reverend Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, the former General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana. Interview date, 30/10/20.

²⁹ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relation*, 218.

³⁰ Interview with Reverend Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong..

³¹ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relation*, p219

³² Johnson Mbilla is the General Advisor of PROCMURA, Accessed April 1, 2021. www.promura-prica.org.

iv. The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG)

The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) was founded on 30th October 1929 as a fellowship of churches by five-member churches. They included the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), English Church Mission (Anglican), Ewe Presbyterian Church (now Evangelical Presbyterian Church), Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast (now Presbyterian Church of Ghana), Zion Church, and Wesleyan Methodist Church (currently the Methodist Church Ghana).³³ At present, the CCG comprises twenty-six member churches and three Christian Organizations. They are the Methodist Church Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Salvation Army, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Christ Evangelical Mission, Eden Revival Church, Evangelical Church of Ghana, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, Ghana Baptist Convention, Ghana Mennonite Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Restoration Christian Church, Legon Interdenominational Church, Anglican Dioceses of Accra, the Luke Society Mission Incorporated, Ghana Evangelical Convention, Accra Ridge Church, Tema Joint Church, Teshie/Nungua United Church, Atomic Hills United Church, Ghana Police Church, Nigritian Episcopal Church, Grace Communion International, Religious Society of Friends, Young Men's Christian Association and Young Women's Christian Association.³⁴ The CCG is the leading ecumenical body in Ghana. It has affiliations with other ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches, All African Conference of Churches, Fellowship of Christian Council in West Africa and Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA).³⁵

The Mission and Vision of the CCG

The mission of the CCG is to search for unity and to work with members on issues of social concern and be the voice of the voiceless in society.³⁶ Thus, the Council intends to build up the capacity of its members to contribute to achieving justice, unity, reconciliation and integrity among various sectors of the Ghanaian society, and provide a forum for collaborative action on the issues of public interest. In seeking to achieve this, they are guided by the Holy Bible and, in all matters of national interest, remain non-partisan.³⁷

Activities of the CCG in Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Relations

The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) has the Interfaith and Ecumenism Department which seeks to enforce respect for the people of other faiths and the need to work towards a constructive relationship and strive for peaceful coexistence. The CCG links up with other Christian bodies such as the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC), the Ghana Pentecostal Council (GPC), and the Council of Independent Churches (CIC) to foster peace and address social issues and Christianity. Moreover, the CCG works closely with other religious organizations or bodies such as the Office of the National Chief Imam, Ghana Muslims Union, Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission and Federation of Muslim Council in contributing to the socio-economic development of the country. It usually does that by actively and continuously participating in national processes and initiatives aimed at promoting the welfare, peace and security of Ghanaians.³⁸

Through the Interfaith and Ecumenism Department, the PROCMURA supported the CCG to hold seminars and conferences on interfaith dialogue. The CCG collaborated with PROCMURA to organize interreligious dialogue in Ghana, specifically in Accra. During this event, the religious leaders and members of the PROCMURA took time to offer prayers for the government and citizens of Ghana and the leaders of West Africa and Africa as a whole for peace and tranquility to prevail, and to commit agents of peace in the

³³ World Council of Churches, Christian Council of Ghana, Accessed April 1, 2021.
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/africa/ghana/ccg>

³⁴ WCC, Christian Council of Ghana.

³⁵ WCC, Christian Council of Ghana.

³⁶ WCC, Christian Council of Ghana.

³⁷ Interview with Rev. Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong.

³⁸ <http://www.christiancouncilgh.org/interfaith.htm>. Accessed April 1, 2021.

world into God's care and guidance.³⁹

The CCG works with the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC), the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (AMM) and the office of the National Chief Imam to stimulate religious harmonization and peaceful coexistence in the wake of religious conflicts in the 2000s. This is what led to the formation of the Ghana Conference of Religion and Peace which is made up of the leaders of the above named religious bodies and they still meet frequently.⁴⁰

The CCG subsequently collaborates with the National Chief Imam's Office, the GCBC, and GPCC to undertake public advocacy and education on various socio-economic issues such as HIV/AIDS, child labour, child trafficking, food security, education, health and peaceful elections. This was clearly demonstrated in the 2012 General Elections and their collaboration with other key stakeholders in the Supreme Court Adjudication of the 2012 Election Petition.⁴¹

Sometimes they issue joint statements to the government and all the religious leaders append their signatures. So they consciously create platforms where they talk, eat and plan together. The CCG has an annual meeting with the GCBC where they discuss national and ecumenical issues to foster relationships. Samwini indicates strong collaboration between the CCG and the GCBC, which have since the colonial era together played the prophetic role of criticizing and commending governments when the need arises. Moreover, the two bodies constantly write Pastoral Letters to their members to give direction in very difficult periods of national life from the 1960s to the present.⁴²

There have also been clashes between Christian leaders and traditional leaders since the 1990s. Most of these clashes have been over the observation of customs during festivals. In dealing with these clashes, the CCG together with other Christian bodies has been engaging traditional leaders on how to avoid clashes during those periods. In times past, they have done that in the Greater Accra Region during the celebration of the Homowo festival. They highlighted the fact that citizens should not resort to violence, but collaborate and resolve issues. So they not only talk with friends in Islam but also with traditional leaders when there is the emergence of conflicts whatever form they may take.⁴³

The CCG has also worked closely with traditional leaders because they consider them key actors in facilitating interreligious dialogue. In all their projects in the various communities, they collaborate with the traditional leaders in those respective communities. They also work at the moment closely with Otumfuor Osei Tutu II, the Asantehene (the monarch of the Asante kingdom), and now the CCG partakes in his annual thanksgiving service at the beginning of every year. This is a church service instituted by the Asantehene in conjunction with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in the Ashanti Region.

Again, the CCG believes that promoting peaceful co-existence is not just between the major religions such as Christianity and Islam, but they must also bring on board other faith-based bodies such as those in the African Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i and other religions which are spread all around the country. Thus, the CCG believes that they must reach out to all of them just to find out how they can together use their faith to facilitate development instead of using faith to destroy the country.

One of the CCG's interfaith engagements was the visit of the newly appointed Ameer and Missionary-in-charge of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Maulvi Mohammed Bin Salih to the Secretariat of the Christian Council of Ghana on Thursday, 23rd October 2014. This visit gave them the opportunity to strengthen their existing relationship and committed themselves to use their platform to fight corruption and indiscipline in the country.⁴⁴

³⁹ Report on Proceedings of The PROCMURA Conference On Religion, Conflict Prevention and Peace-building In West Africa, M-Plaza Hotel, Accra, Ghana on July 21-24, 2009. The topic discussed was "Christians and Muslims Quest for Peace".

⁴⁰ Interview with Rev. Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong.

⁴¹ <http://www.christiancouncilgh.org/news%20Induction%20Address%20by%20Rt.%20Rev%20Francis%20Amenu.htm>. Accessed on April 1, 2021

⁴² Iddrisu, "I am Because We Are: A Precondition to Peace in a Religious and Political Pluralistic West African Country", 58.

⁴³ Interview with Rev. Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong.

⁴⁴ Interview with Rev. Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong.

So the peace and religiously pluralistic society Ghanaians are witnessing and enjoying today is the fruit of some efforts that have been made over the years and the contributions of the CCG cannot go unmentioned.

v. The Government

The Ghanaian Government has done much to ensure and promote religious tolerance, respect and recognition for the religious other. It has included in its Constitution a bill of rights which features religious freedom in one form or the other. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana establishes that every individual in Ghana, irrespective of his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to fundamental human rights and freedoms, but dependent on respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest. The implication is that the freedom of the individual or group of individuals is exercised with the equal rights and freedom of the other as a boundary, be it religious or otherwise. This has created an environment where different religions are able to operate without any unjustifiable interference.

Another method by which governments of Ghana have sought to respond to religious tolerance and to prevent the dominance of one religion as a state religion is a process put in place since independence whereby all three religions in the country perform public functions such as offering joint prayers during Independence Day celebrations or the inauguration of a new President. To avoid the impression of any religious group considering itself as the state religion, prayers are said jointly one after the other by representatives of African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity.⁴⁵ The Government of Ghana also collaborates with PROCMURA to organize interreligious dialogue in Ghana. During such occasions, the religious leaders and members of the PROCMURA take time to offer prayers for the government and Ghanaians, and also leaders and people of Africa for peace and tranquility to prevail eternally.

Furthermore, the government has made efforts to foster religious tolerance through education. The government has essentially demonstrated its commitment to educating the youth on serious recognition and respect for religious others. Ghana had a major education reform in 1987 when conscious efforts were made to introduce pupils to all the main religions in secular schools to the other. For example, a subject called "Religious and Moral Education (RME) is part of the curriculum. RME has become a core subject and examinable for all pupils in the Basic school. The main areas of study here are the beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. The main objective is to deliberately introduce to the pupils the beliefs, practices, sacred objects and customs of these religions, in order to make the people have recognition for the religious other rights from infancy.⁴⁶

The State has instituted national holidays during the celebration of Christian festivals such as Christmas, New Year and Easter. It has also amended the statutory holiday laws to include *Id al-fitr* and *Id al-adha* as national statutory holidays since 1996, all in an attempt to foster unity and equality among the various faiths for their welfare and their development. However, adherents of the African Traditional Religion do believe that the government could do more by amending the statutory holiday laws to include traditional festivities. This will ensure a holistic and equitable recognition of the major religions in Ghana.

vi. Individual and Independent Efforts

There have been individuals and independent bodies who have toiled relentlessly to ensure and promote religious tolerance and respect or recognition for the religious other in Ghana.

1. The National Peace Council (NPC)

In an attempt to foster recognition for others irrespective of religious differences, there has been the establishment of the National Peace Council (NPC). A 2011 Parliamentary Act 818 called for the formation of National, Regional and District Peace Council Boards, that were determined to build sustainable peace

⁴⁵ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 225-226.

⁴⁶ An interview with Mr. Kyeremeh Adu-Gyamfi, a Tutor of Religious and Moral Education at St. Monica's College of Education at Mampong in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Interview date: 14/08/21.

in the country (the Republic of Ghana, “National Peace Council Act, 2011 (Act) 818,” Accra, 2011).⁴⁷ Gazetted on 20th May 2011 and its members restricted to serve for four-year terms, the composition of the Peace Councils was intentionally inclusive.⁴⁸ The members are from various religious groups in Ghana. They involved representations of the Christian Council of Ghana, the Catholic Bishops Conference, National Council for Christian and Charismatic Churches, Ahl-Sunnah Muslim Group, Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Tijaniyya Muslim Group, adherents of African Traditional Religion, a member of the National House of Chiefs, two nominees of the Office of the President (one of whom must be a woman), and two persons who represent distinguished groups such as institutions of higher learning and civil society organizations involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.⁴⁹

The mission of the National Peace Council (NPC) is to ensure and promote the development of systems or mechanisms for cooperation among all people and bodies involved in peacebuilding in Ghana. This is through promoting cooperative problem-solving attempts to conflicts and by institutionalizing the processes of response to conflicts to create sustainable peace and harmony in society.⁵⁰

2. Chiefs and other community leaders

The presence of chiefs and other community leaders in Ghana has helped to regulate the conduct of people and consequently helped to ensure social peace and order. In the Ghanaian traditional society, chiefs and other community leaders are often held in high esteem. They are perceived to be the symbol of wisdom and leadership within communities; therefore their decisions are most respected.⁵¹

The institution of chieftaincy is recognized politically as an important agency in remedying conflicts and ensuring societal harmony. The chiefs settle various criminal and non-criminal issues ranging from chieftaincy, land, and family disputes to petty quarrels and misunderstandings. For example, in several parts of northern Ghana, land disputes are settled by the Tindana who is believed to be the custodian of the land. Their decisions are respected by the community. Moreover, the traditional leaders have established mechanisms for arbitration. Several chiefs have their courts and prisons where offenders are tried and sentenced.⁵²

One of such characters or individuals who made great efforts at fostering tolerance and peace was the late Asantehene, Otumfuor Opoku Ware II, the former king of the Asante. According to Samwini, Kumasi was one of the cities in which many conflicts occurred between Muslims and Christians.⁵³ Apart from banning public preaching within the Kumasi municipality for some time, the king also set up a Muslim-Christian Committee in 1995 comprising representatives from the RCC, CCG, FMC and the AMM under the chairmanship of the then Catholic Archbishop of Kumasi, Kwasi Sarpong. The committee was accountable to the Asantehene. That notwithstanding, the committee had the cooperation of the religious fraternity groups in Kumasi. From there, there has been a reduction in reported conflicts in the metropolis since 1999.⁵⁴

This honourable effort toward promoting religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence has been continued by his successor who is Otumfuor Osei Tutu II, the incumbent King of Asante. He sits twice a month with his Paramount Chiefs and elders in his traditional court to settle disputes and resolve conflicts. Decisions made by this court are seriously respected and any breach attracts fines or additional punishment. They deal with several cases including those on religious violence and discrimination. The lawfulness and authority of these traditional leaders are linked not only to their credibility among the communities they

⁴⁷ Owusu-Ansah & Akyeampong, ‘Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence,’ 13.

⁴⁸ Owusu-Ansah & Akyeampong, ‘Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence,’ 13.

⁴⁹ Owusu-Ansah & Akyeampong, ‘Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence,’ 13.

⁵⁰ Interview with Most Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante, the former Chairman of the National Peace Council of Ghana. Interview date: 14/08/20.

⁵¹ Nancy Annan, *Providing Peace, Security and Justice in Ghana: The Role of Non-State Actors*. An unpublished paper delivered to the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre. 2013.

⁵² Owusu-Ansah & Akyeampong, ‘Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence,’ 13.

⁵³ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 229-230.

⁵⁴ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950 and its effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian relations*, 230.

serve but also to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Chieftaincy Act, 2008 (Act 759).⁵⁵

Otumfuor Osei Tutu II has been a prominent actor in the organization of several interreligious dialogues. For instance, in an interfaith dialogue organized at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi Ghana on Thursday, 30th October, 2014 on the theme “Maintaining Peace in Challenging Times”, he was represented by Oheneba Adusei Akyempemhene who read the message from the great King. The King’s message emphasized the fact that all faiths spring from a common belief in a God of peace. The God of peace cannot sanction violent behaviour among His children and that religious collaboration and interfaith dialogue can ensure peace, unity, solidarity and development. At this event Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury was present and he showed appreciation to the Asantehene (the Asante King) for championing such a platform for interreligious dialogue. There were several representatives from the major religious bodies, peace organizations and politicians who participated in the interreligious dialogue.⁵⁶

3. The National Chief Imam

The National Chief Imam, who is the national Islamic leader, of Ghana has been prolific in the pursuit of religious tolerance, peace and harmonization in Ghana.

In a news report titled “Ghana’s 100-year-old Imam who went to church,”⁵⁷ information is given about the National Chief Imam of Ghana, Sheikh Osmanu Sharubutu, joining a Catholic Church service. This was part of his birthday celebration. The reporter, Favour Nunoo, presented images of Sheikh Osmanu Sharubutu, in a seat of Christ the King Catholic Church in Accra for an Easter church service.⁵⁸ The Sheikh, who is the leader of Ghana’s Muslim community, by so doing, wanted to proclaim and establish that his legacy is peace which is the fruit of inter-faith harmony. Not only was the Sheikh found in church attendance, but he was also pictured alongside the parish priest Father Andrew Campbell.⁵⁹ This incident went viral on several social media platforms. There were people on social media who championed the Imam’s approach and described him as a light shining in the darkness. Nonetheless, not everyone was happy with his approach or initiative. For some critics, for a Muslim to participate in Christian worship was an abomination. However, Sheikh Sharubutu contended that he was not worshipping but was rather moving the relationship between Muslims and Christians from mere tolerance to all-inclusive engagement. In an interview with the BBC correspondent, the National Chief Imam’s spokesperson, Aremeyaw Shaibu, reiterated that “The Chief Imam is changing the narrative about Islam from a religion of wickedness, a religion of conflict, a religion of hatred for others, to a religion whose mission is rooted in the virtues of love, peace and forgiveness.”⁶⁰

In another vein, the National Chief Imam has always been ready to give timely and resourceful interventions to end religious conflicts and crises that arise across the country. In 2019, he condemned a group of young Muslim men who attacked a church in Accra. This was after the church’s pastor predicted that the Chief Imam, Sheikh Osmanu Sharubutu, was going to die in the coming 12 months. The Sheikh ordered those who had been armed with machetes in revenge to forgive the preacher and managed to calm the tension. This timely initiative earned the Sheikh the thanks of the Inspector-General of Police in Ghana. On another occasion, there was a misunderstanding and subsequent violent clash between Muslims and traditional leaders in Old Tafo, a suburb of Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, over a cemetery in 2016. Gunshots echoed throughout the streets of Old Tafo and a curfew was then imposed after one person died in the clashes. Traditional leaders wanted proof that the Muslim community owned a section of land in the cemetery to bury their dead. The situation nearly resulted in an all-out war after some Muslim youths

⁵⁵ KAIPTC, <https://www.kaiptc.org/publications/policy-briefs/> Accessed on 5/1/21.

⁵⁶ The researchers were witnesses to this interreligious dialogue.

⁵⁷ Favour Nunoo, Ghana’s 100-year-old imam who went to church, Accessed September 9, 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48221879>

⁵⁸ Nunoo, Ghana’s 100-year-old Imam who went to church.

⁵⁹ Father Andrew Campbell, is the Parish Priest of Christ the King Catholic Church in Accra – Ghana.

⁶⁰ Nunoo, Ghana’s 100-year-old Imam who went to church.

slapped the traditional leader of the Tafo community. In the Ghanaian traditional system, the slapping of a chief constitutes a defilement of his office, a taboo in Ghana which requires war to be waged - something that could have spread to other communities. On hearing about the unfortunate incident, Sheikh Osmanu Sharubutu immediately journeyed to Kumasi, the Ashanti regional capital. The Chief Imam went to the palace of the Tafo chief, and without even speaking a word; he calmed the situation by the humility and meekness of his presence, thus preventing further unrest.⁶¹ This was probably not the first and only time the national Chief Imam had intervened in a quarrel over a cemetery. A similar incident occurred in 2012. This time the corpse of an imam in the Volta Region of Ghana was unearthed and dumped by the roadside by a community who felt Muslims should not bury their dead in that graveyard. Sheikh Sharubutu journeyed to the place and negotiated a peace deal thereby saving the region from using force to suppress the riots.⁶²

The National Chief Imam, though a Muslim, has recently donated an amount of 50,000 Ghana Cedis toward the building of a National Cathedral in Ghana. This issue has been much-talked-about in Ghana in recent times. There have been several criticisms against this initiative from the side of the National Chief Imam. The spokesperson for the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, has however justified the decision for the donation. According to him, it is a symbolic gesture aimed at establishing a sustainable peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians in the country.⁶³ He explained that the spirit of the gesture is to deepen a harmonious relationship between Muslims as a distinct identified community. The Chief Imam has been doing things that are revolutionary in their significance.⁶⁴ He added that “in a revolutionary manner, the Chief Imam is trying to move our mind from the tendency to see each other (Muslims and Christians) as enemies and to remove all traces of hatred.”⁶⁵

Nonetheless, it can be said that the efforts by individual bodies and religious organizations and civil society groups to foster religious tolerance though laudable, have not been enough. Such attempts have been regarded as one-sided, dealing with people in authority while the ordinary people are yet to feel the impact of the works of these organizations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion so far has revealed that Ghana's peaceful and pluralistic environment has not occurred by accident. It has been masterminded by the efforts of some entities and individuals from the past to the present. The government of Ghana and its citizens should not be swollen-headed or self-satisfied with the current peace and interfaith harmony they are currently enjoying. The contemporary world has become global and the emergence of social media and other public interactions, constantly reveals that the traditional culture of tolerance in Ghana is fading out. In addressing social issues, people especially the youth prefer using harsh and impolite language and an intolerant approach to authority. The culture of neighbourliness and brotherly love is giving way to individualism, where the people give prominence to individual interest than communal interest. This phenomenon requires the collaborative efforts of every person regardless of religious affiliation to come together in unity to holistically confront the challenges of the present times. The principal step to such a religious and crucial mission is to promote and enhance interreligious tolerance and dialogue. It is, therefore, prudent that these interfaith organizations put more effort into their activities because their existence is not known to many Ghanaians. They should be at the forefront of promoting religious tolerance. They should not wait for crises to unfold before issuing statements. Their activities should penetrate the moral fibre of the people so that peace and tranquility is assured at all times.

⁶¹ Nunoo, Ghana's 100-year-old Imam who went to church.

⁶² Nunoo, Ghana's 100-year-old Imam who went to church.

⁶³ Haruna Attah, National Cathedral: Chief Imam only employing sophistry, his donation has nothing to do with peaceful co-existence, MyJoyonline, August 31, 2021. Accessed September 9, 2021. <http://www.myjoyonline.com/national-cathedral-chief=imam-only-employing-sophistry-his-donation-has-nothing-to-do-with-peaceful-co-existence-harruna-attah>.

⁶⁴ Attah, National Cathedral: Chief Imam only employing sophistry.

⁶⁵ Attah, National Cathedral: Chief Imam only employing sophistry.

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