

87TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION AHMADIYYA MUSLIM MISSION GHANA

THEME; BUILDING A VIOLENCE-FREE SOCIETY, THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN

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An African Proverb says, and I quote 'the ruins of a nation begin in the homes of its people' (end of quote). A nation cannot be in turmoil if there is no turmoil within its foundation, its people and in its homes. Likewise, peace in a nation begins in its homes when people are well nourished, cared for and loved.

Building a violence free society therefore behoves all to reduce poverty by adhering to the time-tested life course approach to human development physically, emotionally, mentally and psychologically from cradle to the grave. Many variables such as large cities and poverty have been found to be associated with crime. Large cities mainly due to economic migration are said to be characterised by anonymity and in the world of strangers, men lose their feeling of responsibility for their fellow men. The anonymity of the city permits the criminal to commit his or her offence with little fear of being recognised. Another variable found to be consistently related to crime is poverty. Teenage pregnancy, child marriage, unintended and unwanted pregnancies support and fuel poverty and by extension crime. Children born from these pregnancies are unfortunately mostly under privileged with little affection shed on them and are therefore far more likely to end up as delinquent.

In Ghana and indeed worldwide, children aged 0-17 years are parent's responsibility for optimal care with government's support. Indeed, they are so immature that nations find them too juvenile to vote.

Despite the fact that society finds them too young to vote and participate in political processes that may affect their life yet, we marry some off as brides and others get pregnant out of unions at times with active involvement of parents, primary caregivers and protectors, driving high population growth, poverty and crime.

If a girl becomes a mother at 15 years, she becomes the nurturer of the next generation when she is still a child under training herself. Remember to teach means you have learnt so obviously, she can't teach much because she hasn't learnt much to instil values in the human, the most important resource of nations. Community values of integrity, dignity, hard work, empathy and perseverance will be distorted with unimaginable detrimental consequences including violence to current generation and probably to the next.

As one writer said, and I quote 'you can't become a doctor overnight, a pharmacist overnight, nor a banker overnight. God chose a mother with special characteristics for his son because it is a divine calling, but we look on and allow children to be mothers without a care.' (End of quote). Whiles it is true that it was an honour to marry girls off early years back, does this hold true for the 21st century when education and information is the new valued capital? Can old ways open new doors?

It is documented that boys born to teenage mothers are 13% more likely to be incarcerated later in life and girls born to teenage mothers are 22% more likely to become teenage mothers themselves.

The trend is supported by the fact that the economic, social and psychological status of teenage mothers are likely to limit their access and that of their children to all the quality things in life such as food, shelter, education, love and care. Teenage pregnancy and child marriage if left unchecked, significantly increases the number of people not in education, training and employment, thus, creating a fertile ground for breeding and sustaining violence in our nation and seriously threatening our peace.

This phenomenon leads to increased family and national expenditure and reduced accumulation of human capital for national socio-economic development keeping violence and poverty in a vicious cycle.

Developed countries such as the USA, estimates the annual cost of teen pregnancies from lost revenue, public assistance, child care, foster care and involvement with the criminal justice system to be about \$7 billion annual of expenditure with very little returns.

With 14% of our teenagers as mothers and child marriage at 27%, over 50% unmet for contraceptive among the adolescents, what is the annual cost of teen pregnancies, maternal related morbidities and mortalities to Ghana in lost tax revenue, public assistance, child care including fistula repairs and involvement in the criminal justice system?

What is happening around us, our individual and collective experiences on crime coupled with all the empirical evidence require us to rise up, discuss and address

the phenomenon of child marriage and teenage pregnancy as a major precondition to maintaining a high population growth rate, poverty and crime. Failure to do so will unfortunately negatively affect our nation's destiny.

For us to enjoy a violence-free and peaceful society, we need to among other interventions, prioritise the elimination of teenage pregnancy and child marriage just as we abhor child voting because they are not matured enough for that important national exercise even though they are also affected by our choices. Likewise, they certainly are not matured enough to put their hand on the plough of parenthood.

If children under 18 years cannot vote for Presidents, they certainly cannot and should not be producing and nurturing the future generation for health, social, economic and psychological reasons if we are to build a violent free society and leave the world better than we found it.

In conclusion, for us to reduce the level of violence or increase the peace we wish to enjoy, we should remember the African proverb that the ruins of nations begin in the homes of its people but I will add that the peace we enjoy also begins in our homes. To that end, our role as citizens (parents, religious leaders, teachers, traditional authorities, media among others) should be to co create the peaceful environment we so desire by first reducing injustice in our homes with our children by reducing teenage pregnancy, child marriage and unwanted pregnancies to the barest minimum. By so doing we will be pursuing a right based life course approach to sustainable peaceful, happy, quality human development, and not opting for the path of least resistance that satisfies our individual and societal norms which should be dynamic not static with the ultimate goal of

improving our lives. In sum, old ways won't open new doors. Today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development, indeed a violent free society. (African union 2007).

I thank you