



# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

*Office of the General Secretary*

His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo  
President  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

28 March 2000

Your Excellency,

The Lutheran World Federation believes that religious freedom and tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding, are fundamental building blocks of a secure and sustainable nationhood. In Nigeria, those foundations have been sorely tested in recent times.

Religious freedom must mean freedom of religion for all, and dialogue must be on the basis of respect for each other's religious traditions. If these essential elements are accepted, then religious diversity can positively promote the nation-building process and the development of a culture of peace, rather than the opposite.

Your actions, in promoting dialogue among the governors of the states of Nigeria in relation to the outbreaks of violence between Christians and Muslims earlier this year, speak of a sensitive grasp of the dynamics of interfaith relationships. The agreed suspension of the extension of Sharia in Nigeria's northern states which resulted from those discussions helped to defuse an explosive situation which had already led to the deaths of hundreds of innocent people.

Whilst the manner in which you addressed this situation has itself been an important contribution to the promotion of religious tolerance and peace, the conditions for intolerance and violence remain. It must also be recognized that religious differences are often only part of the issue, with political and ethnic differences being difficult to separate from the religious dimension.

I wish to assure you of the Lutheran World Federation's continued prayers and support as you continue to lead your country towards a culture of peace, based upon religious freedom and unity in diversity.

Yours respectfully,

Ishmael Noko  
General Secretary