

# THE POLITICS OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE NIGERIAN SUPREME COUNCIL FOR ISLAMIC AFFAIRS (NSCIA)

By:  
Saheed Ahmad Rufai\*

## Abstract

*Nigeria is a leading African country with a Muslim majority population. Yet Nigerian Muslims, since the spread of Islam to the country in the thirteenth century, had continued to operate in disarray and were never known to have spoken in one voice until the founding of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) in 1973. This paper traces the origins of the Nigerian Muslims' quest for a united front and articulates the factors that informed their clamour for such a platform. The paper enumerates the early initiatives of the Council and its attitudes to various political crises in the country especially that which ensued after the annulment by former President Ibrahim Babangida of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections widely believed to have been overwhelmingly won by a Vice President-General of the Council, Alhaji Moshood Abiola. The paper relies more on primary sources and oral information formally collected from a number of individuals who were not only eye witnesses but also dramatic personae in the politics of Islamic leadership in contemporary Nigeria, owing to the dearth of sophisticated scholarship on the subject. So far, references to the effects of leadership crises on Islamic leadership in the country, have been broad, loose and general so much that they can hardly be related to a particular political experience or put in a specific perspective. The paper employs a philosophical method in its historical analysis and concludes by evaluating the activities of the Council and concluding that it is fast becoming moribund.*

**Keywords:** *Muslim politics; Islamic leadership; Nigerian Muslims; Historical Analysis on Muslim Representation; the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.*

## Introduction

In the year 1973, an assembly of all Muslim leaders in Nigeria was convened in the City of Kaduna under the auspices of *Jamatu-Nasril-Islam* (JNI) which is the umbrella body for all the Islamic organizations in Northern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Kaduna in that year played host to an unprecedentedly large crowd of Muslim leaders from

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\* Saheed Ahmad Rufai is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria. He can be contact through his email: [ahmadrufaisaheed@yahoo.com](mailto:ahmadrufaisaheed@yahoo.com)

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Dr. L. O. Adegbite, Lagos, August, 1996

different parts of the country who had all come overlooking the remoteness of their various locations. The main issue meant for discussion at the historic assembly was the timeliness of the fulfillment of the long felt need for an all-embracing central Islamic Council for the Nigerian Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

The assembly wanted the proposed Council to "act as a bridge between the various Muslim communities in Nigeria and also enable Muslims to speak to the government of the day in one voice on matters concerning Islam."<sup>3</sup> The emergence Of the Council in 1973 has been described as "the culmination of many years of tireless efforts to get Muslims in this country under one central organization." A major contributory factor in the quick formulation of the Council was the Nigerian Muslims' failure to speak with one voice at an international Islamic Conference held in Libya earlier in the same year and to which various Islamic organisations were invited from Nigeria. Every Nigerian delegate at the conference rose strongly to protect the interest of his own organisation and not that of the generality of the Nigerian Muslims whereas their counterparts from other countries found no strain in making common presentations. Back at home, a quick move was made towards the fulfillment of the need for a central Islamic body which was formally inaugurated as Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) in 1974. The Nigerian Muslims have since the inauguration of the Council in 1974, been able to "debate, discuss and state at the Federal level, their point of view on such matters as education and the law."<sup>4</sup> The body unites the Nigerian Muslims and coordinates the aspirations and activities of all Muslim Communities, organisations and individuals in the country. The Council is registered under the Laws of Nigerian like many of the religious bodies and is being accorded recognition by both the Federal and State Governments as the umbrella by for the Nigerian Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

Given the importance of constitutional stipulations to the administration of such a Central Council, a former Attorney-General in the Old Western State of Nigeria who later rose to become Secretary-General of the Council, Dr. Abdul-Lateef Adegbite, was appointed Chairman of the Committee which drafted the Constitution of the apex Islamic body, while former Sultan of Sokoto who was then the Secretary-General of *Jamatu-Nasril-Islam*, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki was appointed Secretary. The drafting exercise took place at Green Spring hotel, Ibadan in Oyo State where the Committee met several times in 1974, in a bid to prepare the Constitution.<sup>6</sup> There was a serious argument over the office of the President-General which the constitution reserves for the Sultan of Sokoto who is

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> For details of the mission of the NSCIA, see, the Constitution and the Report of the Task Force on Reorganisation, approved in Ibadan on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Peter B. Clarke (1982), *West Africa and Islam*, London: Edward Arnold Publishers, p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> See, the Constitution (NSCIA) *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dr. Lateef Adegbite, *op. cit.*

believed to be the descendant of Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio. The Chairman was of the opinion that the Southern Muslims would prefer an elective leadership while Secretary maintained that the office should be an exclusive preserve of the Sultan.<sup>7</sup> After several adjournments and meetings, the Southern Muslims accepted the arrangement as a sacrifice for the sustenance of unity among the Nigerian Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Yet the Chairman later fashioned out an impressive statement that “the Sultan of Sokoto, Sarkin Musulumi, shall be invited to assume the leadership of the Council as President-General.”<sup>9</sup> Such a provision appears to have logically taken care of a situation where there is a Sultan who is not well disposed to Islam and the Muslims or who is not acceptable to the Nigerian Muslim Community.

The foundation President-General of the Council was therefore the then Sultan of Sokoto, late Sultan Abubakr Siddiq II. All the other principal offices of the Council were also reserved for the northern part of the country as the Deputy President-General is constitutionally the Shehu of Borno. Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki who later rose to become Sultan of Sokoto was made the Secretary-General on account of a request by the late Sultan who felt that Alhaji Dasuki had been functioning as Secretary-General in the north-based *Jamatu-Nasril- Islam* of which he was President-General and as such would not find any strain in working with him on the Council.<sup>10</sup> Yet former Minister of Works late Alhaji Isa Kaita, also a northerner, was appointed National Treasurer. That explains why late Alhaji Aminu Kano, a prominent Northern Muslim politician, sought to know from the leaders of the Council the extent to which such a distribution of leadership positions could be regarded as representative of the Nigerian Muslims. The question he raised prompted a critical reconsideration as the office of the National Legal Adviser was quickly created for Dr. Lateef Adegbite, who himself chaired the Constitution Drafting Committee. This probably served as a compensation or consolation for the Southern Muslims from among whom ought to have emerged the Deputy President-General and the Secretary-General, at least, to strike a balance between the two regions more so that the leader of the Southern Muslims was responsible for the generation of the idea of a central Islamic body in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

### **Early Initiatives of the NSCIA**

The Council, since its inception, has been using its position to protect the interest of the Muslims. One of the instances concerning this was when the then government of the Western State decided to face out Advance Level (Higher

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> This is only a personal observation by the present writer.

School Certificate) arrangement from the Ijebu Muslim College, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State. The government had selected only ten schools for that exercise and none of them was a Muslim school. The Muslims felt a serious sense of injustice and, as such, reacted promptly; the Islamic Council sent a protest delegation to the government of the old Western State. The Council was later to politely suggest to the Chief Executive of the State to either kindly add one more school to the list of schools or make the arrangement effective from the following year. The Governor promised to think about it and eventually did well on the matter.<sup>12</sup>

Another experience of similar nature was recalled by a renowned Media executive and former Editor of *The Punch*, Alhaji Liad Tella who faced some persecution at Baptist High School, Iwo in the then Oyo State where he was taking a Higher School Certificate programme.<sup>13</sup> The Muslim Students in the School were horrendously oppressed as no provision was made for the teaching or practice of Islam. Young Liad Tella sold the idea of forming a branch of the Muslim Students' Society (MSS) in the school, to his colleagues who readily embraced it.<sup>14</sup> The Muslim Students became incredibly organised and began to speak in one indivisible voice. The School authorities soon began to feel threatened and insecure and wasted no time in setting up a panel to fish out all the students involved in the activities of the MSS. Being a frontliner in the effort, young Tella was pencilled down for expulsion. As a result, he too wasted no time in contacting M. O. A. Abdul, who was then a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan. The professor later took him to the Secretariat where they stated the case before the Attorney-General and Commissioner of Justice, Dr. Lateef Adegbite who, incidentally was then the Legal Adviser of the apex Islamic body. The Attorney-General later intimated the Commissioner for Education about the development. On the following day, the school principal involved received a letter from the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Education concerning why no student should be compelled to embrace a religion other than that of his parents.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the position of the Council as presented by its Legal Adviser was respected and the student was reinstated.<sup>16</sup>

### **The NSCIA in Quest for a Truly Multi-Religious Nigeria**

The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs has always enjoyed an adequate representation at various levels in the country. So when the Constitution

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<sup>12</sup> Any critical observer will probably find no strain in detecting that it is characteristic of Dr. L. O. Adegbite to defend Islam in the face of any form of oppression.

<sup>13</sup> Alhaji Liad Tella discussed this issue with the present writer in a casual interaction at MITV Plaza, Alausa, Ikeja, September, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Drafting Committee was inaugurated by the Federal Government to commence its work in 1975, the Council was actively involved in its deliberations. Of particular interest to the Council in the proposed section of the constitution on the state and its fundamental objectives, was the suggestion that Nigeria be described as "One and indivisible sovereign Republic, secular, democratic and social". Prompting the Committee to drop the term "secular", scholars, intellectuals, public commentators, and opinion leaders began to debate over the appropriateness or otherwise of describing Nigeria as a "secular" state. The Council insisted that Nigeria could not be a secular state in that the concept "Secularism" concerns the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to well-being of mankind in this present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God and argued that Nigeria is a multi-religious state for it recognises religions and not even single one religion. The Council also elucidated that Nigeria is neither a theocratic state like Saudi-Arabia and a host of other states nor a secular state like Turkey, and even illustrated with the point that the Nigerian government facilitates pilgrimages (to the holy lands), provides for the teaching of religious studies in schools, and declares public holidays for religious festivals. It was further argued by the Council that the Nigerians have a work-free day on Sunday because Christians are required to worship on that day owing to the insistence of their religion that the day be work-free and that the government also recognises the Vatican and allows them to have an ambassador in Nigeria and in response, sent an ambassador to the state of Vatican. In a similar token was it argued that the Government declares national days of prayers either in Christian Churches or in the Mosques and concluded that it would be hypocritical to say that Nigeria is a secular state and therefore should have nothing to do with religion.<sup>17</sup>

The Shariah question was another issue that generated a heated debate in the Constituent Assembly in 1978. During this period, the Council did not equivocate in pronouncing that Shariah is an inseparable part of Islam and that the Muslims should not be deprived of living and operating in line with the stipulations of their religion. It enjoined the non-Muslims to eschew intolerance by stating profoundly that "once two or more communities are united by political bonds sanctified by the constitution which is a fundamental treaty of permanent brotherhood, common action and destiny, it would not only be criminal but a grievous sin in Islam for the terms of the treaty to be violated by acts of discrimination and intolerance."<sup>18</sup> It articulated the beauty of Shariah and even argued that "aspects of Islamic commercial law, of Islamic law on theft, properly understood, might well find a place in the Nigerian code of law and be of benefit to the country as a whole."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Peter B. Clarke (1982), *op.cit.* pp. 249-257

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> For details, see, *Weekend Vanguard*, January 18, 1997, cover story

The resistance of the moves to introduce the Shariah Court of Appeal into the federal constitution led to a walk-out by eighty-eight Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari who later became Nigeria's first executive president in 1979. The then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo (retired and later Nigeria's Civilian President) intervened to appeal to the members to let wise counsel prevail and not to allow "personal feelings and sectional interest to override the need to fashion a new constitution that will be flexible and workable as well as guarantee the existence of our great nation."<sup>20</sup> The general impression was that the speech read by the Head of State pricked the conscience of the members of the Assembly and navigated a good way for the provisions under the 1979 constitution making the establishment of shariah court of appeal by the states voluntary.<sup>21</sup>

The Council was also represented at the 1989 Constituent Assembly when the Shariah question arose again on account of the fact that the non-Muslims were not only opposed to the idea of the Shariah Court of Appeal but also determined to "wipe out the gains the Muslims made in the 1979 constitution". The Council has always maintained that "no rational government would deviate from the constitution for no one would deliberately want to destabilize its country."<sup>22</sup> At the end of it all the position of Shariah in 1989 remained the same as what it was in 1979. Yet it was a partial success for the real idea almost materialised.

### **The NSCIA and the OIC Connection**

The leadership traits inherent in most of the executive members of the NSCIA were later appreciated by the government of the day. In 1986, for instance, some of them were appointed by former Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida as members of the presidential commission on the implications of Nigeria's membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).<sup>23</sup> The Commission chaired by the then Internal Affairs Minister. Lt. Col. John Shagaya and inaugurated by the Head of State on the 3rd of February, 1986, comprised alongside the leaders of the NSCIA former Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Prof. Nurudeen Alao, Archbishop Olubunmi Okogie of the Catholic Mission, Pastor Alexander Bada of the Celestial Church, former Grand Qadi of Niger State Shaykh Ahmad Lemu and others.<sup>24</sup>

The OIC question had earlier generated a heated debate as some non-Muslims grew "hypertensive" over Nigerian's membership of the body. The NSCIA quickly came out again to correct the wrong impression created that Nigeria is a

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<sup>20</sup> Peter B. Clarke (1982), *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> This is yet another observation by the present writer.

<sup>22</sup> See, *West Africa and Islam, op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> See, *Weekend Vanguard, op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> L.O Adegbite's Bio-data: Public Service, "Religious Activities"

secular state and therefore should not associate with groups of state that have a religious platform. The Council also enjoined Nigerians to discard that erroneous belief and be watchful and alert that no attempt is made for any group to gain an undue advantage over the other. It also stated that it is very sad that people believe that being Christian group or an Islamic group is inimical to the interest of Nigerians. The Council instanced the memberships of Sierra-Leone, Uganda and Gabon, the three being countries with insignificant proportions of Muslims in their population. The Council emphasised that people should stop fearing Islam, a religion of peace which has no hidden agenda.<sup>25</sup> "We must look at the aims and objectives of the OIC, in order for us to appreciate the implication of Nigeria's membership," the Council submitted.<sup>26</sup> When asked why the benefits being expected from the body have taken so long in coming to Nigeria, the Secretary-General of the Council answered that the country is a full member which is not active enough in the Islamic Development Bank which, itself, is "where lies the beef."<sup>27</sup> If a country claims to be a full member and is not active enough in the activities of the body, according to the Secretary-General, it should not expect to get all the benefits.<sup>28</sup> By the time Nigeria joins the Islamic Development Bank we shall begin to receive soft loans and attract social, health, economic and other projects to this country which will benefit all Nigerians whether Muslims or Christians.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Challenge of Political Crises**

The Federal Government of Nigeria appointed a number of the executive members of the NSCIA unto the Advisory Council on Religious Affairs in Nigeria,<sup>30</sup> established in 1987 by Decree and consisting of twelve (12) Muslim and Christian leaders. One of the objectives of the Council was to consider the possibility of resolving all religious crises. It was wisely thought that the body would be well run by joint chairmanship an arrangement to which the Military government of General Ibrahim Babangida never consented as it only favoured the idea of one chairman, who was the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Lt. Col. Shagaya who was very focused and energetic in steering the ship of the Council. His successors were probably not favourably disposed to the activities of the body which was supposed to be supported and serviced by the Chief Executive of the Internal Affairs Ministry. However, the Advisory Body has got into a state of lethargy and is today more or less moribond, as its impact is hardly felt now

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Lateef Adegbite was specially thanked for his enormous contribution in this regard in the Brochure/Souvenir of the National Mosque complex, dated Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> See, *Weekend Vanguard*, *op. cit*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> See, *Newswatch*, February 24, 1986, pp. 14-15.

anywhere in the country.<sup>31</sup>

The NSCIA seemed to have reached the peak of its glory and the zenith of its strength with the demise in 1989 of its foundation President-General, Sultan Siddiq Abubakr III. The mantle of its overall leadership was thereafter passed unto Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, the hitherto Secretary-General who automatically rose to become President-General on account of his appointment as the new Sultan of Sokoto. As Alhaji Dasuki became Sultan and President-General, Dr. Abdul-Lateef Adegbite who was hitherto the Legal Adviser of the Council, was appointed to occupy the vacancy of the office of the Secretary-General, created by Dasuki's elevation to the throne.

The greatest test or trial came for the apex Islamic body when the 1993 Presidential elections believed to be the freest and fairest in the history of the country and overwhelmingly won by Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola who incidentally was a Vice-President of the Council. In the morning of June 23, Nduka Irabor, at the time, the Chief Press Secretary to the Vice President went on air to announce the cancellation of the election which had been held since the 12th of June, 1993. The Nigerian people naturally expected the apex body to hit hard on the Babangida administration over that unjust move but that was never to be as it (the Council) maintained what could be aptly described as "an embarrassing silence."<sup>32</sup> It kept mute for so long that some began to think that its leaders found it difficult to take a common standpoint. In an early newspaper review on Radio in 1994, a statement was credited to the then Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the apex body, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki enjoining the undeclared winner of the June 12 elections to accept the annulment as "an act of God." The Secretary-General wasted no time in phoning the Sultan for confirmation of what was credited to him.<sup>33</sup> He (the Sultan), too claimed to have been trying to reach him on phone. The scribe sought to know from the Sultan whether he said so or not. The Sultan said he never made such a statement and that he even wanted to ask Secretary-General whether he instructed the Administrative Secretary of the Council to make a release on "our behalf."<sup>34</sup> The Secretary-General would hardly believe that Sultan could say so more so that he had sharply denied it stressing that "Islam teaches us to stand by justice and not to partake in oppression and cheating. It must be a forgery in the Sultan's name", the scribe of the Council reasoned.<sup>35</sup> *The Tell Magazine* was later to devote a cover story to how "*June 12 divides Muslims*" by stating clearly why the versatile Secretary-General would never subscribe to the "act of God" pronouncement attributed to the President-

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Dr. Lateef Adegbite, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

General.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the June 12 crisis more or less affected the inter-personal relationship of the two leaders of the apex body.<sup>37</sup>

The Secretary-General, on behalf of the Council, dispelled beyond any reasonable doubt the insinuations that Muslim leaders are indifferent about political crises in the country especially the June 12 issue. He made several releases and presented many position papers in stating why the Babangida government and later the Abacha administration would only be committing "a daylight robbery" by depriving Chief M.K.O. Abiola of his right to the presidency having won overwhelmingly.<sup>38</sup> He made it clear in several ways that Muslim leaders felt very strongly about the annulment of the election results. Stressing that it was not only a daylight robbery but also the mother of all rigging which no Muslim will accept, he established that he and other Muslims leaders would continue to speak in the hope that government will have a change of mind. He however explained that it was impossible for emirs and sultans who play both religious and political roles to sound confrontational to the government because they are also part of it. "Till today other religious leaders who do not play political role still raise the issues of truth and justice with respect to the annulment of June 12, even in their sermons," he added saying that it is not as if Muslim leaders with religious and political responsibilities tolerate injustice.<sup>39</sup>

The Council even stated in some newspaper publications how its members and other Muslim leaders in the country advised the Head of State to release Chief M.K.O. Abiola from detention for a round-table talk on the way out of the logjam and promised that since they had not seen "positive signs" they would continue to make representations to government on the imperative of direct dialogue with Chief Abiola. After five years of continued incarceration Chief M.K.O. Abiola, a Vice President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, died in prison. Nigerians later recalled publicity with deep grief the life and times of this great Muslim personality "who gave so much to make others happy and who contributed enormously to the development of Nigeria and the uplift of the African and the Blackman wherever they may be. Islam occupied a special spot in his heart as was evident in the immense support he gave to Islam causes nationwide."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See, *TELL*, October 10, 1994, Cover Story.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Dr. L. O. Adegbite, Lagos, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See, Tribute to the late Alhaji (Chief) M.K.O Abiola, Baba Adinni of Yoruba land and Vice President –General, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) by Dr. Lateef Adegbite, Baba Adinni and Seriki of Egba land, Secretary – General, NSCIA, at 40<sup>th</sup> day Fidau Prayers held by Ogun State Chapter of NSCIA on Wednesday, August 19, 1998, at Abeokuta, 2000.

## **An Evaluative Look at the NSCIA**

The enviable leadership qualities possessed by various individuals involved in steering the ship of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs have been attested to by some of those who were close to the Council. For instance, the late Wazirin Minna, Alhaji Umar Audi who, as noted earlier, arranged for Dr. Abdul-Lateef Adegbite in 1971 the meeting with late Sultan of Sokoto, that culminated in the founding of NSCIA, later observed that the Council was blessed, from its inception, with leaders who never refused to sacrifice even their career for Islam.<sup>41</sup> The leadership of the body was carefully observed over the years and has been described as having been constituted by qualities of someone who is sincerely interested in Islam, the welfare of the Muslim *ummah* and peaceful coexistence between the Muslims and non-Muslims in Nigeria. Their utterances, as recorded in newspapers from time to time, are always consistent and clearly indicative of their understanding and refinement.<sup>42</sup> They have even been described as "a result-oriented individuals, efficient operators, great achievers, sincere Muslim leaders who are full of energy and dedication."<sup>43</sup> However, there are other Muslim personalities who believe that the leaders of the NSCIA are fond of making unnecessary compromise to the favour of the non-Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Yet others see them as fulfilling satisfactorily the role of bridge-builders between the south and the north.<sup>45</sup>

It is saddening to note that the apex Islamic body does not earn a pass mark in the estimation of some of its leaders who see it as performing poorly owing to "structural defects, weak administrative backup, poor funding, lack of full national acceptance, and insufficient commitment of its members".<sup>46</sup> The Muslims in the southern part of the country have long ago been questioning the idea of making the Office of the President-General of the Council an exclusive preserve of the Sultan of Sokoto in the north while the Office of the Deputy President-General is also reserved exclusively for the Shehu of Borno also in the north whereas the south was only considered for the Office of the Secretary-General after much pressure, following the elevation of Alhaji Dasuki to the position of President-General by virtue of his installation as the Sultan of Sokoto. This explains why a relationship of hostility has persisted between the Council and the League of

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with the late Wasirin Minna, Alhaji Umaru Audi, Minna, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Shaykh Ahmad Lemu, Islamic Education Trust (IET) Headquarters, Minna, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with the Emir of Bida (Estu Nupe), Alhaji Umaru Ndayako, Emir's Palace, Bida, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with the Makaman Nupe, Alhaji Shehu Ahmadu Musa, Saka Tinubu Street, Lagos Saturday, March 29, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Hon. Justice Bashir Sambo, Federal Secretariat Complex, Abuja (FCT), April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Alhaji Sulaiman Onyeama, Enugu, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1997.

Imams and Alfas operating in the south-western part of the country.<sup>47</sup>

Yet it is worthy of mention that nothing is meaningfully heard about either of these two organizations except, of course, when it comes to the announcement of the date of the commencement or termination of Ramadan fast. There indeed is more to the propagation of Islam than moon-sighting. Concerning the question of leadership in the organization, Nigerian Muslims seem to be favourably disposed to the idea of a further zoning of the Council's offices by providing for an additional Deputy President-General with a view to zoning this to the Western states. This arrangement "would deflate the contention of those who feel that the distribution of key offices of the Council is lop-sided."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the Office of Secretary-General will be zoned to the Southern states to balance the position of the President-General which, as stated earlier, is permanently reserved for the Sultan of Sokoto. The most impressive recommendation being made by Muslims in various part of the country is that it be added to the constitution as part of the aims and objectives of the Council that it be responsible for the co-ordination of Da'wah in Nigeria. One finds no strain in subscribing to such an idea and wonders why the Council can be competent to lay claim to being in charge of Islamic Affairs in the country without having any viable Da'wah programme.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has traced the evolution of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and enumerated its early initiatives and activities. The paper gave specific details of some of the Council's roles in protecting the interest of the Muslims at home and abroad. The paper also gave a clear picture of the survival strategies employed by the Council in the face of political crises especially that which greeted the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections. The paper concluded with an appraisal of the leadership of the body alongside its current role and degree of relevance in the country, and also offered some ameliorative proposal as a way out of the current lethargic condition of the Council.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Alhaji Salami Edobo Lawal, Benin City, Edo State, March 21<sup>st</sup> 1997.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, a Memorandum submitted by Dr. Lateef Adegbite, the Seriki of Egbas, to the National Constitutional Conference Commission p.5. See, also, *THISDAY*, vol. 2. 331, Monday, March 18, 1996, p. 17.

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