

Managing Religious Conflict under the Federal System of Ethiopia: The Case of Jimma Zone in Oromiya National Regional State

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Abstract

The FDRE Constitution incorporates fundamental rights, freedom of religion and adopts secular form of government. As a result, believers of different faiths exercise these rights freely for the first time in Ethiopian history. However, these efforts do not bring religious peace and tolerance as expected. Thus, the presumed positive correlation between secularism and sustainable inter-religious relations in Ethiopia remains problematic. This paper attempts to look into the federal system of Ethiopia and its capacity to manage religious conflicts. It tries to search for the causes of religious conflicts in Jimma Zone of Oromiya National Regional State where the problem is serious and frequent. Based on this fact, the research examines the danger of extremism in the stability of the country, explores whether the government organs and its officials implement the constitutionally recognized religious rights and investigates whether the federal system is effective to prevent or mitigate religious related conflicts. The design of the study is based on the qualitative methodology. Information is gathered using primary and secondary data. The study aims at collecting available sources of information from the informants through interview and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Unstructured interview is employed. Books, Journals, Reports, Internet sources, etc. are used as a secondary data. The paper gives emphasis to the current challenges of the government in managing religious conflict especially at the local levels of the government. Finally, it suggests possible recommendations that will help to prevent religious conflict.

INTRODUCTION

After a long history of centralized rule, Ethiopia has adopted the federal system. The 1995 Constitution fully recognizes the freedom of opinion and expression (Art.29) and Freedom of religion, belief and opinion (Art 27). The Ethiopian government is working to maintain tolerance among Christians, Muslims and other believers. Accordingly, every person shall be entitled to

freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Ideally, these constitutional provisions should be enough guarantees for religious freedom and stability.

Through secularism, Ethiopia seeks to not only maintain some form of neutrality and independence on religious matters, but also allow Ethiopians religious freedom. The essence was to demarcate between the two realms, state and religion. Contrary to expectations, however, Ethiopia's secular posture has been challenged on some occasions by religious conflicts, thereby curtailing the religious freedom it sought to protect.

Federalism is mainly known by its ability to accommodate diversity among other basic factors. Diversity can be expressed through different manners such as cultural, religious, linguistics and other social differences. In order to make the federal governance sustainable, religious tolerance is a pillar in settling frequent clashes between different religious groups.

This paper analyses the problem of secularism as a constitutional mechanism for religious balancing in Ethiopia. However, constitutionally a secular state, religion continues to cast a threatening shadow on the governance of the country. The attempt to secure religious freedom for some appears to infringe on the freedom of others. This, coupled with the weak institutionalization of the forces of democratization and the economic softness of the state, creates room for the transformation of ethno-religious identities. Secularism has not been able to find a solution to this. Thus, the presumed positive correlation between secularism and sustainable inter-religious relations in Ethiopia remains problematic. This is partly because secularism is not rooted in

political institutionalization, capable of generating sustainable social capital, that is, a generalized sense of trust among the Ethiopians.

The objectives of this study are to assess the cause and consequence of religious conflicts between Christian and Muslim religions, and the role-played by the various government sectors in bringing tolerance in Jimma Zone there by to bring a long lasting peace and tolerance between different religions.

Federalism and Conflict Management

Federalism refers to the ‘coming together of humans as equals to establish political bodies in such a way that all reaffirm their fundamental equality and retain their basic rights.’¹ The two aspects of federalism, self-rule and shared rule, enable this system to manage diversified interests in one. According to views of some scholars, the system of federalism is better in handling conflict in a multicultural, multi ethnic and multi religious countries. Federalism can peacefully accommodate heterogeneous groups by decentralizing key policies and thus providing a stake for ethnic elites in the maintenance of the existing state.² Horowitz (1997), McGarry and O’Leary (1995), Coakley (2000), Hechter (2000) and Ghai (2000) are among those who argue for federalism as an appropriate method to accommodate difference in multicultural states.³ Federalism is a means of maintaining the balance in interest between the regions and the centre by combining regional self-rule and shared governance. Hence, it is mainly known in balancing the common interest on one hand and diversified interests on the other in order to maintain the social integrity and stability. Opponents of this group argued that federalism might not be an effective conflict handling system, unless it is implemented appropriately to manage diversity. The reason for their argument is minorities are still outnumbered on the federal level. In order to make the federal

governance sustainable, the system shall be designed appropriately and implemented effectively. In this regard, implementation of democracy, respect of minority rights and religious tolerance, etc. are pillars in settling frequent clashes between different social and religious groups.

State-Religion relationship in Ethiopia

Until the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie Ethiopian Orthodox Church had been part of the state. Religion was a major preoccupation of the emperors and a main function for the throne was the support for the Church⁴. No emperor, however, powerful, has succeeded in keeping his throne while being in conflict with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.⁵

The source of authority in this system is located at the top of the hierarchy, and the direction of its flow is downwards. The ultimate source of authority is God, while its terrestrial exercise is entrusted to the emperor. Ethiopian rulers freely invoke God's name on their own behalf and not in vain⁶.

¹ Daniel Elazar, *Exploring Federalism*, Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987, p. 2-7.

² Alemayehu Fentaw, *Conflict Management in the Ethiopian Multi-national Federation*, European University Center for Peace Studies Stadtschlaining, Austria, 2009, p14.

³ As Alemayehu Fentaw and supporters of this view stated, although federalism in its original form was not designed to regulate conflicts triggered by diversity (ethnic, religious, racial, etc.), it is today conceived as one of the better devices to calm inter-group or intra-state conflicts. Horowitz classifies federalism as one of the structural techniques in conflict regulation. Hechter claims that to the degree that federalism increases self-government, the demand for secession is correspondingly reduced.

Interdependent and mutually reinforcing, throne and church have been the twin foci of the forces of societal unity, and its symbols of continuity and uninterrupted autonomy⁷. For similar reasons Lij Eyasu lost the throne because of his alleged sympathy for Islam⁸. Many scholars partly attribute the isolation of Tewodros and his defeat by the British to his conflict with the

Church following his decision to confiscate its land properties⁹. The custom of inalienable Imperial land grants to the Church further substantiates the view of the Ethiopian State as the instrument of the Ethiopian Church and vice versa. Thus, the emperors at their coronations were expected to declare their utmost allegiance to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church¹⁰.

Moreover, Ethiopia's religious tradition is reflected in the day-to-day life style of the people, and nowhere this spiritual energy echo more than in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church¹¹. Hence, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was very much part of the Ethiopians national life. Observing this fact Eyayu Lulseged wrote the following; "The strong identification of faith and nation reached its apex in medieval Ethiopia when kings invariably adopted a policy of religious uniformity to effect political unity in the country"¹². He further wrote: "The close unity of the theme of national defense and

⁴ John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of A Traditional Polity*, (1974), Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.33

⁵ Ibid, p.15

⁶ Ibid, p.37

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, (1855-1991), (2nd ed., 2002), Eastern African Studies, PP. 121

⁹ Ibid, p.35

¹⁰ Ibid, P. 193

¹¹ Eyayu Lulseged, *Why Do the Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia Identify their Faith with their Nation?*, in Richard Pankhurst et al (ed.), *Proceedings of the First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, April, (11-12, 1990), Addis Ababa, P. 4

¹² Ibid, p.5

Christian identity could also be inferred from the traditional practice of Ethiopian emperors who went to battle fields accompanied with the *tabot* and cross"¹³. According to Fasil Nahoum, prior to the enactment of the first written Constitution of 1931, Ethiopia had traditional Constitution in the form of customary laws and canon of the kings (Fetha Nagast and Kibre

Nagast). It embraced some legal principles on ecclesiastical (relating to Christian church) and secular matters.¹⁴ These governed the actions, behaviors of, and relationships between the monarchy and nobility as well as between members of society¹⁵.

It is widely believed that the promulgation of the 1931 Constitution was mainly propelled by the urge for consolidating absolute power under the custody of emperor Haileselassie, who used the Constitution to entrench his twin policies of centralization and modernization within a juridical framework of emergent absolutism¹⁶. This was affected by reducing most of the traditionally established rights and privileges of the nobility¹⁷. Interestingly enough, this Constitution did not have any single provision with respect to freedom of religion. In fact, it did not contain any provision pertaining to the status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church either. As Fasil Nahum pointed out, this conscious omission signifies the emperor's desire to stand apart and distance himself from the influence of the Church's long established traditional power¹⁸. The modern concept of religious freedom as a right of citizens was recognized constitutionally by the 1955 Constitution for the first time. However, unlike its predecessor this Constitution proclaims that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the officially established State religion¹⁹.

The system was discriminatory so the status of other religions was not even mentioned. The Muslim peripheries were expected to pay taxes and tributes, like any other non-Muslim regions. Nevertheless, they were generally left alone to pursue their own cultures and religions. They were in effect semi-autonomous regions with their own rulers, religions and cultures.²⁰

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Id., p.6

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Fasil Nahum, *Constitution For A Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*, (1997), The Red Sea Press, p.5

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Ibid

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Bahru Zewde, cited above at note 8, P. 140

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Ibid

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Fasil Nahum, cited above at note 14, p.21

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The Revised Constitution of the Empire of Ethiopia, (1955), Art. 126

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Assefa Fiseha, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia*, (2006, 2007), A Comparative Study,

Revised Edition, Forum of Federations, p. 1

The 1974 revolution brought radical changes to the political and economic landscape of the ancient regime of Ethiopia. It also ended the age-old symbiotic relationship between the monarchy and the powerful Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. Teshale Tibebe describes this situation as follow:

*The revolution destroyed the power base of the ruling class of the Ge`ez civilization. By declaring equality of Christians and Muslims, by separating State and Church, by expropriating land from the land lords and making it available to the peasants, and by using a new State language- the language of Marxism...*²¹

Derg dismantled the power base of the ruling class, and the centuries old Solomonic dynasty was brought to an end. However, events quickly deteriorated with the ascendancy of Marxism-Leninism and the development of totalitarianism centered on the person of Mengistu H/Mariam.²²

The 1987 Constitution pledges to guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, and it also proclaimed the separation of State and religion.²³ Unlike the Imperial Constitution, the Provisional Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) Constitution embraces the modern concept of secularism for the first time in the country's history. However, the entire move was just a facade. The communist ideology the *Derg* articulated with its promotion of

godlessness and its “demotion” of religion naturally did not suit well with the leadership and the faithful of the various religions.²⁴

The Concept of Secularism

Secularism is a highly contested concept, across different political systems, and it is ‘unquestionably the most misused word. This is partly because the concept can be used in several related, but different ways, thus making it difficult to know its exact meaning.’²⁵ George Jacob-Holyoake first adopted the term ‘Secularism’ in the early 1850s, to describe a system of morals and social action shaped exclusively by these worldly considerations, irrespective of religious beliefs. The word was derived from the secular education movement for the complete separation of religious teachings from other forms of education.²⁶ He was a leader of the English secularist and free thought movement and he coined the term secularism to describe ‘a form of opinion concerned itself only with questions, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life’.

²¹ Teshale Tibebe, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, (1896-1974), (1995), The Red Sea Press Inc., Lawrenceville, p.268

²² Bahru Zewde, cited above at note 8, p.237-238

²³ *The Provisional Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution*, (1987)Article, 46 (1-3)

²⁴ Fasil Nahum, cited above at note 14, p.29

²⁵ Kamath, M.V. *What is Secularism? News Today*, 2007, www.newstoday.com/guest/2702gu1.htm. Retrieved on 21/11/2011

²⁶ *Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol., 24, (1997), By Grolier Incorporated, P. 510

Holyoake was concerned with a humanist philosophy, one capable of guaranteeing human needs in life. While secularism, in this sense, generally encompasses a sphere of knowledge, values, and actions, which are independent of religious authority, there seems to be nothing about its

original formulation that excludes possible interactions between religion and the state.²⁷

Secularism is also sometimes used to imply separation of state from religion as social movement. In some cases, secularism is considered a religion. Against the background of this conceptual problem, it is ‘more useful to describe a secular society or a secular state, than to define “secularism”²⁸ Secularism is commonly defined as the idea that religion should not interfere with or be integrated into the public affairs of a society. As secularism is often used in different contexts, its precise definition can vary from place to place. Nonetheless, the general parameter lies in the belief that life can be best lived by applying ethics, and the universe best understood, by process of reasoning, without reference to god or gods or other supernatural concepts²⁹ Constitutional secularism assumes popular sovereignty as a source of power to the exclusion of religion. Popular sovereignty means that all power in the State originates from people, therefore, it cannot originate from the sacred.³⁰

Freedom of Religion and its position under International Law

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) gives recognition to rights related to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion. The preamble and Articles 1, 2, and 18 are dealing with this issue.

The second paragraph of the preamble of UDHR states “the advent of the world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people”.³¹

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Jelliss G. *What is Secularism?* Leicester Secular Society, 2005, <http://homepages.stayfree.co.uk/lss/secular.htm>.

Retrieved on 21/11/2011

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Agberemi, H. *Nigeria Beyond Secularism and Islamism: Fashioning a Reconsidered Rights Paradigm for a Democratic Multicultural Society*. New Delhi: Global Rights, 2006, p. 301

29 The Free Encyclopedia, (www.experiencefestival.com/secularismdefinition), last visited, 24/112011

30 Haarscher, Guv, *Freedom of Religion in Context*, (2008), P.3

31 Martin Scheinin, Preamble, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Common Standard of Achievement*, 1996, vol.44, p.388

Article 1 of UDHR also states as:

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brother hood.*³²

The preamble of the declaration gives attention to religious rights in its statement “human beings shall enjoy freedom of belief” and Article 1 of UDHR in its statement “all human beings are born free” reflects that all human beings are entitled to this right by being a human person, i.e., they are natural rights.

Article 18 of the UDHR is stated as follows:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*³³

The term “everyone” signifies the rights listed are not confined to the majority religious group alone but to the minority religious groups as well.

The UDHR in its article 29 (2) imposes limitation on the exercise of the above rights as follows:

*In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of, securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society.*³⁴

This article of the declaration protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of people from being infringed by believers who are exercising their religious right. Therefore, majority religious group has a duty to respect the rights of minority groups. They should not impose their own interest on the others. Government has also a duty to maintain “public order”. Public order is defined as “set of fundamental principles on which society is founded”.³⁵

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³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁵ Urban Morgan, *The Siracusa principles on the limitation and derogation provision in the international covenant on civil and political rights*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985) p.5

2. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion under article 18 of the ICCPR reads as follows:

*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public and private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*³⁶

According to Article 20 (2) of the covenant “Any advocacy of...religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law”.

Article 26 of the covenant states:

*All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all people's equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as... religion...*³⁷

This is to mean that state parties shall enact laws in order to avoid incitements and provocations, which lead to discrimination, hostility or violence among religions.

Regarding religious minority protection article 27 of ICCPR reads as follows:

*In those states in which...religious...minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities should not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to profess and practice their own religion,...*³⁸

Minority religious groups are entitled to profess and practice their own religion in-group without being dominated by majority religious groups, by Article 27 of ICCPR.

3. The Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief

The preamble of this declaration describes:

*the need to respect one's freedom of religion or belief because it is "one of the fundamental elements in one's conception of life", the importance of promoting "understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief", the role played by freedom of religion for "world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples."*³⁹

³⁶ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December, 1966

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *The Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion of Belief*, 25 November, 1981

Article 2 (1) of the declaration emphasizes on the rights of individuals to be free from any discriminatory acts of the state, institutions and group of persons...on the ground of religion or belief.

Intolerance and discrimination are defined under article 2 (2) of this declaration as follows:

Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having at its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal bases.⁴⁰

Religious discrimination is condemned in all covenants and declarations because it is an act against the principles of human rights.

Moreover, in article 4 (1) of the declaration the duties of the state parties towards the prevention of religious discrimination is incorporated as follows:

All states shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.⁴¹

State parties have also duties, under article 4 (2), to avoid religiously motivated intolerance and discrimination by enacting legislations and through taking “all other appropriate measures”.

4. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights

The right of freedom of religion and belief is stated under article 8 of the Charter as follows:

Freedom of conscience, the profession and free practice of religion shall be guaranteed No one may, subject to law and order, be subjected to measures restricting the exercise of those freedoms.⁴²

The implication of article 8 of the Charter is that religious practices are not subject to restrictions, except limitations stated in law or order. Hence, every individual is free to follow any religion he/she wants and allowed individuals

to worship, observance, publicly manifest his/her religion and engaging in the teaching of the doctrine of the faith he/she follows.

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ibid

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ibid

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The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 27 June, 1969

Freedom of Religion in Ethiopia

Religious freedom is defined as the “freedom to individual believe and the practice or exercise one’s belief and such freedom means not only that civil authorities may not intervene in affairs of religion; it also prevents church from exercising its authority through state”⁴³.

As we have seen previously, International Human Right Instruments such as the UDHR, ICCPR, and African Human Rights documents recognized freedom of religion as fundamental human rights. According to Article 9(1) of the FDRE Constitution, such Universal Human Rights Instruments that are signed by Ethiopia are the integral part of the law of the country.⁴⁴ Article 13 (2) of the Constitution stipulated that human rights interpretation in Ethiopia has to conform to the spirits of these human rights instruments.⁴⁵ Beside these, Article 27 (1) of the FDRE Constitution directly guarantees freedom to hold or to adopt religion or belief of his/her choice, to individuals. The second paragraph of this article specifies that the manifestations of these freedoms include the right to worship, observance, practice and teaching. Moreover, believers are entitled to establish institutions of religious education and administration in order to propagate and organize their religion under Article 27 (2) of the Constitution⁴⁶.

However, when followers of a certain religion exercise these rights, they shall not infringe the rights of others. Article 27 (5) of the FDRE Constitution

imposes limitations to protect, among other aspects, the fundamental rights and freedoms of others⁴⁷. It is obvious that one of the missions of every religion is to increase its followers. In order to increase their members they propagate their doctrine using their religious institutions. While they are propagating or preaching their doctrine, they have an obligation to respect the rights of other religions.

In this regard, Article 492 of the 2005 Criminal Code of Ethiopia imposes penalty for an act violating the free exercise of religious rights. It reads as “Whoever publicly preventing the solemnization of, or disturbs or scoffs at, an authorized religious ceremony or office or profanes a place, image or object used for religious ceremonies is punishable with fine not exceeding one thousand birr, or with simple imprisonment not exceeding two years”⁴⁸

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H.C.Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, (6th, St. Paul Minn: West Publishing Co., 1979) ,p.597

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The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995, proc.No.1, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, Year 9, No.11, Art.9

⁴⁵

Id., Art.13

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Id., Art.27(1)

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Id., Art.27(2)

In the view of the writer, the penalty imposed by the law and the act of the offender is not proportional. If this kind of crime is committed when a crowd of people is celebrating the religious festivals, we can imagine what would be the consequence. The other problem is lack of enforcement of the law in areas where religious clashes are common.

CHALLENGES IN MANAGING RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN JIMMA ZONE

Proselytism as a Cause of Conflict

Proselytism is an act of trying to persuade people to share once religious belief.⁴⁹ It is the conversion of faiths from one confession to another through methods and means that contradicts the spirit of love and violates the freedom of the human person.⁵⁰ The FDRE Constitution proclaims freedom of religion; which allows a multiplicity of denominations that could exist side by side and guarantees them to have equal rights.⁵¹ Since all the various religious institutions operate in the same constituency, it is natural to expect aggressive competition between them in an attempt to recruit new followers and to retain existing ones. Here comes the issue of proselytism.

In areas where the Muslims are minority, they focus primarily on proselytism or the Da'waa mission. That is to say, they are fashioned by their social and political environment and their local challenges, obstacles, community interests and political agendas.⁵² In Islamic perspective proselytism directed at Muslims is not acceptable, though proselytism in the form of Islamic *da'awa* (missionary outreach) is mandated.⁵³ In the legal sense as long as proselytism is understood as an expressive conduct undertaken with purpose of trying to change the religious beliefs, affiliation or identity of another without at least any form of coercion is acceptable. This is because to propagate one's belief is one aspect of the rights of the proselytizer. In as much as the right of the proselytizer, the right of the target to the peaceful enjoyment of his/her freedom of religion is also equally recognized.

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⁴⁹ The *Criminal Code of Ethiopia* (2005) *The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* Proc.No.414/2004, Art.492

⁵⁰ Macmillan English Dictionary, second edition, 2007

⁵⁰ Joel A. Nichols, *Mission, Evangelism, and Proselytism in Christianity*: Mainline conceptions as reflected in Church documents, 1998, *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 12, P.639

⁵¹ See, *FDRE Constitution*, preamble, Art.3, 11, 27

⁵² Abdelkerim Ousman, *The Potential of Islamist Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2, 2004,p.66

⁵³ Stahnke Tad, *Proselytism and the Freedom to Change Religion in International Human Rights Law*, *Brigham Young University Law Review*, (1999), P. 4

The practice of proselytism is expressed in different ways everywhere in Ethiopia. It is common to see people preaching installing high volume sound amplifiers on minibuses, freely moving in every street and main squares of the capital. Even some times, they stop their vehicles in front of other denominations' edifice or Churches.⁵⁴ These acts may of course instigate others for a counter act so that it could be the ground for conflict. Some people post their religious brochure on the fence walls of other denominations.

It is common to exhibit an illegitimate technique of adding members to one's own particular community by criticizing the beliefs and practices of another denomination negatively. This will also bring about sudden and unexpected religious clashes between different religious groups. Some religious institutions used provision of educational and job opportunities, and humanitarian aid as a means to attract believers of other religion towards them. Some use the financial problem of the poor people as an instrument to attract believers. At one time in Addis Ababa, the writer of this paper noticed, one illustrative practice that a certain local NGO provides educational services (tutoring and coaching), teaching materials, uniform and some amount of grains to students of elementary and junior grade levels. One of the admission criteria set by the institute to get assistance is to be a member of the religious sect to which this NGO is affiliated. These children are from different religion and the purpose of joining the organization is to get

material assistance for their education. Parents of those students condemn the organization for the pressure it imposes on their children, to change their religion.

According to different International Religious Freedom Reports, members of minority faiths, such as Pentecostals have complained that they encountered overt opposition from the public while proselytizing.⁵⁵ Similarly, Muslims and Orthodox Christians on their part complain about the aggressive proselytism by Pentecostals and Jehovah's witnesses.⁵⁶ Religious leaders of Orthodox

⁵⁴ Tizazu Delelegne, *Ye Haymanot Gichitoch Mensea Achir Ye Tinat Proposal*, February, 2000 E.C. Addis Ababa, (unpublished), Ministry of Federal Affairs, P. 9

⁵⁵ International Religious Freedom Report, 2005, 1999, Ethiopia

⁵⁶ International Religious Freedom Report, 2002, 2003, Ethiopia

Christians and followers condemned vigorous proselytism of Protestants/Pentecostals, which is mostly targeting on young members of the Orthodox communities. Most parents strongly oppose the act of these new faiths because they do not like their children to be converted. Orthodox Christians condemned that sometimes Protestants fail to respect Orthodox holy days and Muslims expressed their grievance on an act of Pentecostal preachers in disparaging Islam in their services. All the above illustrations are perhaps evidences that proselytism is one of the factors that contribute to inter religious tension in Ethiopia.

Land as a Cause of Conflict

One of the potential causes of conflict between Christians and Muslims includes resource issue, land to build mosque or church, and for religious celebration place. According to the FDRE Constitution, rural and urban land

is under the exclusive ownership of the State and the People of Ethiopia. It is a communal property and cannot be sold or exchanged.⁵⁷ In Ethiopian history Land has great religious, cultural and legal significance.

These days the administrative allocation of land to religious communities is creating tension. In the course of fierce competition, each religious group construct its own worship place attached a certain land and this creates difficulties to local authorities to take rigorous enforcement action. The root cause of all of the conflicts in Jimma and its surrounding areas was conflict between Christians and Muslims on a place to build Mosque in Mana town near Jimma. In a dispute between Mosque leaders and successors of that land, the Municipality gave the land to Muslims for the construction of the Mosque. Then unexpected clash emerged. Similarly, the intolerance was changed to group conflict in this area and other places.⁵⁸ From the above situation, we can imagine how land issue is sensitive and causes religious conflict. There are also reported cases, where private individuals bought residential houses, and after wards attempted to change to some kind of structures for religious services that led to clashes with the local communities of other faith.

Given the growing interest and competition for land, it comes as no surprise that various religious institutions complain about land allocation. It has been reported that, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) has raised concerns with respect to the equitable celebration of religious holidays. Evangelical Protestants have also complained that they are perceived as new comers, they remained disadvantaged in the allocation of land compared to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council.

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International Religious Freedom Report, 2002, 2003, Ethiopia

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Tizazu, Cited above at note 54, p.94

Members of the Jehovah and other minority Pentecostal denominations alleged that there is a visible inequity in treatment and access by local officials regarding land for churches and cemeteries. They stated that, though the government provides them some land, it is not sufficient, so they have resorted to lease or purchase buildings to use as places of worship throughout.⁵⁹ In general both the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council were favored than Protestants and Jehovah's for church and mosque land allocations.

The other basic internal factor of conflict is religious celebration places. In this regard, on Meskerem 16,1999 E.C in Oromiya Regional State, Jimma zone, Calo Kebele a serious conflict broke out on Demera celebration between Orthodox and Muslims. The reason was the demand for the field, which were used commonly in the past. As stated by Sheh Bedru, the location of the Mosque and Demera celebration area are very close. Then, Muslims asked Christians to change the place of Demera but the Orthodox refused. Finally, the dispute was changed to violent conflict on 'Meskel' celebration day.

Religious institutions require land to construct worship buildings and for celebrations of their holydays. It is clear that the demand for land increases to accommodate the interest of different religions since their followers increase as population increases. Moreover, new religions are emerging from time to time. Therefore, care has to be taken to avoid religious clashes while allocating land.

Intolerance

In Ethiopia, in addition to Christianity and Islam, there are a number of other minority faiths and traditional beliefs. Christianity, Islam and traditional belief have made great contribution to the development of diverse cultures and traditions. One of the manifestations of cultural diversities is religious and cultural festivals. These Religious and cultural festivals are important to show positive image of the country and tourist attraction. Besides this, religious tolerance is one mechanism of maintaining unity in diversity. The development of mutual respect and tolerance among the believers of the cross and the crescent has also been the solid foundation for the peace full-coexistence of the followers of the Christian and Muslim faiths.⁶⁰ Evidences are abundant to substantiate the long-standing culture of religious tolerance in this country.

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ibid

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ibid

That ranges from intimate friendship, good neighborhood to inter marriages. However, contrary to this tradition, recently we are beginning to see unhealthy trends. Intolerant attitudes are emerging between Christians and Muslims. The temptation of manipulating religion has multiple facets. According to government reports, some people from the Orthodox Christianity strive to portrait Ethiopian identity as ‘inherently’ Christian, implying that other faiths do not belong to this country. This has been manifested by carrying slogans and wearing T- shirts written on it, ‘Ethiopia is an Island of Christianity’.⁶¹

According to the same sources, as was the case for extreme Christians, we also find an outright arrogance from some Muslim individuals who snatched

microphones from the preaching priests and chanting ‘religious’ slogans “*Allah W`akber*” inside the Church.⁶² These sources alleged that some Muslim extremist elements have also desperately tried to capitalize on the historical precedents, sensitizing past injustices, employing emotive words, in an attempt to ignite tempers of the innocent adherents to accentuate polarization and hardening position.⁶³

There are also some evidences that point to the role of printed and electronic media, used as means in this terrifying campaign. As described in the ruling party’s documents, some extreme elements from both religious groups record or print their rubbish propaganda of hatred on CD, DVD, cassettes to reach out as much as possible to every household. These products carry immoderate criticisms, offensive, slanderous, and outrageous comments on religion and religious values.⁶⁴ The evidences that we have seem to suggest, some newspapers, bulletins and other media outlets have been serving the evil motives of these groups. Some of the local newspapers carry articles that have extremist religious undertones that accentuate differences and highlight hatred deliberately ignoring shared community values. For example, one of the local newspapers called *Selefiya* revealed the importance of *jihad*, stating that: ‘if a call for jihad is pronounced be on the fore front, respond with no hesitation for the Jihad call’.⁶⁵ Some people write and publish translations that are harshly critical of other religions.

⁶¹ International Religious Freedom Report, 2005, Ethiopia

⁶² Addis Raey, EPRDF’s, *Ye Nidfe Hassab Metsihet*, Tir-Yekatit, 2nd issue, 2001 E.C., pp.11

⁶³ *Ibid*

⁶⁴ *Id.*, p.12

⁶⁵ *Id.*, P.8

False comparisons are frequently made between religions designed to feed the kind of controversy and tension that erupted in many parts of the country.⁶⁶ The ruling party EPRDF sources alleged that some extremist groups even have infiltrated the mainstream religious institutions and to some extent, they have become successful in planting their evil seeds.⁶⁷

Some individual observers indicate that, in certain localities people of different faith who lived in harmony for long started to organize in separate *Edir*, and *Ekub*, seeking to establish the same institutions, but along religious lines,⁶⁸ Such act affects seriously long-lived social interactions and tolerance between Muslims and Christians.

In the past there was no problem between religions in Jimma. Rather different religions lived, peacefully one with the other. They share the same *Edir*, *Ekub* and other social interactions. However, nowadays, these things are falling under question and new crises are emerging in Jimma and its surrounding. *Edir* and *Ekub* are segregating peoples on religious basis. In addition, some are forcefully dismissed from *Edir* and *Ekub* due to their religion.⁶⁹

Extremism

Extremism is a tendency to have beliefs or opinions that are considered to be extremely unreasonable by most people.⁷⁰ Government sources and individual commentators pointed out that, in the Ethiopian context what extremist groups have in common is all attempt to fog their real motives. They often confuse or conflate religion with politics. According to the same sources, the former is a strategy for camouflage; the latter is the real objective.⁷¹

Both Muslims and Christians faced different problems while they are exercising their religious right. In Muslim dominated areas, Christians were displaced, their churches burned, forced to change their religion, denied to worship freely, etc. Similarly, in Christian dominated areas, Muslims face similar problems; they are prevented from practicing their religion freely, have been harassed and attacked.⁷²

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⁶⁶ *Selefa*, Local Weekly (Amharic) News Paper, Vol. 9, No, 386 July,2008

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⁶⁷ *Id.*, P.4 and 5

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⁶⁸ *Id.*, P.13

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⁶⁹ Tekaligne, *Managing Religious Conflicts, A Study of the Legal Framework with Particular Reference to the 2006*

Muslim-Christian Conflict in Oromiya,2008, p.92

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⁷⁰ Macmillan English Dictionary, second edition, 2007

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⁷¹ Yohannes Gebresellassie, *The Cover of Religion to Advance a Hidden Agenda is Obsolete and Unacceptable in the 21st Century*, (Saturday, 28 March, 2009) Reporter, Local Weekly (English) News Paper.

The government sources state that, some extremist people use whatever possible means at their disposal to encourage people to have angry feelings, protest and fight, hatred, instigate violence under the cover of religion. According to my respondents' view, the most disturbing phenomenon is the radical groups' focus has become the younger generation. They reach out universities, colleges and even lower level educational institutions to realize their project. Some of extremist elements even demand to construct mosques in public schools and in higher education institutions. In many parts of the Jimma zone people murdered, displaced, churches burned, property destroyed because of religion related violence. In some areas, Christians were forced to change their religion, denied to worship freely and their religious ceremonies were disrupted.

Khawarija

Kharijis (Khawarij) or ‘seceders’ are exclusivists, who believed that they were the only true Muslims.⁷³ All of my respondents stated that Khawarija is new and recently emerged Muslim sect in Jimma zone. Leaders and followers of this sect preached that the earthly law and government should not rule the human person, except by Islamic religion and the Holy Quran. They deliver message to the Muslim community to refuse payment of tax, ruled by the law, administered by the government, etc.

Kharijis ‘was at once a terrorist band and a fanatical religious sect. They were held together by the conviction that they were the only true Muslims, and that their rebellions had profound religious justification.’⁷⁴ The zeal and militancy of the Kharijis has also been a model for many later Islamic, and radical Islamist, movements. As Abdullah Schleifer expresses it, ‘the Khariji understanding of *jihad* as a revolutionary model for Islamizing the state and society has continued to haunt Sunni Islam to the present day’.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Addis Raey, cited above at note, 62, P. 8

⁷⁴ Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawārij*, Johns Hopkins University Press, (1956), p.26

⁷⁵ Lapidus, Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.49

Tekaligne in his research stated that

“Kawari is known as “Kawariya” or “Kawarija” that represents in Oromiffa “Karoora Waranaa Rawwii Islamaa Jihad” meaning the War Strategy of Islamic Jihad. “Kawari is the Arabic word to mean “Addaa ba’uu” in Oromiffa and it means “to be

separate” or “distinct” or “alone” or “different sect”. In their teaching, they teach not to greet Christians, not to touch hands of Christians. They prohibit living peacefully with Christians⁷⁶

As one of the of elder person residing in Yebu wereda stated, in Jimma area and its surroundings, some sects of Islam that claim to be more Islamic than others are widely violating peace and order of the peaceful Muslims and other religions. They believed that *jihad* should be waged against those who did not accept their view of Islam. The very latest Khawarija sect is unique in its philosophy of teaching. This third sect is new to Ethiopia and it focuses on the young Muslim group in Ethiopia. According to Sheh Abi Azid Kiyar, this sect is fundamentalist wing getting upper hand in countries like Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Somali, and Saudi Arabia. He further said that they prefer Jimma because of the size of the Muslim population and, the strength and dominance of sherya rules in Jimma. They believe that these situations are significant for the successful implementation of their mission and expansion of their doctrine.

The conflict of Khawarija sect is not only with Christians but also with Sufi Muslims who are living peacefully with Christians. They consider them as old and an out dated, lenient Muslims. They threaten the Sufi Muslim leaders and followers psychologically. An elder person in an interview mentioned that members of this sect send a cross to the respected *Imam* in their wereda because the *Imam* preaches always about tolerance and peaceful relationship with Christians. This is to imply that you are not true Muslim rather ‘kafir’ (non-Muslim).

All religious leaders Interviewed believe that the leaders and followers of Khawarja sect were actors in the 2006 conflict between Christians and

Muslims in Jimma. Members of this sect also burnt down fifty Protestant churches and caused the displacement of around 3000 Christians from their villages in the 2011 attack. Hence, the leaders and followers of this extremist group are responsible for the loss of life and property. Regarding Muslims' attack on the community and Churches around Asendabo, in March 2011, PM Meles Zenawi told a news conference that "elements of the Kwarja sect and other extremists" had been preaching religious intolerance in the area.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Schleifer, S. Abdullah, 'Jihād and the Traditional Islamic Consciousness', *Islamic Quarterly*, 4th quarter (1983), p.180

⁷⁷ Aaron Maasho, ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) Sun Mar 13, 2011 1:11pm GMT

Various Religious Leaders blame government machineries for not performing constitutional duties to protect violation of human rights properly. The communities blame the local governments and some of the state officials for their poor handling of the conflict. Ethiopia launched new economic and investment policy for development and to eradicate poverty. One of the strategies to achieve economic development is opening its door and inviting foreign investors and foreign professionals to earn capital and technology. However, some of the foreigners may have a hidden agenda. For instance, Tekaligne pointed out in his research, some years ago some Pakistan engineers entered Jimma for investment and to construct Gilgal-Gibe Hydro Electric Power project. They had been teaching new kind of Islamic fundamentalism to the young groups in Jimma zone.⁷⁸ He further stated that,

*some nine Pakistan investors came to Jimma for investment. They were teaching unique kind of religion and they went back to their country. It may be then the result of such teachings that resulted in new kinds of teaching and cruel inhuman murder of human beings and left still unaccepted religious conflicts in different parts of the country.*⁷⁹

Mostly extremism is not officially introduced into Ethiopia. The above report indicates that there are foreigners who have hidden motive of spreading the islamic fundamentalism. It is easy to introduce their objective and diffuse to the public under the umbrella of investment, trade, business, humanitarian aid, etc. These individuals who have a hidden agenda may have political motive. Their internal motive could be political or expansion of their religion to dominate other religions.

Lack of Awareness of the Constitutional Rights of Others.

In an interview made with the leader of Mulu Wengel Church, the major cause of religious conflict in Jimma is lack of awareness of the rights that the constitution granted to the people. According to him, a person who has the knowledge in the consequence of an illegal act never commits a crime. These irresponsible individuals agitate and push their followers to commit a crime against other religious groups. Awareness of freedom of religion as a constitutional right around towns is not a serious problem. Nevertheless, in rural areas, let alone religious rights the right to life is in danger.

Religious institutions have responsibilities to preach about peace and love of all humankind. The religious teachers must speak about the value of respect and recognition of others right. The institutes have responsibilities to check and supervise whether the teachings are focusing on tolerance instead of pressing believers to fight against believers of another religion. In this regard, understanding of the constitutional provisions relating religion is essential.

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Tekaligne, Cited above at note, 69, p.106

⁷⁹
Id., p.99

Prime Minister Melese Zenawi, in a speech delivered through ETV, on April 26 2004 (Miazia 18, 2004 E.C), and said that those people who are involved in religious conflict have lack of awareness. He further added that the solution is teaching these people that religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution to all without discrimination, in order to respect the rights of others.

Lack of Systematic Religious Teaching

Today, schools have become centers of religious teaching. The preachers also knock the residence of other religion to propagate their own beliefs. According to an elder person in Yebu wereda, the followers of Pentecostal religion, walk from door-to-door and knocking each house to preach their doctrine. Propagating religious beliefs in this way may outrage others and lead to violent religious conflict.

The problem of proselytism is exhibited by manipulative or illegitimate techniques of adding members to one's own particular community. Respondent from Mulu Wengel Church commented that some religious institutions assigned preachers who do not have deep knowledge in the doctrine of that religion. The Jimma zone police officer also pointed out that in some religions individuals preach without having official permission from the concerned religious institute. These individuals deliver message emotionally and unethically. They criticize others rather than focusing on the doctrine of their own religion. The institutes are weak and unable to control and manage such irresponsible act that instigate their followers and provoke others.

Absence of coordination between the leaders or administrators of a religious institute and individuals who are engaged in teaching is another problem. In

an interview made with two members of Mulu Wengel Church, one is the administrator and the other is preacher, they reflected different views on the methodology. The leader stated that our preachers never deliver a speech opposing the doctrine of other religions whereas the preacher stated that I have an obligation to criticize the doctrine and view of others to convey the order of God. Such inconsistencies indicate that there is no uniform and systematic method of administering religious teaching.

According to Sheh Abi Azid, Khawarija believers teach that Muslims should follow only Khawarija and reject Sufiya or any other Muslim teaching. They deny existence of other religions and spread their doctrine in rural areas. Teachings of different extremist groups such as Khawarija agitate and provoke the public officially in Mosques. They also propagate their extremist ideology through recorded CDs, Cassettes and printed materials.

The Role of Federal, State and Local Governments in Managing Religious Conflict.

Generally, government organs at all levels have the duty to respect, i.e., refrain from violating the right of freedom of religion, to protect the violation of such rights by others and enforce the law when victims seek justice in case of violation of their religious rights. All levels of governments have responsibilities for effective implementation of the right of freedom of religion. Therefore, the judiciary shall interpret the law to implement effectively freedom of religion. The executive has a duty to enforce the law appropriately.

In federal system of government, power is devolved from the center to the regional states and then to local governments. Therefore, the body closer to the people is the state governments than the federal governments and the local governments than the regional states. State governments through their

administration and state police force have a duty to maintain public order and peace with in the state.⁸⁰

According to the Amended 2001 Oromiya State Constitution, every organ of government has a duty to keep peace and order. Particularly, the state and local governments are expected to play the leading role. The state Security Council, including the state police commission or the security representatives, justice offices, administrators and their branches including zones, wereda and kebele do have important roles in handling conflict.⁸¹

In an interview made with Sajin Tamirat Bekele, the Jimma zone police officer, followers of the Khawarija sect committed crime under the cover of religion against non-Muslims and Muslims that do not accept their principle. After investigating the crime, the police submitted the charge for prosecution. Concerning preventive measures, after identifying members of this group the police will monitor their day-to-day activities and take necessary measures. Religious forum composed of Orthodox, Muslim, and Protestant has been established to prevent conflict through awareness creation about the extremist view of this sect. The forum, in cooperation with the Human Rights Commission, is engaged in prevention of the crime in cooperation with the police. The police officer cited that the problem is serious at wereda and kebele level. Therefore, it is planned to extend the structure of the Forum up to the lowest level to address the problem.

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Id., p.105

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The FDRE Constitution, Art.52(9)

Lack of Commitment to Enforce the Constitutional Rights of Citizens.

Most religious organizations gave credit and much appreciation to the current system of governance, especially the development of religious freedom. Freedoms of religion, equality of religion and liberty rights are included under the fundamental human rights category. The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia included freedom of religion under Art.27, separation of religion and state under Art.11, equal protection of rights under Art. 25.⁸² The Oromiya State Constitution included these rights in its preamble. It states, “We the Oromo people...have paid enormous sacrifices...to uproot the oppressive system...which was imposed upon us and violated our human and democratic right.”⁸³ Moreover, Art.10 up to 44 of the 2001 Revised Constitution of Oromiya National Regional State incorporated the human rights provisions⁸⁴ The state constitution gives due attention to these rights by imposing responsibilities on the three organs of government to respect and enforce such rights. The Constitution stipulated under Article 13(1), “Legislative, executive and judicial organs of the State at all level have the responsibility to respect and enforce the human rights provisions.” Sub article 2 further states, “The fundamental rights and liberties contained in the constitution shall be interpreted in conformity with the international human rights laws and human rights conventions and principles of other relevant international instruments that have been accepted or ratified by Ethiopia”.

Some religious leaders appreciate the commitment of the government in giving recognition of these religious rights in the constitution both at the federal and state level. One of the Religious Leaders expressed his satisfaction with the current system of governance, and said that they have full freedom to worship. Another Religious Leader has also affirmed that the

government is positively responding for their request of land. Nevertheless, another Religious leader strongly denied and blamed that local administrators unwillingness to respond to their request of land repeatedly. He said that, usually the officials tend to respond quickly to religious institutions to which they belong. One Religious leader also approved that when they go to the wereda office to get different services the officials do not treat them equally. Officials at the zonal level also show similar approach.

⁸² The National and State Security Council Establishment Proclamation (2001), **Negarit Gazeta**, Proc.No.257/2001), Art. 1

⁸³ The *FDRE Constitution*, Art. 27,11 & 25

⁸⁴ The *Oromiya State Constitution*, Preamble

Though the federal and state constitutions recognize religious rights, some religious leaders and followers complain that there is problem of implementation. Local governments do not respect the constitutional rights of minority religious groups due to the implementation problems. They treated them discriminately against the Federal and State constitution.

Every organ of the state and local governments has an obligation to respect and enforce the human rights Regarding the enforcement of these rights, almost all respondents share similar view. One of the elder persons in Yebu wereda said in an interview, when we inform the preparation of violent act by extremist groups repeatedly to the wereda administrators and the police, they kept quite at the beginning and later tried to involve after serious damage occurred on the life of individuals and property of religious institutions. The society blames local governments, police forces and some of the officials for their being negligent and poor handling mechanism of the conflict. In this

regard, the primary task of the local/wereda administration and the police should be crime prevention.

Religious leader of the Mulu Wengel Church supplements this. He described, “In the 2006 conflict, officials of the local government had the information. Nevertheless, they remain silent perhaps deliberately. According to him, in the 2011 conflict, they gathered us (religious leaders) to discuss upon the issue after many churches have been destroyed and many people killed”. As we see from the interview, government officials at the lower level are either the part of the problem or do not execute their responsibility. They are expected to collect every information from the public, analyze that information and take an immediate action to prevent or reduce the consequence of the conflict.

There is no clear effort made to bring the principal criminals who escaped the charge to bring to justice. This could have had consequence on the image of justice system of the country.⁸⁵ If the decision of the court is not implemented victims may lose confidence on. As stated in an interview made by Tekaligne with victims, they do not believe its implementation though it is fair. Due to that, most of the criminals do not fear anything after they finished imprisonment. They continued in creating terror on victims, and witnesses after they are released.⁸⁶

The Judiciary is the government organ that gives decision by interpreting the law. One of the constitutional rights of citizens is Right of Access to Justice. Accordingly, Article 37(1) of the FDRE

⁸⁵ Aron, Cited above at note, 77

⁸⁶ Tekaligne, Cited above at note, 69, p.106

Constitution, Everyone has the right to obtain a decision or judgment by, a court of law or any other competent body with judicial power⁸⁷ However, legal recognition of rights of citizens is meaningless unless the executive implements it in accordance with the decision of the court. In this regard, the Council of Ministers on which the highest executive power has a duty to ensure the implementation of law.⁸⁸ Therefore, police and prison administration shall enforce the court decisions.

Lack of Impartiality in Accommodating Different Religions.

In different organs of the government at local level, there is lack of impartiality. Because of this, there are incidences that the government officials seem to support the violent act of one of the religious group against the other. For instance,

Officials of local government mishandled the dispute between two religions when we see the role played by the concerned organs in the area. The local governments in the area themselves were part of the problem than to be part of the solution. Aba G/Meskel, Religious leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jimma stated that one of the causes of the conflict between Christian and Muslim is the interest to be superior on others. Some officials of local governments use their political power to dominate minority religious groups in order to ensure the superiority of their own religion. They do not oppose or take any measure for an act of aggression of one group on another. Usually, their response to the request for land and permission to construct churches of non-Muslim religious institutions is not positive like Muslims. Such discrimination is unconstitutional act because it violates the principle of secularism and equality of all religions.

The problem of treating minority religious groups unequally is more serious in rural areas than towns. According to Orthodox leader, When non-Muslim residents demand something from kebele administration, the officials' response is request for the conversion of their religion to Muslim. In some places, local administrators send a letter and the picture of swords to threaten Christians. Most of the members of the kebele and Wereda administrators were supporting the conflict. In addition, most of the participating officials are still there. Some of them changed Wereda and serving in similar or better position. Moreover, they had been using the used armaments during conflict to aggravate the condition.

Government organs, and its system and officials have the duty to protect violation of the right of citizens by others, and respect the principles of secularism and separation of state and religion. They have to take preventive measures to handle religious conflicts and take necessary actions impartially. Tizazu, from Ministry of Federal Affairs, proved the involvement of local administrators in Muslim-Christian conflict in Jimma. Government officials including lawyers, administrators and prosecutors were involved in the 2006 conflict between Muslims and Christians in Jimma. A prosecutor, who is expected to respect laws, and to protect the violation of human rights, was caught leading some 5000 persons, to burn the house of Christians. He initiated and led Muslims to kill Christians, saying, "Allah Wahakuber".⁸⁹

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The *FDRE Constitution*, Art.37

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The *FDRE Constitution*, Art.77

Most respondents expressed that most officials are changed or promoted to another place or position and still working without being accused of charges. Such kinds of involvement of the government official in conflict between

religions aggravate the tension and causes mistrust of the public on government officials. Beside this, it will erode the culture of tolerance existed between followers of different religion for many years.

Lack of Capacity and Absence of Effective Mechanism to Manage Conflict

Government officials at local level have not been in a position to provide institutional support in line with the Constitution that calls for ensuring religious rights. There is a tendency to be influenced by localized interests that can provoke conflicts. They have neither the capacity nor the awareness of conflict management mechanisms. Consequently, conflicts, in some of the State and local governments, tend to be reinforced rather than managed effectively.

Almost all interviewee agree that conflict management system in Ethiopia is poor. In Ethiopia, conflict management is after the situation reaches its crisis level. Early warning and conflict management mechanisms are rare in the case of the 2006 conflict in Oromiya.

Article 52 (2) (g) of The FDRE Constitution, imposes the duty, on State governments, to maintain public order and peace within the state through its administrative organs and state police force. Moreover, the amended Oromiya State Constitution imposes the duty to keep peace and order on every organs of the government. State security council, State police commission, justice offices, administrators at Zone, Wereda and Kebele levels do have responsibilities in handling Conflict.⁹⁰

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Tekaligne, Cited above at note, 69, p.104

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proc.No.257/2001, Cited above at note, 45, Art.1

One problem rose by the Zonal police is lack of capacity to get appropriate evidence. The police force has governments provide support to the zone after the conflict reached at climax. Without taking preventive measures of conflict, it is not possible to maintain peace and security. Taking actions after the conflict has already reached climax level means peace and security of the public is infringed. Concerning this, all religious leaders and followers agreed that the government system at all level is weak in taking preventive measures. In fact, recently the Ministry of Federal Affairs is initiating the establishment of religious forum. As Tizazu stated, its purpose is mainly to solve the problem by religious institutions themselves. However, the forum itself has a number of problems to achieve its mission effectively. Among these, financial constraints to extend its structure up to the wereda and kebele level, different views are reflected among the religious groups it constitutes regarding its mission and intervention of extremist group are some of the problems faced by the forum.

Government organs at federal, regional/state and especially at zonal, wereda and kebele level must have the capacity to handle religious conflicts. Causes of religious conflicts may vary from place to place. Concerned government officials and employees have to be able to know the real cause of religious conflicts, the sensitivity of the problem, to forecast the extent and consequence of religious conflicts. They shall give quick and wise decisions but with due diligence before conflicts reached at crises level

The International Religious Freedom Report, expressed its opinion that “local and municipal authorities should not overlook to consider causes of religious conflicts other than religious difference”.⁹¹ Local authorities do not know the historical background of different religions and potential causes that may lead to religious conflict. Besides this, they do not have strategy to remove those

potential causes in order to prevent or minimize the occurrence of religious conflict. Moreover, they are reluctant and inefficient to give appropriate and prompt decision before conflicts reach at crises level.

The society condemns government's late approach after life and property of citizens are lost. One of the reasons of failures to take preventive measures to cease or mitigate religious conflicts is lack of capacity in knowledge and in management skills, In this regard; the mismanagement problems of the government organs in Jimma, mainly police and administrators have contributed to the conflict between Christians and Muslims.

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International Religious Freedom Report, 2007 Ethiopia, P. 5

Conclusion

Ethiopia is one of the ancient Christian nations in the World and the first country that accepted Islam; even when the first Muslims were persecuted in the holiest Islamic city of Mecca. Since the initial introduction of Islam into Ethiopia, relations between Christians and Muslims were friendly for the most part of history. Communities of both religions live side by side in peace and harmony for centuries. However, recently there are some incidents of religious conflicts and persecution in some parts of the country.

Orthodox Christianity had been the official State religion of Ethiopia up until the end of imperial era in 1974. The governments disregard the concepts of freedom of religion, separation of state and religion or equality of religions until that time. These principles get recognition under the PDRE constitution for the first time. Nevertheless, The *Derg* regime did not implement these principles due to the socialist ideology it followed. The 1995 FDRE

Constitution establishes secular form of government and ensures freedom of religion and equality of all religions better than any of the previous constitutions did in Ethiopia. It declares the separation of State and religion and pronounces that there is no State religion. That is why Ethiopian Muslims, Christians, and other denominations finally achieved a sense of freedom and equality. As a result, many religions are flourishing and their followers are freely exercising in most parts of the country without any fear since its adoption.

Even though, there was strong relationship between church and state, and discriminatory treatments imposed on different religions by governments in the past, different religions existed without serious conflict. The long-standing culture of religious tolerance in this country ranges from intimate friendship, good neighborly hood to inter religious marriage.

Some of the reasons for such religious peace is the settlement pattern of the people is not along religious line. When we observe the Ethiopian religious distribution, believers of different religion mix together with others in several regions of the country. There is also strong social interaction and a good culture of religious tolerance that is deeply rooted among Christians and Muslims established because of living together in one area for long time. In almost all religious doctrines, except recently introduced extremist religious group, peace, love and give respect to others are religious principles. Furthermore, the religious rights such as freedom and equality of all religions and separation of state and religion guaranteed by the current constitution develop confidence and trust in the mind of believers so that they exercise their religious right without fear with others. These are grounds for tolerance and peaceful coexistence of different religions.

Christians and Muslims were also peacefully living in Jimma until 2006. However, since 2006, the situation changed. Many non-Muslims die inhumanly, forced to convert their religion and properties destroyed due to the conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Zone. Therefore, this study attempted to search for the causes of Muslim Christian conflict in Jimma zone.

The causes of the conflicts are, on one hand related to the activities and responsibilities of the religious institutions, and the government's commitment to implement the constitution and capacity to manage conflict, on the other. Unsolved historic issues of resource distribution such as land among religions, issues of administration like poor handling mechanisms and weaknesses to focus on prevention method of religious conflicts, lack of secular and fair treatment of religions, problems of tolerance and injustice are some of the causes of the conflict. The other causes include teachings of the newly emerging religious groups and the doctrine they disseminate to the believers, financial influence, and introducing the hidden agenda of some groups under the cover of religion, etc.

Resource issues on land to build mosque or church, and for religious celebration place are one of potential causes of conflict between Christians and Muslims. There is a visible inequity in treatment and access by local officials when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Local administrators issue the nearside celebration place to different religions without considering the possibility of religious clash. Print and electronic media have also contributed to aggravate the problem by propagating minor religious clashes in irresponsible manner.

In many parts of the Jimma zone, the newly emerged Muslim sect called Khawarija murdered and displaced people, burned churches, denied to

worship freely and forced Christians to convert their religion. The philosophy of teaching this sect is also against the doctrine of Sufi Muslims who are living peacefully with Christians. They threaten the Sufi Muslim leaders and followers psychologically by considering them as old and an out dated lenient Muslims and labeling them as ‘not true Muslim’, rather ‘kafir’ (non-Muslim). Khawarija gets financial support and training from foreign sources so that it can easily attract young people and propagate its doctrine the entire zone in a short period. Its foreign members also came to Ethiopia, under the cover of investment, business activities and humanitarian aid, to disseminate their idea of fundamentalism. The purpose of this sect is to impose its doctrine on others forcefully. Khawarija sect has a political motive to change the government system into Islamic government. They call the current government kefir (Christian) government, teach the Muslim society not to pay tax to government and say one has to pay tax only to Allah. The teachings of this sect are against government policies and laws targeting to change the government to Islamic one, by force.

Most religious leaders and teachers know that they have a right to preach but have limitations on the extent of their duties and responsibilities. Most of them focused on the mission of delivering their religious message and increasing the number of followers without respecting the rights of others. Their religious institutions do not make an effort to create awareness regarding their duties and responsibilities. Some religious institutions do not have uniform and centralized method of delivering religious teaching. Individual feelings and emotions are reflected in their preaching. The way these individuals preach instigate their followers to hate and attack members of other religion and provoke others to take counter act. Most religious institutions do not have monitoring mechanisms of teaching intolerance,

controlling system of an act of agitating the public to violate rights of others and delivery of messages against government policies. The weaknesses of the institutes to control and manage such irresponsible act of individuals obviously lead to conflict.

Violation of religious rights is serious at zonal, wereda and kebele level. The ultimate safe guard for religious freedom, tolerance and mutual coexistence of different denominations is not only a constitutionally guaranteed freedom and equality of religions, but also a firm commitment to put into practice these rights. Even though every organ of government has a duty to keep peace and order, the state and local governments are expected to play the leading role. Hence, the state Security Council, including the state police commission or the security representatives, justice offices, administrators and their branches including zones, wereda and kebele do have important role in handling conflict. However, most government officials at the lower levels were reluctant to perform their duty and not committed to protect the constitutional rights of citizens. There is also discriminatory treatment of religions by the local administrators.

Conflict management mechanisms are weak in the case of religious conflict in Jimma Zone. In almost all conflict areas, the local administrators and the police did not take any preventive measures, though they were pre informed by members of the community. Police has limitation in number, facilities and training to manage conflicts in the zone. So far, there is no effort to organize and train the wereda and zonal police forces to take pre conflict measures.

The Ministry of Federal Affairs is initiating the establishment of religious forum to solve the problem by religious institutions themselves. However, the

forum itself has a number of problems to achieve its mission effectively. Among these, financial constraints to extend its structure up to the wereda and kebele level, lack of awareness of its mission among the religious groups and intervention of extremist group are some of the problems faced by the forum.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Our values such as strong, peaceful and positive social interactions, and good culture of religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims, had sustained the stability and continuity of Ethiopian society. Thus, government has to work with different religions and civic society organizations to maintain and inculcate these values in the society.
- It is risky to permeate construction or issue land around the same area for two religions. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the distances in allocation and use of land by different religions considering the possibility of religious clash.
- Members of the extremist Muslim sect, Khawarija, infiltrate in to the country under the cover of trade, investment and humanitarian aid. Hence, government has to devise strong controlling mechanism, if possible, before they get visa or license, if not, serious follow up on their day-to-day activity must be made. Moreover, government shall investigate and break their financial flow in to Ethiopia.
- Religious leaders have responsibility to teach their followers the meaning of freedom of religion, the duty of respect of others right, the value of tolerance, etc. Therefore, Religious institutions and leaders

have to make sure that the teachings and methodology of the preachers are free from violation.

- Government organs, its institutes and officials at all levels have the duty to work in conformity with the constitution. They have the duty to respect the constitutional rights of citizens and protect when others violate such rights. The judiciary shall pass appropriate and impartial decision against those committed violent and inhuman act. The executive shall implement the decision of the court properly. Thus, government has to make sure that its officials are respecting and protecting rights of citizens and its organs are performing their duties in accordance with the constitution.
- Our federal system is not proactive in managing conflict. Government took measure after the conflict reached at climax. In this regard, local authorities have to know the historical background of different religions and potential causes that may lead to religious conflict. Moreover, they shall give appropriate and prompt decision before conflicts reach at crises level. Therefore, government has to give training on conflict preventive strategies to the concerned officials and workers at zonal, wereda and kebele level.
- State security council, State police commission, justice offices, administrators at Zone, Wereda and Kebele levels shall be well organized institutionally, equipped with necessary facilities and skilled man power in order to accomplish their task successfully. Hence, government has to capacitate these levels of government in all these aspects.
- The newly established religious forum can be taken as one conflict preventive strategy. Nevertheless, its financial sources are religious

institutions that do not have sufficient fund to accomplish its purpose.
So, the government shall support this forum to achieve its goal.

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