

Title

Interview Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini, Director of Christian-Muslim Relations at the Ghana Christian Council, Accra and Muslim convert to Christianity

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Description

The interview focused on the function and structure of the Ghana Christian Council. The larger idea was to discuss the role of the Council to inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue in the country.

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Monday 18 July at the Christian Council of Ghana with Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini

Introduction of self: Thank you very much and welcome. I am in the Christian Council of Ghana. My name is Nathan Iddrissu Samwini. I come from Wa, in the Upper Region. I am a trained Methodist Minister at the Trinity Theological Seminary (Ghana). But I veered of to specialize in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana. I have been at the [Christian] Council Director first as the coordinator of the Council's Inter-Faith activities. From 1985 (October till this time [July 2005]). Also since January 2004, I am the Director of Programming [for the Council].

Q. As Director of Programming for a Christian Council, what programs are expected to be put in place? Let's talk a little about that.

A. The Christian Council is an ecumenical body that fosters fellowship between its member churches. The members of the Christian Council are 18 Christian denominations as of now. They come together for fellowship and work toward social justice and development. Not only for or among their members, but also for the national good. Some of the program areas that we look at include HIV/AIDS which is now of worldwide or global concern, the Council is very particular. We also look at inter-church and inter-faith relations. On inter-faith relations, you should know that Ghana is religiously plural. It has African Traditional Religions, it has Muslims, and of course it has Christians. Included are minority Christian groups and a number of Eastern religious groups such as the Bahia, Buddhists, and Hindus are all present in Ghana.

The Council's inter-faith unit therefore works to foster peaceful co-existence [and] tolerance in the midst of which we there can be proper development within the mission itself [the church] because no mission body can thrive in an unstable environment. So these are the two areas that the Council works on. Our other areas include family life and gender which looks at the Council's activity among member churches [to address such questions as]: how can we have responsible families? So we run educational programs to teach the churches on responsible family living and life. The other area we work on is

development and this program looks at what we call "economic justice", good governance, general developmental issues as reduction of poverty, justice, trade and related issues.

It will interest you to know that under this particular program, we [are closely involved in political] election monitoring. We have formed coalition with other organizations and the Council has a led-organization to monitor elections since 1992. The Council has actively been involved in election [monitoring] to ensure that the elections held in Ghana are really peaceful, transparent, and fair to everybody. With the credibility that the Council has attained since [its inception in] 1929, any time the Council comes out with its findings, the country and other international-concerned partners take our report to be credible and so the government also has to accept it.

We are also involved in relief and rehabilitation programs that look at the plight of the people that are either internally displaced for one disaster or the other, as well as others who are internationally displaced--those referred to as refugees. The internally displaced peoples do not become refugees but the internationally displaced peoples you know travel from afar such as from neighboring countries as Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire (several of their citizens) have found Ghana as a place of abode. In recent times, just about April (2005), large number of people [from as far as] Darfur in the Sudan have found their way to Ghana. What the Christian Council has done is to set up the Relief and Rehabilitation Department and it will interest you to know that the UNHCR of the United Nations work directly with the Christian Council on the educational development of the international displaced persons. So we are the implementation partner for the educational programs of the UNHCR.

Q. Would your Office also be working with the Catholic Secretariat (Ghana)?

A. We always have core-collaborative partners. Definitely, the Christian Council works very closely and it has worked very with what we call the Catholic Bishops Conference which many people call [refer to as the] Catholic Secretariat. In fact, there is a book entitled "Catholic Bishops Speak" which is a compilation of all the communiqué and pastoral letters that are jointly issued by the Catholic Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana from the 1980s through the 1990s. It is a very informative document. It also talks about the extent of collaboration between the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Bishops Conference. In recent times during the election observations, we worked together to raise or to mobilize the election observers. In the last elections of November 2004, the two bodies [The Catholic Bishops Conference and the Ghana Christian Council recruited] about 3700 election observers from across Ghana and so we collaborate on social issue, we collaborate on political issues, we collaborate on economic issues and we have what we call the Joint Heads of Churches and Catholic Bishops Meeting which is an annual affair--in May every year. We also have a Standing Committee on Cooperation meets quarterly to look at national issues and to advise either body on what to do and where to go [policy wise] So we have very close working relationship. But the Christian Council is different from the Catholic Secretariat. In other words, they as two separate organizations.

Q. The Catholic Secretariat [the Conference of Bishops] and the Christian Council are 2 separate bodies. Of course we know from earlier years when there were political crisis and nobody was speaking up [against the government] these 2 [Christian bodies were the organizations] that spoke up [and called for changes] and social justice. They called on the PNDC government to hold elections and have a constitutional transfer [of power]. These institutions [have a history of political involvement]. So has the institution of the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Secretariat worked closely with Muslims in this country [as well] and if so, how?

A. The 1980s was a reference point and during those days the 2 institutions could not work with Muslims. You might come to realize that around 1981 when the PNDC took over [power], they adopted a Marxist-Leninist approach--the socialist cum communist approach to governance--which really did not go down well with the churches. They [the church] attacked the [PNDC] action of public flogging and other things that were dehumanizing and these made the churches (the 2 bodies) become vocal and [they were on a] head-on collision with the government of the ruling revolutionaries. That made the PNDC to become unpopular with the churches and around 1983/84 the revolutionaries virtually [made efforts] to foster relations with the Arab world and Libya in particular. From that point, the government fostered very close relationship with the Muslim community in Ghana whether this was a deliberate attempt to spite the churches or ignore them or to get a friend away from an enemy or a perceived enemy [is not clear]. From that time on, however, it was not possible for the Muslims to work closely with Christian, particularly the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Bishops Conference. Matters came to a head when in 1989 when the government came out with the PNDC Law to say that all Religious Bodies must Register with the government [PNDC Law 211]. The Catholic Bishops Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana were the 2 bodies that came out to say that we will not register to a communist tactics to control the churches that would not be accepted. I can say that the 2 bodies and their affiliate congregations never registered and around 1990s the Law was secretly repealed. It will interest you to know that Muslims went to register under the law and other newer churches at the time went to register under the law but because the 2 big bodies--the Catholic Secretariat and the Christian Council of Ghana rejected it, it made the law to be repealed so whatever became of the registration, we do not even know. So the Muslims became friends of the ruling PNDC and later on the NDC [National Democratic Congress].

Q. That was the case [in the 1980s] but since the return to constitutional rule [1992] what has been the relationship between the Conference of Bishops, the Christian Council, and Muslim organizations?

A. We can go back 1978 when an idea to call a meeting to form what they called the Council of Religions in Ghana. The meeting [was attended] by religious bodies that included the Ahmadiyya Muslims. The Tijaniyya and other Muslims bodies were not a part of this meeting. They [discussed] the idea of having a Council of Religious in Ghana and that idea was accepted among them and around 1980 the Federation of Muslim

Council of Ghana became part. In 1984 they drafted and promulgated their constitution and in that constitution, the [re]named the group as the Forum of Religious Bodies. It is a meeting of the religious leaders--usually within Accra because many of the head offices of the religious bodies are in Accra but the Forum represented all the various religious groups (bodies). The Forum of Religious Bodies comprise of the Christian Council of Ghana (which became the host lead body), the Catholic Bishops Conference (which became a strong partner), and the Federation of Muslim Councils of Ghana (FMCG). The FMCG is a very interesting body. It was the brainchild of Libya. In an attempt to bring unity among all [the] fighting factions of the mainstream Muslim group in Ghana, the FMCG was formed. [This included the] Ghana Muslim Mission (which is a group for indigenous Ghanaian Muslims) and the Tijaniyya tariqa and all its sheikhs, as well as the ahl-Sunnah al jamat (which is the leading fighting body against the Tijaniyya practices), and the splitter Muslim groups all within the Ghana Muslims community. Libya attempted to unite all of them and so [the formation of the Federation of Muslim Councils of Ghana] brought them together. Although the objective failed, the name came to stay and they became a part of the Forum of Religious Bodies. The Ahmadiyya [Muslims were already] a founding member of the Forum, and then the Ghana Pentecostal Council. These are [members of] the Ghana Forum of Religious Bodies. So from 1984 they [the Muslims] were beginning to work closely but that was the time that the revolution [of the PNDC] was heating up. So that led the Forum to collapse for a while because the revolutionists succeeded in dividing their front, [making it less effective to collaborate with the Muslims and so collapsed downward the collaboration with] the Catholic Bishops Conference and down with the Christian Council of Ghana. That made the Forum to become very weak in the 1980s. But come 1992, when the Christian Council again with the Catholic Bishops Conference fought hard for democratic governance and the return to constitutional rule, then things began to become clear again to the extent that by 1996 [the second democratic general elections of the 4th Republic]the Muslims came back to join the Catholic Bishops Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana in the Coalition or Network of Domestic Election Observers (NDEO) which has the Forum of Religious Bodies as part. Then they all sent out election observers--Muslim, Christians, we all sent out election observers to work together [with other organization such as] NUGS (the National University students' representative governments), as well as other civil society organization (NGOs) all came together to form NDEO. That was for 1996 election. Come 2000 [the third general elections of the 4th Republic], they Muslims still followed it up. In 2004, however, we began to loose some of the traditional partners so many of the [international observers began to think that Ghana had become matured in elections and started to reduce their participation in election monitoring--both local and international) so couldn't form strong partnership as before. Instead, the Christian Council together with the Catholic Bishop Conference organized the observers. The Muslims moved away and joined CODEO (the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers) which was headed by CDD (The Center for Democratic Developments, Ghana). Simply because [the partnership of NDEO in which the Christian Council and the Catholic Bishops Conference participated in the 2004 election] had no money. I was not here in 2004 but away to complete my studies. It is my understanding that [from pervious activities] there was debt that was shared among the Religious Organization and the Muslims did not meet their debt payment obligation so both the Catholic Secretariat

and the Christian Council decided not to go with the Muslims [in 2004] because they were not sure that the Muslims will meet the debt obligation.

Q. Let me ask this question (because when you go through the chronological development of relations (from the early 1980s through the mid-1980s) till the elections of 1992 to 1996 and then 2004) one would have expected [because] the Muslim community in Ghana worked with the Christian Council at a certain point [and then changed its relations to develop] close relations to the administration by neglecting the influence of the Christian committees, that the [Muslims] would have developed certain Muslim attitude politically to the extent that there could have developed conflicts with the society. We do not have accounts of any such [Muslim-Christian] conflicts. Why didn't inter-religious conflicts develop especially during this time?

A. There developed. Religious conflict is part and parcel of the history of Ghana. We only talk about inter-religious conflict, but let me take it on the broad line [of religious conflicts]. In 1912 the churches [came] together to write to the chiefs at that time, pleading with them to exempt Christians from being forced into observing traditional rituals. Some of which were seen to be in contrast to the faith of the Christians. For example, if a chief dies, the community including Christians would be forced to buy a cow, to walk bare-footed or even to pacify the land... For example, the people of Mankasim [in the Central Region] had real difficulty with [the Wesleyan Missionary] Thomas Birch Freeman in the 1830s concerning their [sacredness of their traditional burial grounds of their chiefs] "nananumpo" and this was [reported in the] accounts of Freeman. Even in Accra here, the Basel Mission had real difficulties with the La people of Abokobi until one of their chiefs became converted into Christianity. We can also get into the Akyem [of the Eastern region] there were problems so there had been [a history of concern about religion]. Even since the Ahmadiyya [Muslim] Mission arrived in Ghana in 1921, there had been simmering or clear religious conflict in this country because the Ahmadis [at Wa in the Upper West region, in Kumase in the Ashanti Region, at Saltpond in the Central Region] and in Tamale [in the Northern Region, the Ahmadis] came out clearly to speak against the position of Christianity. They denounced the person of Christ, they denounced his divinity, they said "no he didn't die on the Cross" and so, and even they said the [Christ] won't come again because "Ghulam Muhammad had come back in his [Christ's] place." In some cases, they generated real conflict. Secondly, they also came out to condemn all practices of the mainstream Islam because they believed that with the arrival of Ghulam Muhammad, the reformer had come. In fact, some of them referred to him as a Prophet without the Book. According to the Quran, there should be No prophet after Muhammad and so in the first place they were seen as a heretic group by the mainstream Muslims, so there was that conflict. This caused violence between the Ahmadis and the mainstream Muslims wherever they found themselves across the country. Their preaching infuriated a lot of Muslims. [Some saw them as] a confused Christian heretics because they were using the Bible and the Quran at the same time so people didn't know where to place them. In Kumase, [the main car park at] Kejetia because a permanent place where they will stand up to ridicule Christianity. They confused so many people and many uninformed people were not able to tell whether these were Christians or Muslims.

True conflict within [the Muslims community] came to a head-on the 1960s and the 1980s. I made this clear in my book where I [gave] examples of people and itinerant preachers from the Sudan to come to preach in Tamale where the created confusion between the ahl-Sunnah al Jamat led by Afa Jura and the Tijaniyya. The Ahl-Sunnah al Jamat in those days in the 1960s) were fighting over [the doctrinal issue of] whether "one could see God" or not--a position accepted by the Tijaniyya. The view that if one became a sheikh you can develop spiritually to the extent of seeing God. the Ahl-Sunnah al Jamat argued that it was not possible to "see God" and that it was not Quranic. The preacher came from the [Republic of] Sudan and he came to preached that it was possible to see God when he preached to the Tijanni; but the same preacher divided his sermon [differently for his audience because in the] because when he preached to the Ahl-Sunnah he said that it was NOT possible to see God--the same preacher divining his sermon among two different factions and the next day it was a free for all fight and so many people had to die in Tamale.

Now, if you knew what I call the distributive pattern of Islam and Christianity in Ghana, you will see that whereas Christianity is strong in the south, it is very weak in the north. So in the north, it was more intra-Islam conflicts than it was Christian-Muslim conflict. The other thing is that in the north, Islam is more integrated into the culture of the people; to the northern culture is an Islamized culture but not necessarily that all northern people are Muslims. In the south Muslims settled independent from the host society and this is the creation of the Zongos [the Muslim communities] and they became autonomous or semi-autonomous. They were not involved in the political life of their host and the social life of their host [community] and they did not involve themselves in the economic life of their host--they were independent--take for instance [such Muslim settlements (Zongos) as Nima (in Accra), Aboabo # 1 and #2 (in Kumase), and all the Cow Lane, Town Council Line, Zongo Lane etc)] they are all separate and have no hand in the governance of the Kumase [for example in the Ashante Region], although historically [Muslim] clerics were useful to the Ashanti and their medicine was useful to the Ashanti. But even that the Ashanti were interested in those things and not so much in Islam. So they were separate from their host. But because Christianity] it does not understand Islam and it had never understood it, Christians in the south could not penetrate the Zongos and so for a very long time there was no Christian-Muslim conflicts in the south and for that matter the whole of Ghana. This is because in the north they became part of the culture of the people, and in the south they stayed away from the people and were kept apart.

Q. So it is the nature and pattern of settlement the reasons for the absence of conflict in the past? [Note that Al-Hajj Shaibu Armiyawo argued the opposite--that the integration of settlement had familiarized Muslims and others in Ghana]

A. Let me tell you how and why conflict began to general from the 1970s onwards, especially what we can now call "the Christian-Muslim conflict." Churches began now to expand their territories all over the place; and now they were beginning to take the gospel from [the southern bases] into the Zongo [Muslim communities] and because they did not know how [to minister to Muslims], some of them began to teach polemics and some of

them thought that it was time to adopt the Ahmadiyya strategy to use both the Quran and the Bible to preach to Muslims because the Ahmadis have done that without any consequence. The Muslims did not take this kindly for non-Muslims to handle [discussions on the] Quran and especially when it was perceived to have been handled not in the proper way. These conflicts became very serious between the [1980s led to conflicts in Accra, and even into the 1990s.] Examples [could be found in cases that took place] at Teshie-Nungua when a Christian Crusade was scattered [dispersed] because they were using both the Quran and the Bible to preach. The Muslims will mobilize from all over Accra—from Nima and [other parts of the city's Muslim communities] and go to Teshie/Nungua to scatter [the Crusade Preachers]. If we come to the 1990s, it was more frequent [to see conflict] and in Sekondi, a Christian "open-air" [public or street preaching] was scattered [or dispersed by] by Muslim youth because the [Christian] preacher used [the Muslim call to Prayer] to call his audience. When the Muslims got there, they [found this person using both] the Quran and the Bible in preaching and this led to conflict and destruction of property--[a situation that led to the] intervention of the Christian Council of Ghana and the Forum of Religious Bodies.

In 1995, over 2000 Muslim youth were brought before the court because they did a lot of damage. The Christian Council of Ghana, The Catholic Bishops Conference, and the Forum of Religious Bodies intervened and it will interest you to know that when they did so, they wrote to the then Minister of Interior saying that "set these people free we will settle it at the religious level." After the young Muslims have been set free, the Forum of Religious Bodies delegation went to Sekondi to assess the damage [and in the value of the currency it was over 20 million cedis (about 300 cedis to the dollar those days)]. The [Forum of Religious Bodies shared the amount to be paid], up till today, the Muslims have not paid. The Christian Council paid its part of over 11 million cedis, the Muslims took 10 million but they have not paid the debt.

This is not the only cases of conflict. There were cases also in Kumase where conflict had been caused by Christian preaching to Muslims.... There was also a case in Tamale when an American Evangelist had to be smuggled out of the town overnight because he had preached to say that "Jesus is Lord", and this the Muslims thought it to be an affront and they mobilized but the police got to know of it and smuggled the preacher out of town. So there has been an instance [of conflict]. Between October 1995 and October 1997 when I joined the Council and began compiling inter-religious conflicts between Christians and non-Christians (between this 2 year period), we compiled 32 conflicts reported in the Ghana media. Of this, 8 of them were Christian-on-Muslim; 9 were Muslim-on-Muslim [conflicts]; and the others were not specified. For us in a country that boasts of peaceful co-existence between religions, 32 [religious conflicts] in two years was too much for us.

Q. So since then [1996], what has been done to make sure that we do not have a "Nigerian situation" in Ghana?

A. Let me talk a little about the Christian Council Inter-Faith Unit. In 1958 at the last meetings of the International Missionary Councils were held in Accra (Legon), they considered how the growing independence of African countries which would be

accompanied by the independence of the Church in Africa we fare in the midst of Muslims. They wanted to avoid the European (western) of relationship with Arab which had been one of antagonism than peaceful existence. So they decided that they should form an organization called "Islam in Africa Project." The "Islam in Africa Project" was a Christian initiative to help the Churches in Africa to interpret the gospel of Christ in the midst of Muslims more responsibly, to avoid polemics and other intolerant dimensions. Ghana was a founding member of the "Islam in Africa Project" because the first meeting was in Ghana to be followed in the next meeting in Nigeria in late 1958. It depends on the country, but in Ghana the Christian Council the direct host of this body. So the Christian Council in Ghana set up an "Islam Committee" within its premises since 1959 (we have had an Islam Committee). But you see that these days were not the days that many Christians were interested in Islamic studies. Because it is also a Christian initiative for the Church to understand Islam and to live well with it, it was not possible to engage a Muslim to come and head it. So the committee was there and it was like people who were interested in reading about Islam or have fair experience about Islam were invited to become members of the committee. Until around the 1960s when some Presbyterian missionaries came who had either read about Islam or developed some interest in Islam and [these missionaries] were made "area advisors". They were advising the "Islam Committee" of the [Christian] Council about Islamic issues. Some of the reports talked about Christian-Muslim relations and the Council made use of their expertise. There a book entitled "Christian Council at Forty" edited by [Professor] James Anquandah you can read some of these reports from that book.

Q. Can one find a copy of this book at the Bookstore downstairs?

A. It is out of print but for reference purpose we can look for a copy for you. But [the report shows how the "area advisors] continued to help in advising the [Islam] Committee until around 1986 when Rev. Mbilla when to do graduate studies in Islam at the University of London. He came back in 1989, and the Presbyterian Church made him their Inter-Faith Coordinator. He was then in Tamale when the Christian Council started to court him as the first Ghanaian into the [Islam] Committee to work as their advisor. So from 1989 Johnson Mbilla became their advisor and so did Rev. Dovlo was also an Advisor to the Christian Council. Then they run programs for the Churches because it is a Christian initiative to educate the churches on Islam and on how to live at peace with their Muslim neighbors and to be able to interpret the Gospel in the midst of Muslims. The target group is the Church and the emphasis is educational and that is our method of approach. So he run programs for people [the churches] in Tamale [for the pastors from the regions in the northern part of the country]; and then in Kumase. He scheduled one for Accra but couldn't run it because he had to returned to the UK to do his PhD. [We can add to this effort in] the 1980s [during the periods of conflicts], a body that we called the Ghana Evangelism Committee. It had a Director who was very interested in Islam and it went around to organize programs all over the country in the late 1980s to the 1990s to [sensitize] the Church of the need not to attacking Muslims but of the need for them to understand Islam and also if possible to take the mission of the Church to Muslims--[this was a multiple-headed approach]. I was sent to Burma Camp [The head Barrack of the Ghana Armed Forces] by PROCCMUCRA. The Program for Islam in Africa Project

changed its name in 1984 to become the Program for Muslims-Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCCMUCRA). The headquarters is in Nairobi [Kenya]. It is the body that facilitates education or people who are interested in studying Islam so that you come back to become a resource person to the Church in Africa. That Program sent me for studies in Birmingham [UK] in 1983 October. I came back in 1994 November with an MA and then the Christian Council decided that they should engage me as a full term person [employment]. Between 1994 and November 1995, I was at Sunyani as a Methodist Minister. In October 1995 [when I was a Station Manager at Sunyani for the Methodist Church but I was also a part-time advisor to the Christian Council on Islamic affairs. Then around April/May 1995, the Council decided that we should no longer have a part time position because my position at Sunyani [did not allow me to come to Accra all the time when I was needed]. So they spoke to my Church to release me to the Council so in August of 1995, the Conference of the Methodist Church accepted and released me to work here full time for the Christian Council Inter-Faith Program. In that case, I [also] become the "area advisor" for the country for PROCCMURA. From 1994 I have become the area advisor for POCCMURA in Ghana and therefore they contact me on anything on Islam in Ghana, but the Christian Council appointment came in 1995 and that is when I moved from Sunyani to this office [in Accra] as full time coordinator.

Q. In that case you can be [are the] full-time coordinator of Inter-Faith Programs (of the Ghana Christian Council) and at the same time serve as Area Advisor to be consulted by PROCCMURA?

A. Yes that is what happened. Anything concerning Islam in Ghana, PROCCMURA contacts me since then and also advisor the Council and the General Secretary on what he is supposed to do on Christian-Muslim Relations, especially with its membership in the Forum of Religious Bodies.

Q. Then let me ask you a question here [regarding] Rev. Johnson Mbilla and yourself. [You are persons] in charge of Inter-Faith advising for the Presbyterian Church and [you to the] Christian Council of Ghana on the development of mission to Muslims and appropriate way of mission work among Muslims. Yourself, you were a Muslim at a point in your life. Why has the Muslims in Ghana not been so aggressively opposed to the any such missions since it might take people away from them?

A. In 1995 Rev. Johnson [Mbilla] got a scholarship to go back do his PhD, so he left. That created a vacation for the Presbyterian Church inter-faith unit. But for the fact that I was back here, the Christian Council did not loose entirely but the Christian Council programs are more of national program so we did not leave out any church [in our inter-faith activities]. But we have system we call the Local Council of Churches which is a fellowship of all churches down to the local communities and it is opened to every Christian denomination. So we work through the Local Council of Churches—when we are dealing with our members, [then we do so only with those who are members of the Ghana Christian Council, but when we are dealing with all Christian, then we work through the Local Council of Churches]. So our activities cover three levels—Heads of Churches, Members of the Ghana Christian Council, and Local Council of Churches. So

when we are dealing with Local Council of Churches we deal with all churches, when we deal with heads of Churches [it means] we are dealing with the Heads of the 18 churches that belong to the Ghana Christian Council, and when we deal with members of the Christian Council that means we are dealing with all the 18 [member churches and their congregation]. We give them the information [needed] because they represent us at the Forum of religious Bodies so they can understand what is being said and know what to say.

Then coming back to the question of Mission and conflict, we do not determine the Mission agenda of the churches. PROCCMURA [for example dose not tell the churches not to do] Mission [among Muslims]. What PROCCMURA is out to do is to say, “Do your mission but do it responsibly” so as not to antagonize. So if your church is planning to do mission in the Zongo [Muslim settlement community] and you do not know how to do it and you contact us, we come to your church with the expertise and teach you of how to go about it. [For example] we teach them “what is Islam, what is the place of Muhammad to Muslims, what do you say and what you do not say about Muhammad to allow relationships to continue peacefully, or about how what you say can antagonize Muslims.” This is our general approach and we also emphasize that yes relationship are two ways—it can be cordial at this time and when it is cordial, that is when engage one another on social, on political, and economic issues that concerns all of us. While that is going on, we are fostering good relations. In that case, the tendency for conflict is remote. But in the event of a conflict, for one mistake or another, because we have been cordial in our relationships [in the past] it will not be difficulty to come back to do Christian-Muslim dialogue. But if the relations are not cordial when things [were normal] our [view is that we can not turn it into cordial relations in times of crisis] and there will be no opportunity to have dialogue.

Q. Having said that, has the Muslims even raised the question of their concern that mission work of Christians in Muslim communities antagonizes them?

A. They have not publicly but you hear pockets of those complaints here and there but they are not [formal] because as much as Christians go out to do mission, Muslims also go out to do mission and there is no conflict for Muslims to preach to Christians because these are missionary religions. Our emphasis is that [we do] our mission by respecting the other; and to make your appeal respecting the other and if I am convinced then I can come over [convert].

Q. Now the last question here. If mission work is Christian, and if mission work is Islamic how then ...has the mission schools of the Christians been viewed by Muslims in a different way or as a place for conversion and if that were the case how would the Christian Council of Ghana redress that with regards to fostering relations [with Muslims] in an amicable way?

A. Let me begin by saying that the mission schools initially and historically were nursery grounds for the church but with the turn of the 1960s and the 1970s the schools [even the Methodist school I attended] were not grounds for conversion. [This is especially the case in the higher levels of education at the secondary schools]. Of course they had Bible

Knowledge [classes] but these were treated as secular subjects just as geography or history and that did not lead to conversion. In the same way, [the schools] even did courses on Islamic Knowledge which was also not meant at conversion. So the Mission Schools, yes initially in the 1800s might have been nursery grounds. But when the church began to grow in leaps and bounds [the years that followed] the Mission Schools as nursery grounds for the church was lost especially at the schools where [more and more students see their work and studies as secular activities] sponsored more by the government and not the [churches]. However, what [these former mission-controlled schools] do is that they have their mission [Christian denominational] discipline—go to worship, so since the school is for us, anybody who is here must also respect our discipline. So then, worship was a way to imbibe in the student not only academic life but also religious, moral, and social values of the Church. So they will say come to the worship, and if it is a Methodist school [then] we will sing a Methodist song, we will hear the gospel.

Q. Now you see Muslim secular schools that are [being opened by Muslim proprietors]. Through my interviews, I have been [told by them that their] “schools are opened to everyone—Muslims and non-Muslims, and we have so many non-Muslims in our schools and we don’t force them to become Muslims.” Do you believe that become avenues for social integration [and therefore] foster Muslim-Christian relations?

A. Well I do not want to doubt the statement yet there is a clear difference between the Muslim schools and the Christian schools. The Quran is not a secular document. The veal is not secular veal. And the Arabic they study there is not classical Arabic but Quranic Arabic. So that will be difficult for a person to [attend these schools], learn the Quran in a devotional way and not in an academic ways and learn the Quranic Arabic and still call it a secular school.

Q. What about the Islamic Education Unit secular curriculum [that the Ministry of Education provides for the schools]?

A. They use the secular curriculum because the teachers are paid by the Ghana Education Service and so in that case the Ghana Education Service has a say [in the content of instructions]. But if you come down to it, there are complications [a subject that I have struggled with in my studies]. The struggle was that till now, now community has come up to say that these schools as established as Islamic community schools. The proprietors are private [owners] who want to see devotional Islam in those schools. The development of the infrastructures is done by individual or family [owners]. So far, I remember only Wenchi [in the Brong Ahafo Region] where there is a community school. Places like Wa [In the Upper West region has schools] but even here they were started by the late Ibn Sally is now a community school. But in the majority of cases, they are privately owned and the entrepreneur determines the Islamic value of the schools. So it is possible for him to tell a teacher today that “I do not like you.” An example was in the Tamale Ambariyya [Islamic School] where Afa Dwura [the proprietor] walked into the class room and told the geography teacher that it is Allah who causes rain to come and not any climatic changes. He collected the chalk [from the teacher] and told this to the class in front of the

teacher. So this is the complications and the difficulties. If the individual proprietor has this power, then what is the role of the government in it? These are difficulties and until such a time that clear transformations and the ownership shift from private to communal then I am yet to be convinced that [one can] go to an English/Arabic Basic school and not to [be instructed] in devotional Islam.

Q. Has the Christian Council of Ghana has any say on this issue or brought it up for public discussion?

A. No we haven't. This is simply because there is great ignorance by Christians of Muslims. Apart from the ignorance, there is also apathy or avoidance. In that case, the culture of apathy increases the avoidance. They don't even know about what is taking place [in the Muslim schools].

Q. Then wouldn't the culture of avoidance contribute to conflict [in the future]?

A. Yes, in way or another. But so far, the ignorance may have made one or two Christian parents send their children [to the Muslim schools but I do not think that this is in great numbers] For example, if it is [Islamic] university education which is a recent development [in the country] then I can say that yes, [there are Christians who go there], but not at the basic levels of education—they say that “our schools are opened to everybody but you go there and you don't find [the Christians]. The schools are opened to everybody because the teachers are provided by the government and even some of them are even Christian teachers. But the amount of influence at the [Islamic schools] is Islamic. For example, if you go there as a Christian English Teachers, you are only waiting for your session to come and you teacher and you leave; or you go there as a mathematics teachers you wait for your [class time] and you teacher and go back. The rest [of the teachers] are Muslim instructors.

Closing Observations: On this note, I would like to thank you for the conversation. The Christian Council of Ghana, The Catholic Secretariat, the Forum of Religious Bodies have been talking for a while and from my conversation with you, your own position [employment] here within the Christian Council and Rev, Johnson Mbilla's at the Presbyterian system has contributed to much information for the Church to educated itself and its mission. I thank you sir, Rev. Dr. Nathan Samwini.

Response by Interviewee: Thanks you very much and it has been a pleasure coming our way I want to tell you that this is a virgin land and there is great amount of work to be done on Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana. Thanks you very much.