



Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa  
Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique



# MALAWI REPORT



Christian and Muslim Religious leaders Conference  
on Peace and Development in Malawi

26 & 27 April 2012, Dumisani Hotel Kasungu  
**LILONGWE, MALAWI**

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## Abbreviations

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PROCMURA	Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
SAFCEI	South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

## INTRODUCTION

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations, in its quest for peace and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the continent and as implementation of its second principle of operation that talks of '*Christian constructive engagement with Muslims for the holistic development of the human family*', has for sometime now embarked on peace conferences across the continent. In 2008, a regional peace conference for East and Southern Africa was held in Dar es Saalam, Tanzania to address potential issues that are nest for conflict in the region and iron out ways for conflict prevention and reconciliation in the region from a religious point of view.

As follow up of the Dar es Saalam meeting at country level, PROCMURA headed to Malawi where a peace conference for Christians and Muslims religious leaders was held on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012 at the Dumisanu Hotel in Kasungu. A total of 25 leaders drawn from the various Christian denominations across the country held constructive and fruitful discussions on the theme: '*Christian and Muslim leaders for peace and development in Malawi*'. The forecoming provides the proceedings of the conference.

Malawi's state of peace can remain and should remain a point of convergence between Muslims and Christians. This can be, on the basis of constant interactive and educative forums where Christian leaders are informed on the right models of evangelism as well as knowing their Muslim neighbours well enough to the point of understanding. The Area Committee's articulative words in this line of thought buttresses the need for such conferences to be held at local levels where majority of the people may choose to live ignorant of their neighbour's faith. PROCMURA endeavours to point out that what happens in the neighbouring countries may quickly infiltrate into another neighbouring country given the influence of globalisation and the mass media. Notice, that in the meeting in Malawi, Nigeria's issues arose.

With the presence of the national media of Malawi at the meeting, one can only hope that the latter is used positively to propagate peace and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the country. Yet this requires a complete overhaul of the views that are mirrored with a myriad of past histories that require repackaging and consumption from new stalls that are not shaded with stains of blood-stained hands. A task that the General Adviser and PROCMURA Area Committees commit themselves to do around the continent.

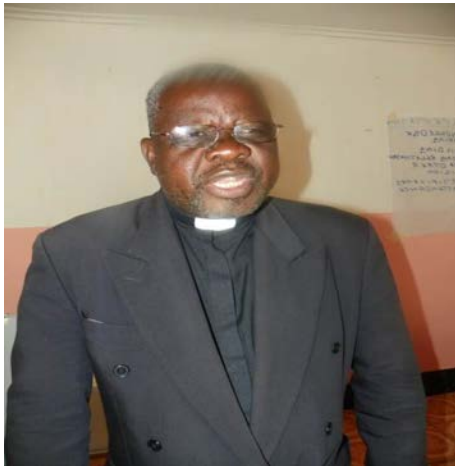
In Malawi, the peace that is thriving for now needs to be in optimum use. All nations in Africa can use the apex of peace in the nation to realize her development. Knowing very well, that development is a contingent of peace. The reverse of this is conflict which may take facial description of religious, civil wars, negative ethnicity, discrimination and human rights abuse.

## 1.0 DAY ONE

### OPENING REMARKS

The day started with few opening remarks by the General Secretary of the Malawi Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr. Osborne Joda-Mbewe, and the PROCMURA Area Committee Chairperson for Malawi, the Rev. Ted Mwambila.

#### 1.1 *General Secretary of the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC) – Dr. Osborne Joda-Mbewe*



**Rev. Dr. Osborne Joda-Mbewe, General Secretary of Malawi Council of Churches addressing the leaders**

Rev. Dr. Osborne welcomed all the participants to the conference, especially Muslim leaders for responding positively to the invitation of the Malawi Council of Churches. He then proceeded to express gratitude to the PROCMURA team that came all the way from the Central Office in Nairobi to assist in the facilitation of the conference. He specifically thanked the PROCMURA General Adviser, Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah for allowing PROCMURA to finance the conference. Dr. Osborne explained that since independence, Christians and Muslims have always lived in peace with each other in Malawi and that is appreciated, it should however not be taken for granted. He went on to say that peaceful coexistence that the two religious communities have enjoyed should be maintained and strengthened so as to build sustainable and cordial relations between the two groups. On the basis of that, Dr. Osborne said that while convening this kind of gathering, the Council wishes to create stronger and meaningful relations between the Christian and Muslim communities and their noble work.

He pointed to the fact that soon Malawi is going to have general election that that requires sober Christian-Muslim relations, stressing on the fact that it is paramount that both communities are able to understand their differences and tolerate each other so as to be able to jointly participate in the building of sustainable development for the country.

#### 1.2 *Chairperson of the PROCMURA Area Committee in Malawi – Rev. Ted Mwambila*



**Rev. Ted Mwambila, Malawi Area Committee Chairperson**

The Rev. Ted Mwambila who is the Chairperson of the PROCMURA Area Committee for Malawi and an Executive Committee Member of PROCMURA joined the General Secretary of the Christian Council to thank and appreciate the team from the PROCMURA's Central Office in Nairobi. He then gave the history of PROCMURA in Malawi and shed some light on the diverse activities that were held both in the core and specific programmes. Rev. Ted specifically spoke about the joint workshop for Christian and Muslim women on HIV/AIDS that was held in 2007 and stated that though it was the first time that the Area Committee together with the Malawi Women's Programme supported by the Women's Programme at the Central Office were having a joint meeting with Muslims, it was a very good, exciting and fruitful experience. He went on to observe that the relationship that was built at that meeting made it possible for PROCMURA to invite a Muslim lady to participate in a regional consultation in Uganda and some

Muslim scholars were also taken to a regional conference in Tanzania. Finally, Rev. Ted urged participants to make the best out of the two-day meeting.

## 2.0 PRESENTATIONS

### 2.1 Presentation on PROCMURA



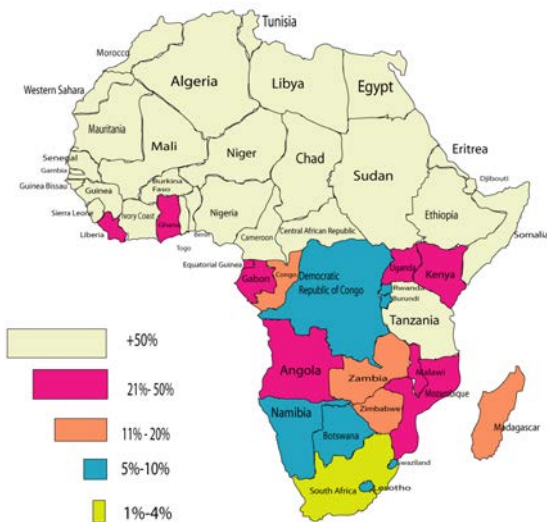
Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah, General Adviser- PROCMURA

The General Adviser of PROCMURA, Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah made a presentation on PROCMURA and introduced the organisation to the participants. In the presentation, the General Adviser stressed that PROCMURA is a Christian organisation that stretches a hand of friendship to the Muslim community and highlighted the two operating principles of the organisation. Dr. Mbillah went on and explained that the organisation’s activities are implemented through four different programmes which he elaborated. In the elaboration, he stated that each of the four programmes has a particular target group and focus with diverse issues, and observed however that some issues can cut across the different programmes but with different emphasis such as peace and HIV/AIDS among others. Before concluding the presentation, Dr. Mbillah indicated that PROCMURA collaborates with ecumenical and interfaith structures as well as Muslims and Islamic organisation.

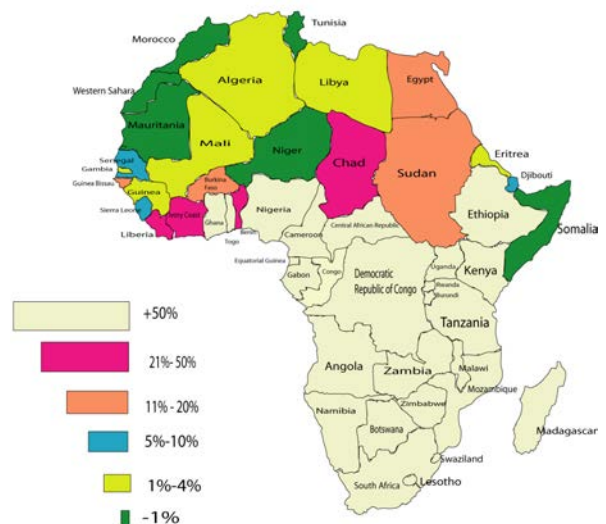
### 2.2 Christianity and Islam in Africa: A General Survey

In this presentation, the General Adviser, Rev. Dr. Mbillah went through the religious history of Africa in terms of Islam and Christianity. He pointed to the fact that during his childhood, Jesus was sent to Africa (Egypt) to escape the massive killing of new born babies by King Herod (Mtt 2:13-15); while conversely, the followers of Mohammed the prophet of Islam were sent to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) when faced with persecutions. This was to show that both religions at one point or the other in history sought refuge in the African continent, hence Africa serving as a land of protection for them. Dr. Mbillah rounded that up by saying that arguably, the presence of baby Jesus and that of the first converts of Islam definitely set the spiritual pace for the Christian and Muslim presence in Africa. He then moved to present the religious map of Africa and said that according to independent sources, followers of both religions constitute 89.2% of the continent population with various concentration; either majority in one part or minority on the other. Dr. Mbillah also highlighted the challenges for Christians and Muslims in terms of mission and identity.

MUSLIM POPULATION (Islamic Foundation ,Leicester, UK)



CHRISTIAN POPULATION (World Christian Encyclopedia)



### **2.3 Peace and Peaceful Coexistence between Christians and Muslims: Prospects and Challenges**

The General Adviser started his presentation with an elaboration on the fact that religious leaders are or should be agents of peace in the continent. He then stressed that for peace to prevail in the wider society, it is paramount and inevitable that there is peace between the two religions. On that, the General Adviser stated that there are evidence to suggest that Christian-Muslim relations in Africa face a number of challenges relating to peace and peaceful coexistence. Such challenges were elaborated under the phenomenon of ; Negative religious expansionist policies, politicisation of religion, Globalisation or internationalisation , importation or exportation of conflicts and the challenge of translating good precepts in religion into good practice in every day life.

He concluded his presentation by urging religious leaders (Christians and Muslims) to advocate for peace by example. He also reminded the leaders that looking at how the continent is shaped religiously speaking, both group have to find ways of collaboration to address some of the pertinent issues that the continent is faced with.



## 3.0 GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND REPORTS

### 3.1 Group discussions

After the opening ceremony and the various presentations, participants went for lunch break. In the afternoon, the participants were divided into four groups and set themselves for discussions so as to allow everybody to reflect on the various issues that arose in the morning session. The following questions were to be discussed:

- a- Identify issues of common concern to religious leaders in Malawi and discuss how you can collaborate to attend to them?
- b- What are the things that cause friction between Christians and Muslims in Malawi and what can be done about it?
- c- How do we see ourselves? African Muslims or Christians, Muslim or Christian Africans? Who are we?

### 3.2 Group reports



Participants in group discussions



## 4.0 DAY TWO

### 4.1 Overview of the situation in Nigeria



Rev. Dr. Mbillah explaining the Nigeria predicament

In sub Saharan Africa, Nigeria is one of the countries that have registered repeated unrest between Christians and Muslims, especially in the northern part of the country. This has led to great economic instability as well as an atmosphere of insecurity and consequently a hindrance to proper development projects in the region. Due to the violent nature of the ethno-religious conflicts in the country, which often take the form of riots, sabotage, assassination, armed struggles, guerrilla warfare and secession, we could affirm with no doubt that there are implications for political and economic development

of the country and thus making it an important issue that should be taken seriously.

Dr. Mbillah elaborated on the recent killings that the country experienced in the Plateau State in early 2010 and at the moment across the northern states perpetrated mainly by the Islamic sect of Boko haram. He made a distinction that the Plateau State tragedy was not by the Boko Haram but was rather a complex situation with multiple root causes.

He explained that the Nigerian situation is of great concern to PROCMURA because despite the fact that PROCMURA has taken preventive measures to promote the spirit of positive difference and acceptance of one another with his or her differences, tension between adherents of the two faith communities continue to rise, and any single mistake from one side or even an issue that came about from any other sphere other than religion could bring about killings among the members of the two group. He elucidated that following the violent conflict that erupted early last year in the Plateau State, PROCMURA had organised a religious leaders conference for peace and peaceful coexistence, where five states were brought together to discuss and deliberate on the situation in Northern Nigeria so as to stop the endless killings and root for respect of the sanity of life in all situations. From the discussion, it was clear that the clashes may be bearing a religious face; but it was observed however that, the issue is more of socio-economic and ethno-religious.

Concerning Boko Haram's actions, the General Adviser said that the group's official name is "*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*", which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". As such, though the group was anti-western ideals and wanted Shari'a law to be practiced in Nigeria especially in the north, it was noted that the group was non-violent since 2002 when it was created until the arrest and killing of its founder and leader Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. According to Dr. Mbillah the police made a mistake by killing Yusuf; because all the actions of the group now are revenge for the killing of their leader.

### 4.2 Clip showing the violence in Nigeria

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the General Adviser was on his way to Jos, Nigeria when it was reported that there was a bomb blast in the Church of Christ in Nigeria popularly none as COCIN. That of course changed the itinerary of the General Adviser who was delayed at the Lagos domestic Airport, because flights to and from Jos were cancelled following the unfortunate incident. After two days, and in collaboration with the organisers of the two meetings he decided to change the venue of the meeting to Kaduna. In Kaduna, Dr. Mbillah held a meeting with the Chairman of PROCMURA, Bishop Josiah Idowu Fearon and a number of Christian and Muslim Leaders. He also had an extraordinary PROCMURA Area Committee meeting where

members of the Nigerian West and Nigeria North Area Committees held discussions in the view of mapping out the way forward towards making a contribution to finding sustainable solutions to the problem that has engulfed the Northern part of the country; a situation which seems to become the norm.

While in the heart of the tumult, the General Adviser decided to see for himself all that the media has been reporting. He was able to collect few evidences depicting the situation as it is on the ground. As such the following were shown to the participants with no comments.

<b>TIMELINE OF INCIDENTS</b>	
7 September 2010	Bauchi prison break
31 December 2010	December 2010 Abuja attack
22 April 2011	Boko Haram frees 14 prisoners during a jailbreak in Yola, Adama-wa State
29 May 2011	Northern Nigeria bombing
16 June 2011	Abuja police headquarter bombing, Boko Haram claims responsibility for the attack
26 June 2011	Bombing attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri
10 July 2011	Bombing at the All Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja
12 August 2011	Prominent Muslim Cleric Liman Bana is shot dead

#### **4.3 Closing Remarks**

The pace for the closing ceremony was set by the General Secretary of the Malawi Council of Churches, Rev. Dr. Osborne Joda-Mbewe when he announced the arrival of the Vice Chairperson of the Council, Rev. Bossman S. Chitheka. During the ceremony, three closing remarks were given. But before the closing remarks, Dr. Osborne took time to appreciate the team that came from Nairobi and appreciated the financial support that the PROCMURA’s Central Office extended to the Council which led to the organisation of the workshop. He also expressed gratitude to Muslim leaders for making out time to honour the Council’s invitation and for their active participation with very objective contributions.

Last but not least, Dr. Osborne thanked the Church leaders who were present for leaving their busy schedules and participate at two-day meeting. He concluded his closing remarks by saying that all was very helpful for the presentations and the contributions led to fruitful constructive discussions during which pertinent issues were raised and addressed.



## ***The Area Committee Chairperson – Rev. Ted Mwambila***

Rev. Ted Mwambila followed Dr. Osborne in offering gratitude and appreciation to the Central Office Team as well as for the financial support. He also congratulated the Muslim leaders for taking seriously the invitation extended to them by the MCC. Above all, he was very grateful and thankful to the General Secretary of the Christian Council, Rev. Dr. Osborne whom he said single handedly approached the Nairobi Office and ironed out the possibility of holding a joint meeting for the religious leaders and the women; and saw to it that it was implemented. Rev. Ted recalled that the last time the Central Office was around and an activity held in Malawi was in 2007. In his conclusion, he humbly urged the Vice Chairperson of the MCC to ensure that the link that has once again been created between the Nairobi Office and the Christian Council is maintained and sustained for further collaboration.

## ***The General Adviser of PROCMURA- Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah***



**Rev. Dr. Mbillah standing speaking and beside are Rev. Bossman and Dr. Osborne**

The PROCMURA General Adviser in turn commended the Chairperson of the PROCMURA Area Committee in Malawi and echoed that he is a very engaged and committed member of PROCMURA Executive Committee; and that even at times when he was faced with serious difficulties on matters of health, that did not prevent him from participating in important meetings that were meant to shape the future of the organisation. Dr. Mbillah also applauded the MCC General Secretary Dr. Osborne whom he qualified as a very energetic and committed person. He recalled that Dr. Osborne approached him during the joint meeting for religious leaders on Climate Justice and Sustainable Peace that was organised in Nairobi by PROCMURA, the AACC and SAFCEI.

Dr. Osborne insisted that it has been long since the Central Office organised an activity in Malawi and that it was about time that plans are worked out for many more activities of PROCMURA to resume in the country. The General Secretary's persistence made him and PROCMURA's finance office to decide and work out ways and means to organise the just concluded activities.

To the participants, Dr. Mbillah said that it is important that what has been discussed and what they have learnt is implemented at community and grassroots levels, for that is the only way to make a positive impact with difference among our people as belonging to different religious group yet capable of working together for a better Malawian society.

## ***Remarks by the Vice Chairperson of the MCC - Rev. Bossman S. Chitheka***



**Rev. Bossman S. Chitheka, Vice Chairperson of the Malawi Council of Churches**

In his remarks, Rev. Bossman observed that even though there has been peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Malawi since independence, a meeting of this nature is a first in the history of the MCC. As such, he qualified the workshop as special and unique. Special because the leaders were not only discussing Christian and Islamic issues, but was also setting an important platform and discourse in strengthening Christian-Muslim Relations in Malawi. He then said that he is seeing the meeting as unique for the reason that leaders of both groups aim not to bury their different theological directions, but they want to understand them better for the benefit of the communities that they serve. Rev. Bossman reminded participants that, in both Christianity and Islam, in his understanding, as people, we are way below God or Allah, and as such, we have no reason to kill others in His name.

He observed that what he just said makes the meeting key for the religious (Christians and Muslims) leaders because they can cut out an informed discourse at community and National level. To conclude, he called on participants to tolerate each others' religious differences and embrace them for peace and development to exist; he then declared the meeting officially closed.

## 5.0 PRESS CONFERENCE

The MCC informed the media of the event. The media was keen to know what can Christians and Muslims discuss together and why was Malawi chosen by PROCMURA; what is PROCMURA, why was it created and since when. To get answers to those questions and also satisfy their curiosity, the National Radio and two people from the press booked for a press conference that was later held at the end of the session and Dr. Mbillah, Rev. Bossman, Rev. Ted Mwambila and Dr. Osborne responded to their questions.

Thus, after the closing ceremony, the three journalists came in and put forward their questions one after the other trying to let the organisers respond to questions that might be going through the mind of the common Malawian.

### Questions:

**Journalist:** *To Dr. Mbillah, why Malawi and why at this particular time?*



Rev. Dr. Mbillah and Rev. Bossman interviewed by the press

**Dr Mbillah:** We are thankful to God that Malawi has gone through a peaceful transition since president Bingu Wa Mutharika died and the new President, Her Excellency Mrs. Joyce Banda took over. There are countries where religious misunderstandings have found an ally in politics to cause violence and bloodshed on innocent people. Those people who kill in the name of God or Allah are condemned to hell because humans have no business to protect God. We, as humans, are way below God to defend Him, and judgement should be left to God alone. PROCMURA is here not to convert Muslims into Christianity. Neither is it here to convert Christians to Islam. We are here extending a hand of friendship to our Muslim brothers and sisters so that together we can make Africa a better place to live. Africa is a continent of peace

that is why Jesus as a baby was brought to Africa to escape Herod also, Muhammad's disciples escaped to Africa fearing persecutions. Africa is therefore a continent of faith. Malawi is not alone on this programme that has just ended; in fact we should say that we are late in coming to Malawi.

For sometimes now, having realised that the phenomena of negative solidarity as well as conflict globalisation were taking root in our continent, PROCMURA which is a Pan African organisation embarked on peace, conflict prevention and reconciliation conferences for Christian and Muslim leaders so as to find ways in which peace and peaceful coexistence is preserved and maintained for countries and ensure that Muslims and Christians are at peace with each other; and to find sustainable solutions to places where it is difficult for the two groups to tolerate each other. As a result of , a conference for East and Southern Africa was organised for the leaders of the two faith communities in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2008. The outcome of the conference was to be implemented as way forward at country level. This is the time for Malawi.

**Journalist:** *A word on the Nigerian situation*

**Dr. Mbillah:** We see that religious misunderstandings have resulted in many deaths and destruction of property. In Nigeria, people are killing each other in the name of God or Allah. This is outrageous and should be condemned. Why are Africans killing each other by importing evil, by fighting proxy wars and by believing their faith is better than the others'? We should all know that Christians and Muslims cannot extinguish the other and must therefore co-exist within their differences and God's will,

**Journalist:** *To Rev. Bossman Suzumile Chitheka, what would you say about this event?*

**Rev. Bossman:** We as Christians are together with Muslims in the civil society and other areas, including politics where we provide advice. We are together in the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), an interfaith organisation that speaks on behalf of Malawians in times of need. We are also together in the Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association where we deal with issues of health. We also work together in other core areas of education and climate change. This is a clear testimony of the good relations that we enjoy and need to be strengthened through programmes such as PROCMURA. In addition, as we meet at leadership level, we certainly needed some clear guidelines on how to let the wonderful joint work that we are doing flow to our members and have them do the same at community level without compromising their faith.

**Journalist:** *Does it mean that though you are doing things together your differences still stand?*

**Rev. Bossman:** All we vouch for is to exist together despite our theological interpretations, differences and beliefs. We must learn to preach without insulting each other. This is important and we want all levels of the two faiths to buy the PROCMURA spirit.

**Journalist:** *To Dr. Mbillah, your last word?*

**Dr. Mbillah:** The key question that we are usually faced with is that of our identity. People are both, Christian or Muslim Malawians Africans human beings and Malawian African human beings that are Christians and Muslims. It is therefore imperative that we embrace the two 'beings' as a people and work to live with our religious differences in peace. We have to accept that we are both in these and cannot push each other out of existence. We are one, Christianity teaches peace and Islam talks peace.

My plea to Malawians is that they understand this and rise beyond petty religious differences rest we turn into another hot violence spot on the continent. A quarrel between a Christian and Muslim women at a market place can easily erupt into a national bloodletting experience between the two. We must therefore respect each other's faiths and understand our differences to avoid chaos.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it should be said that this is another foundation stone that PROCMURA has managed to place in the edifice of peace that it has been building in Africa so as to ensure a continent free of conflict and tensions based on religious differences. PROCMURA believes that sustainable development is achievable in Africa if among other issues, Christian and Muslims live at peace with each other, because if they form 89% of the continent population, it is obvious that they constitute a non-negligible force.