

BBC's Heart and Soul with PROCMURA

The BBC World Service invited Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah, General Adviser of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), to its weekly programme Heart and Soul to deliberate on Christian-Muslim relations in East Africa with a particular focus on the situation in the Sudan and South Sudan. The discussions were joined in by a renowned journalist Gill Lusk from Africa Confidential and an expert on Sudan.

The interview took place in BBC's Nairobi studio on the evening of 5th March 2012 and is to be broadcast on Saturday 17th March 2012. The situation of Christians and Muslims in Sudan took centre stage in the discussions. The independence of South Sudan has a profound effect on the Sudan (North) as the former seceded from the later. In a situation like that the two countries have to come up with a working relationship amidst the minority Christians in the Sudan and minority Muslims in South Sudan. As a move to create a citizenry who would have no dual allegiance, the Sudan Nationality Act appears to render a number of Sudanese citizens *persona non-grata*. The president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, has given peoples of South Sudan origin until 8th April 2012 to repatriate or adjust their legal status accordingly, failure to which foreigner status will be conferred on them.



Rev. Dr. J. Mbillah in studio during the discussion

Unfortunately, the situation in the North has led to fears that the South in similar vein might take up the offensive and institute similar laws against Muslims who constitute a minority. This is in fact a fallacy that has been propagated to disenfranchise the real situation of Christian-Muslim relations in the South. If memory were to serve us right we can recall that during the Independence Day celebrations in July of 2011, Christians and Muslims were at hand to recite the opening prayers. A symbolic gesture if ever there was one. In addition, one has to contend with the fact that there is a sizeable percentage of African Traditional Religion(s) practitioners in the South. As a matter of fact and as a new frontier for Muslim *Da'wah* and Christian Mission, South Sudan presents such a possible scenario even though with apprehension to past realities.

Apart from the fate of the minority Christians in the north and the minority Muslim situation in South Sudan, the discussions also highlighted Christian and Muslim collaboration in the East African region. A positive gesture that is not usually taken into consideration when Christian-Muslim relations are discussed. The General Adviser took time to elaborate on these pointing



Rev. Dr. Mbillah (left) who was accompanied by the Literature & Communications Officer of PROCMURA who was allowed to listen in during the discussion

out PROCMURA's programmes in South Sudan on peace and reconciliation, the issue of HIV/AIDS and the broader cooperation between Christians and Muslims in the East African region and indeed the rest of the African continent. In any case, Christians and Muslims are not aliens from Mars and Pluto forced to cohabit but brothers and sisters having more in common than perceived differences.

The General Adviser cautioned against brandishing South Sudan in particular, as having a specific religious agenda that will alienate and thereby marginalise sections of the Sudanese population. He argued that the onus is on the people and republic of South Sudan to, in all intent and purposes, demonstrate that Christians, Muslims and African Traditional Religion(s) practitioners can live and work together for the development of the new state. Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere, South Sudan cannot afford to go down an unjust course, this we believe the leaders will work towards achieving.

To listen to the discussions, readers are encouraged to tune in to the BBC World Service on Saturday 17th March 2012.

Readers are asked to follow this <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p002vsn4/episodes/upcoming> for the programme schedule.