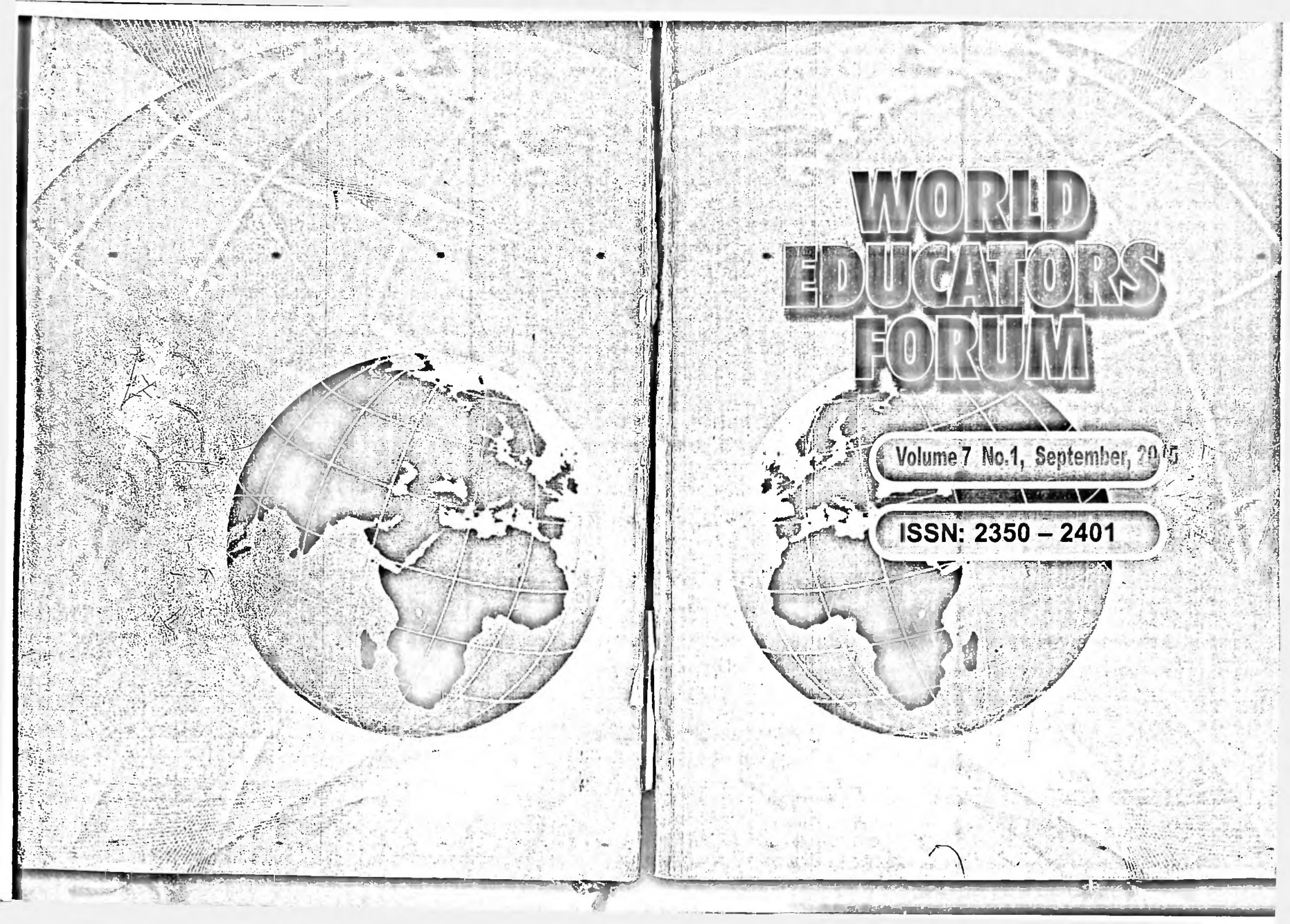
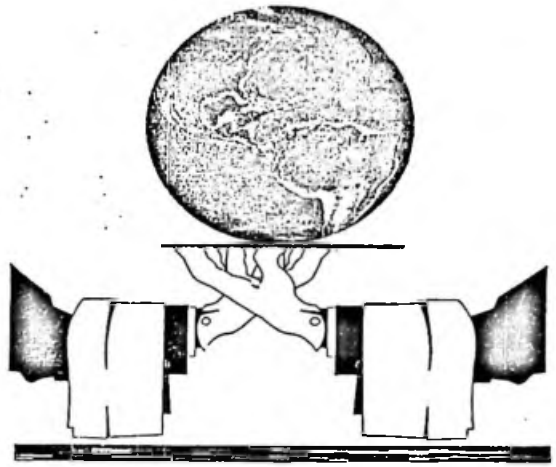

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APPLYING INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CURBING CRISES IN THE AFRICAN SOCIETY: FOCUS ON BOKO HARAM CRISIS IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This paper entitled: "Applying International Public Relations in Curbing Crises in the African Society: Focus on Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria," is of the strong belief that unionism and interaction among African countries and others can only be successfully guaranteed in the absence of serious crises internally rocking them. Usually, countries, the world over, rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped cannot operate and thrive in isolation; they must depend on others in one way or the other for survival and sustainable development. This explains why countries interact symbiotically under diverse fora such as European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and above all the United Nations Organization (UNO). The paper, adopting FrankJefkins's transfer process model,states that since there is high interdependence of countries on one another for survival and sustainable development, it should be the responsibility of every country to ensure that crises occurring in Africa and other parts of the world are put to rest. Since the internal peace of Nigeria, the largest economy of Africa, is currently being threatened by terrorism perpetrated by the dreaded Islamic insurgents,Boko Haram, the paper, among others, advocates the adaptability of an international public relations approach

consequent upon the current ineffective coercive gimmick by the federal government of Nigeria in managing the crisis.

Key Words: International, Public Relations, United Nations, Government, Boko Haram and Nigeria.

Development globally, begins with individual nations. This view is shared by Walter (1974) in Ciboh (2005:3) who stated that "personal development is very much tied in with the state of thesociety as a whole."The point to be driven home from this position is that where there is crises in one country, its ability to develop can be hampered and this can, in one way or the other, impact negatively on other countries as well. For instance, theBoko-Haram crisis in Nigeria is attributed by many analysts to the crises in theArab world. Since the outbreak of theBoko-Haram crises, the government of Nigeria hasemployed military tool to quell it. This apparatus has been very unsuccessful as the insurgents keep on unleashing terror on the whole country and beyond. This paper, therefore, seeks the application of international public relations approaches in curbing theBoko-Haram.

InternationalPublic Relations and Boko-Haram: A Conceptual Clarification.

Most of the available texts on public relations, either consciously or unconsciously have not been very straightforward in defining international public relations, particularly in the context of nations. Perhaps, some are over carried away by the so much available literature on similar concepts like international trade, and international relations. These concepts, no doubt, are not only related to international public relations but they have something in common with it. This is because their existence, success and sustainability are built on effective international public relations. This is because countries of the world cannot interact among themselves to solve their problems and advance politically, economically and socially without employing theweapon of communication which is the concern of international public relations.

Public relations, as a concept, has numerous definitions among which are the nonsensical, commonsensical and professional/technical ones. The nonsensical definitions are those which consider public relations as giving bribes, doing propaganda, telling lies for your organisation, window dressing and so on, which, according to Nwosu (2005:10-11) do not portray what public relations is all about. It is not public relations when you do not tell people the truth about affairs concerning your organization.

According to Nwosu, commonsensical definitions like doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, doing good and getting credit for it, making friends and working with them to achieve your individual and corporate objectives are close to what public relations entails because at least, they point out what public relations does.

Basically truth, is the foundation upon which public relations is built; with true information about the activities of an organization or institution, sound interaction between it and its publics can be built and sustained. This is thetechnicality or professionalism that isinvolved in public relations according to Nwosu.

Black (1989:4-5) having examined myriad definitions of public relations such as the one offered in 1948 by the Institute of Public Relations, London, the Mexican Statement of 1978, Rex Harlow, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) offered in 1982 and many others, defined public relations thus:

> *Public relations practice is the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information.*

The practice of public relations, from the foregoing discourse, is unrestricted; it can be practiced by organizations, institutions, governments of countries in the world. In this regard, even companies that conduct businesses internationally, employ international public relations. When the government of a country employs public relations in order to build and sustain a cordial and harmonious existence with its people and other countries, it is still the subject matter of international public relations. Of course, the interaction, in this case, is only made possible in the face of true and effective communication.

Boko-Haram, which is another key concept in this paper is inclined to Islamic religion. It is a fanatical Islamic group which, according to Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, leader of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the Savanna Express Magazine of October 2012, practicesIslamism rather than the real Islam. Boko-Haram is a derivativeconcept from Boko and Haram – Bokomeans education, Haram means sin. Boko-Haram,therefore,simply means Western education is sin. We can, conclusively, in this regard, defineBoko-Haram as an Islamic group which completely detests the Western form of education because it is sinful and as such, does not only fight tirelessly, committedly and fearlessly to eliminate it but even those who embrace it with the aim of establishing a state built and governed dominantly by theocratic principles.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories and models that are relevant to this paper but the presenters decide on the transfer process model of public relations. This model was formulated by Frank Jefkins in the 80s. Basically, the model seeks to explain the function of public relations as continuously converting four negative attitudes people have towards an organization into four positive ones. In this regard, Public relations is expected to convertHostility to Sympathy, Prejudice to Acceptance, Apathy to Interest, andIgnorance to Knowledge.

According to Jefkins (1998) in Ajala (2001:23) when the negative situation is converted into positive achievement through knowledge,the result is the primary objective of public relations, understanding. According to her, Jefkins expects practitioners of public relations to use it to achieve sympathy where there is hostility, acceptance where there is prejudice, develop interest where there is apathy and communicate to achieve knowledge where there is ignorance.

The model is relevant to this paper becausemajority of Nigerians are tired and frustrated with life in Nigeria consequent upon failure of the Nigerian government to make life meaningful to them. In this regard, they have become hostile not only to the country but also disinterested in it. Some prefer to die than to leave as has been witnessed in the militant activities in the oil-rich Niger-Delta areas, and currently, Boko-Haram. Incidentally, it appears the government of Nigeria has not been very effective in the application of international public relations in telling the ignorant international community about the true situation of things on ground.

Boko-Haram Crisis: Background and Causes

Boko-Haram is an Islamic group which came into existence in 2002 in Borno, a state in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Its founder was Mohammed Yusuf, an Islamicscholar said to be a Cameroonian. Before the establishment and recognition of Boko-Haram, militant groups hadexisted in the Southern region andunleashed terror on Nigerians and the international community.

As the government had fought and calmed down the militants in the South, Boko-Haram sprang up, this time, in the North, precisely North-East region. This Islamic group which claimed to have come on board to fight injustice, corruption and other ills, which according to it, are perpetrated by people educated in the Western style, became more aggressive after the presidential election of 2011 which ushered in President Goodluck Jonathan. In an article in the Savanna Express entitled: The Source of Boko-Haram, Politics and Others Fingered, Adepoju (2012:14) wrote:

> *Who is behind the Islamic Terrorist Group Boko-Haram? Analysts are asking who is behind the Islamic terrorist group, Boko-Haram, which has been ravaging Northern Nigeria for years, escalating itsattacks after the presidential elections of 2011. Roots of Boko-Haram: Religion, Poverty, Politics, or All of Them?*

It is difficult to point out a single factor as being responsible for the birth of Boko-Haram. The Politico Magazine's edition of June 2, 2014, writing on: "Jonathan and the Burden of Boko Haram" states thus:

> *According to reports, Mohammed Yusuf established the Jama'atuAhlisSunna Lidda'awatiWal-Jihad (The Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad) in 2002 in the city of*

> *Maiduguri, with the sole aim of establishing a sharia government in Borno state ... motivated by the desire to establish a "pure" Islamic state governed by the sharia legal system.*

The foregoingdiscourse shows that the desire to establish a theocratic state was responsible for the coming on board of Boko-Haram. Ofcourse, this desire was nurtured and brought to bear consequent upon inability of the Nigerian government to provide good governance to the people. Like Usman Dan Fodio who launched successfully the 1804 Jihad in Northern Nigeria in the midst of injustice, corruption and glaring falling of cherished values, Yusuf's preaching against the prevailing injustice, corruption, tribalism, election rigging attributed to bad governance endeared him to many followers.

According to him, the bad government in Nigeria has root in Western education. His argument is premised on the belief that everybody working in the government of Nigeria has Western education. This implies that Western education does not teach people to be responsible and as such, should be replaced by the Islamic education and government for the betterment of Nigerians and Nigeria. This explains why Yusuf calls his group, Boko-Haram.

Real FactorsSustaining Boko-Haram in Nigeria

Since the Boko-Haram crisis began and became more threatening,spreading to Yobe, Adamawa, Plateau, Bauchi, Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory) and other areas, the Nigerian government has been relentless in applying force to quell it. But the government has also been calling for dialogue. While these efforts are worth appreciating, the government has not been successful with them. This can be attested to by the increasing destructive activities of the insurgents as reported by the media. The Politico magazine of June 2, 2012, commenting on the unstoppable activities of the sectdeclares:

> *...ever sincethe extra judicial murder of the group's founder, Boko-Haram has carried out series of violent attacks, mostly in Borno and neighbouringYobe states. Earlier in the year, the group stormed the FederalGovernmentCollege, BuniYadi, killed about 50 boys and kidnapped undisclosed number of female students. But in the past four weeks, Boko-Haram fetched itself another round of local and international condemnation after invading the Government Secondary School in Chibok and made (sic) away with 234 female students.*

Boko-Haram has been attacking churches, mosques, cinema viewing centers, motor parks, villages, schools, destroying lives and property. This is a demonstration of inability of the government to curtail the group.

The government's powerlessness in this regard, makes it call on the international community for assistance. It is still worth appreciating the quickpositiveresponse by the international community. While the bold step taken by the Nigerian government to admit its inability to combat the terrorists therebyrequesting the assistance of the international community is also highly appreciated, it is worrisome and unknown if the government has told the world about the true factors providing a favourable ground upon which the insurgents are thriving and will continue to ride on even if all the security personnel in the world are deployed to help Nigeria. Some of them as pointed out by Chiakaan and Chile (2011:111-119) are:

Poverty: It is very unfortunate that majority of Nigerians are suffering from poverty. This is very disheartening particularly as Nigeria is a very rich country. Chigbo (2008:18) in his critical analysis of the journey of Nigeria into the well of her wealth so far states thatNigeria made good money from oil in 50 years but this created more problems rather than improve living standards of the people.

Balarabe Musa, a former governor of Kaduna state also laments this unfortunate situation. In one of his articles in the Nation Newspaper of July 19, 2010 Akowe quoted Balarabe's views thus:

> *Nigeria is faced with the same situation now and we have to emulate Mandela, if we allow things to continue like this, Nigeria will disintegrate because of high level of poverty...Those people you elect earn N4.5 million per week and a member of house of representatives takes home 3.5 million. It might be allegation but let them deny it, if it is. The stateof the nation is negative.*

According to Chiakaan and Chile (2011:111) it is only a few, particularly those who forcefully manipulatethemselves into political offices and leadership positionsthat are living affluently. These are the cabal Boko-Haram insurgents are desperate to eliminate but which they are finding it difficult and as such, resort to eliminating the commonpeople.

Insecurity: Before Boko Haram had fully come on board, there was general insecurity in the country. Militant activities in the Niger-Delta had seriously threatened the sovereignty of Nigeria apart from negative activities of such other regional groups like Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Odua People's Congress (OPC). Leaders of the world that came to Abuja, Nigeria when Nigeria was celebrating her 50th Independent Anniversary on 1st October, 2010 had to run for their lives when two bombs blasted and killed 18 people near the Eagle's

Square, Abuja, venue of the ceremony. A militant leader, Henry Okah is still suffering in detention in South-Africa as his group was held responsible.

Corruption: It is sad to know that corruption even though legally condemned appears to be merely in theory. Practically, it is more of a culture among Nigerian leaders. Nigerian police and other security personnel openly collect bribes from motorists, road users and others while on duty. There are cases of some motorists and other unfortunate civilians in the name of accidental discharge being shot dead when they resist compliance as reported by the media.

Supporting the foregoing discussion, Sarah Margon in the June 2, 2014 edition of the Politico magazine questions "How do you Beat Boko_Haram with an Army that's Almost as Evil?"

The reporter, acknowledging Alice Friend, the Pentagon's Principal Director for African Affairs, states:

> *According to her, the war against insurgency would not succeed until the monster of corruption is tamed. "the Nigerian military has the same challenges with corruption that every other institution in Nigeria does." She said, adding regrettably that "much of the funding that goes to the Nigerian military is skimmed off the top, if you will."*

The reporter goes ahead to state:

> *The incident illustrates the quandary the United States and international community face in helping the Nigerian government rescue the nearly 300 girls Boko-Haram, an unquestionably brutal armed group, kidnapped last week. The tactics of the government security forces are barely more palatable than those of the militants themselves. Nigerian security forces are known for raiding local communities, executing men in front of their families, arbitrarily arresting and beating people, burning residential property and stealing money while searching homes.*

Educational Negligence: The Nigerian government is more worried and prompt to anything that has to do with legislators' welfare. This is due to fear of impeachment. Of course, members of this political class themselves care little about education. When teachers or lecturers go on strike as the only strategy to attract government's attention to the worsening situation of education, it does not worry government much. This explains why in Nigeria, lecturers and students of tertiary institutions sometimes spend almost a year at home due to strikes by academic and non- academic staff without being much worried. This is very unfortunate particularly in the glaring face of insecurity.

Unemployment: It is no longer a story that most of the youth, particularly the educated ones are unemployed. But these are people who have gone to school to improve their standard of living. Years after graduation, they cannot get a job or a means to start any business. What can stop these frustrated youth to join any gang which can offer them a means of survival?

To sum it up, negligence of political public relations by the government of Nigeria can make the fight against Boko-Haram and other groups labeled as terrorists in Nigeria meet with little or no success at all.

International Public Relations Approaches in Managing Boko-Haram Crisis

Some of the international public relations strategies to be adopted in managing the Boko- Haram crisis are:

Effective Public Relations Based on Good Governance: Public relations, according to one of the definitions byNwosu (2005:11) is''doing good and getting credit for the good done." This is what has been lacking in the fight by the Nigerian government. The government should wake up to its responsibility of providing good governance to Nigerians generally. This can make Nigerians to be more peaceful and even willing to cooperate with the government and international community in the fight against terrorism.

International Seminars/Conferences: A conference is a veryimportant weapon in the hands of public relations. This is because it provides a platform for government representatives and other Nigerians the opportunity to speak to the international community about the true situation on ground in Nigeria and attract more sympathy to this serious issue threatening the peace, unity and development of the country and of course, the world at large.

International Press Conferences: It is true that the existence of Boko-Haram is not a hidden matter, but it is possible that many international media may not be aware of the true dangerous activities of the group. Locally, the Nigerian government is always pretending to be "on top of the situation." When the local media report this side of government, it will always make their international counterparts to feel everything is going on well. Embarking on international press conferences can afford the international media the opportunity to practically interact with government officials and know that Nigeria is far from winning the battle thereby, attracting more concern from the international community.

Invitations: If the Nigerian government can be bold enough to invite members of the international community to come and see things by themselves; how churches, mosques, motor parks, markets, schools, villages, cinema viewing centers, or in short, how every place is being attacked, the international community will be moreserious about helping Nigeria out of this problem as it does in Mali, Ivory Coast, Central-African Republic and others.

Guaranteeing Fundamental Human Rights: One of the charters of the United Nations is freedom of expression. When women and other concerned Nigerians were protesting in Abuja, the Federal Capital city of Nigeria against the almost 300 school girls held captive by Boko-Haram to attract the attention of the international community, the Nigerian government through PeterMbu, a commissioner of police then of that city rose up and made a pronouncement banning any kind of protest in that regard. This implies that the government does not even want people to express their feelings against the insecurity in the country. Of course, the government does not want the international community to know.

Recommendations

As a result of what has been discussed in this paper so far, the following recommendations are hereby made:

i. **Avoidance of Propaganda:** The Nigerian government should stop telling the world that it is on top of the situation. It is not. Terrorism by Boko-Haram is very much available.

ii. **Good Governance:** The government of Nigeria and other African states facing this problem of insecurity should not only focus on the use of force. They should asses their performance and see if they are living up to expectation. They should provide good governance to the people.

iii. **International Academic Seminars/Conferences:** International academic seminars and conferences aimed at finding lasting panacea to Nigeria's problem of insecurity should be sponsored bythe Nigerian government. This can invite different scholars from within and outside Nigeria to come out with ideas on how best security can be restored to Nigeria.

iv. **International Press Conferences:** International press conference can present the world press with a better position to understandNigeria'sproblems and present them to the international community for intervention.

Conclusion

Effective application of international public relations by African states and other developing societies is the basis for good governance and consequently, peace. Adopting international public relations, therefore, requires living up to the United Nations requirements of elimination of poverty, providing employment opportunities,

elimination of hunger or improving generally, the living standard of people. These, coupled with freedom of information or expression and other rights guaranteed, can go a long way to ensure that victory against terrorism and other forms of crises in Nigeria and other African states is obtained.

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