

**Title [Unique]**

Interview Alhajji Shaibu Armiyawo (Acting Director at the time of the interviews, but became the Director of the Greater Accra Islamic Education Unit)

**Creator**

Owusu-Ansah, David

Armiyawo, Al-Hajj Sheikh Shaibu

**Description**

This interview and subsequent ones outside this project focused on the history of education in Ghana and the manner that Muslims in Ghana have reacted toward secular learning. The central issue is how best to the Islamic Education Unit (as agency of the Ghana Education Service) can interest Muslims in secular education. The ability of the Unit to do so will contribute to sustaining religious tolerance in the country.

Monday July 11 2005,

Part I of Interview with al-Hajj Shaibu Armiyawo, Acting Manager of the Islamic Education Unit, Greater Accra

Q: Would you please introduce yourself?

A. I am Sheikh Armiyawo Shaibu. Officially not a Sheikh but the community refers to me as that. I am a graduate of the University of Ghana (Legon) and currently working with the Islamic Education Unit; I am a teacher by profession and rose to the position of Deputy Regional Manager for Islamic Education Unit (Greater Accra), and with the retirement of my boss I am now in the position as Acting Regional Manager of the Greater Accra Islamic Education Unit since 2003. In addition to this position, I am also the National Secretary of the Conference of Managers of Educational Units--a responsibility that my former boss also served as secretary and once he [retired and I assumed his responsibilities; I also became secretary to the Managers of Education Units]. I am also an Imam (I deliver sermons as the Dar-es-Salam Mosque at the Airport Residential Area [in Accra] and I am also a visiting Imam at the Military Mosque (Accra) and also a Television presenter on Islamic issues in Accra. These are the activities that I engage in.

Q: I want you to clarify this. When you say that you are a director of Islamic Education Unit, in the minds of students will this be equal to Islamic schooling of the Saudi Arabia type [Quranic schools] and is this the same schooling system that you are talking about?

A. No. We are talking about an institution that encourages the integration of both secular and Islamic education and indeed in Islam we are made to understand that Islam does not make a distinction between what is secular and what is religious. Life is built in totality and what helps one to have an appreciation of life and to function effectively is important so in the Islamic Education Unit promotes the education as a holistic education of the Muslim so all our schools teach modern sciences are included as well as Arabic are all included [as part of the instructional content].

Q. Before the development of the IEU as the modern type as you have just described, where would the Muslim children who wanted to have that total education experience turn?

A. That is a very good question! A few parents who appreciated [secular] education who also appreciated the weaknesses of the exclusively Arabic school system ventured to take their children to [Christian] Mission Schools and we have many Muslims who are products of these institutions. [As a result of the mission school influence, some of these Muslim students] have lost their Muslim identities but others retained their Muslim identities. This is the reason why many Muslim parents were suspicious of the intention of these mission schools. I will say that there were parents who were apprehensive of the education system that was Eurocentric and also Christian in content. We see now that with the coming of the Islamic Education system, there is a shift from that apprehension and fear to a more accommodating toward western education because it integrates secular education and religious one and therefore it is holistic. Before this time, many Muslim children will not go [or were not sent to school] but preferred to go to the makaranta [recitation Quranic schools] and a few found their way into the Christian mission schools and these are the [Western educated] leaders you see in the Muslim communities.

Q. You used the term "accommodation" to describe what you referred to as the few how "went to Christian schools" and now of course [this] new shift to the Islamic Education Unit is another "accommodation". In that sense, [we are brought to the very] idea behind this project--to look at religious tolerance in Ghana. How would you perceive the old system of [training] and the new one [IEU] as contributing to religious co-existence [or tolerance in the country]?

A. The old system in itself did not promote tolerance. In other words it was set apart--Arabic and Islamic religion and the purpose was to make the Muslim children not accepting anything Christian and even not accepting the friendship of Christians. It gave you the sense that Christians were always your enemies and we saw the practical evidence of that in our communities--the Zongos. The Zongo was a place that was not friendly to non-Muslims. When a non-Muslim entered the Zongo, he was seen as kafir [non-believer] not to be entertained and to come there and his presence was seen as sacrilegious to Islam. This did not promote friendliness and therefore accommodation. But with the introduction of this Islamic Education and in fact with the introduction of modern schools in our country has helped but not so significantly. This is because many Muslim children did not go to the mission or government boarding schools. The Muslims who went to these schools were very few. These Muslims who found themselves in these mission/government schools were the few in predominately Christian schools and therefore they had to be accommodative and friendly. Such products of such system are friendlier and more integrated into society than those who go to the old Muslim institutions. There is therefore more tolerance because they were able to keep their Islamic identities and therefore they become more confident to interact with non-Muslims and they know how to interact. But if you take the exclusive Muslim schools then we have problems. Part of their inability to interact is one of inferiority feeling

because they see themselves as not having gone to school. There is better economic life for those with [Western education] and in the communities of Muslims that do not have western schooling there is filth and unemployment but there is the loyalty to religion. This could be reason for tension as violence is a mode of those who feel inferior to assert themselves.

Over these years with the establishment of the Islamic Education Unit, there is a shift of attitude. Even parents themselves are accepting western education. Because of this new system of education even Muslim parents are being forced to interact with non-Muslim teachers, for example. If I should venture or risk present percentages I would say that about 80 percent or a great majority of the teachers in the Greater Accra, and even nationally, are Christians. In other words, we do not even have the human resources to say that you want to remain independent. [So once you have the western curriculum for Islamic schools] and the majority of the people who took advantage of mission schooling become Christians, you have no choice but to have your own sons being taught by Christian teacher in an Islamic school. For example, I was taught by dedicated Christian teacher from class one to Form Four (from K-1-K-10). In all that 10 years of education, all my teachers were Christians but only one. So since you have them, you have to interact with them. Now the parents accept them. This was the case of my schooling at Sekondi and she became very integrated into the Zongo community. They all called her Madam, Madam, and she can enter every house at the Zongo and she was a Christian. Even at my level now as manager of Islamic Education, we have the Conference of Manager of Schools. This is the conference of all the school managers from all the religious bodies in the country brought onto a common platform. The Conference of Managers of Education Units (COMEU) must have conference president or chair person. The first chair was an Ahmadi Muslim and my own boss here was the national secretary. So you have 2 Muslims who were heading an organization that was predominantly non-Muslim and therefore Christian and presently, I act as the national secretary. We have a Methodist who is now the national president, and we work together. So makes sense that in Ghana we have peaceful co-existence and tolerance but this should not make us think that there has never been any tension before.

There have been [inter-religious] tensions before. I can give you an example and we can say that sometimes the tension is not because of the nature of the two religions but rather the attitudes and backgrounds of individuals being hot tempered; so an example was in Kumase when somebody from the Charismatic preachers [Christian evangelical preachers] and to show the impotence or the lack of it of the Holy Quran, he put it on the ground and stepped on it. This was to demonstrate that the Quran was not powerful in full view of some Muslims who were not able to control themselves. What he did was enough to create a whole great violent response that affected the whole Kumase metropolis. For the first time it dawned on the country that Muslims in the country are quiet but when provoked they can become violent. So it took the hard work of the police to calm the violence but the dimension was not as much as you can find in Nigeria. This however led to the creation of a new forum--The Forum of religious Bodies--to find amicable solution to religious intolerance. This is to tell you that in Ghana there is good relationship between Muslims and Christians and both groups are recognized and have

participated in national political election monitoring and observations to help solve problems. This is just one example, but there was also the case in Tamale (in the North) and an evangelist who wanted to preach similarly. This one did not become a crisis because there was police intervention so that did not degenerate into violence. But at Sekondi, when a Christian Evangelist made mockery of the Muslim call to prayer, that one degenerated into violence. This preacher has done so to get the attention of Muslims and he has learnt a little about the call to prayer and used his microphone to call prayers when it was not time for prayers. He provoked the Muslim youth into attacks. I have personally witnessed the misinterpretation of Islam in Kumase. I happened to be around in Kumase and I saw this young preacher who has learnt the fundamentals of Islam and could read the Quran to give his own interpretation. He quoted in Arabic but I could see that he did not have the full grips of the system. I tested his Arabic in a conversation but found out that he was not interested. I confronted him at another time when he claimed that he had learned the whole Quran and found nothing good in the Quran. When I said so, he now becoming more careful because I was speaking English but I also found out that he was not rooted well in the English language as well. He turned to speak in the local language to say that the Quran is bad because it did not represent Jesus and his mother well. He asked to visit me, but if this had been a typical Zongo (Muslim community) situation this could have degenerated into serious conflict.

This is not the only case because there is also Christians who have become Muslims. If they behave this same way we can have more conflict.

Q. If converted-Muslim and Christian preachers are a source of some of this conflict, why have these incidents of conflict not been many in Ghana?

A. Generally you must say that by the very nature of Ghanaians is that they do not like violence. This is true even of the Muslims. Ghanaian Muslims are careful and they believe that this is God's work so they turn to leave things to Him. Together with this is the sort of situation where even our community is to promote tolerance. Apart from the typical Zongo community, many people in Ghana live in compound houses where Christians and Muslims may rent from the same landlord. We use the same public transportations and you can be sitting next to a Muslim and there is nothing you can do. Even at my office here, I have many Christians who work under me--the majority of my teachers are Christians and this situation makes it incumbent for us to accept the situation of coexistence peacefully. There are also situations that are potential sources of conflict. As many people who hold high administrative positions are non-Muslims, Muslims will claim that they have to pay bribes because once the Muslim has come, he has to be exploited. This is the case because the rank and file is usually Christians and once they see your name to be "Muhammad" that means you can be exploited. This is unofficial discrimination and this is there. Even in the media. Before these new TV stations were opened, GBC [Ghana Broadcasting Corporation] has monopoly over the news, and on Sundays, I used to call the News "Church News" because the presented news from Church to church and you did not find any news on Islam even on Fridays when you have [specifically] asked them to cover your activities. This happens not because it is the policy of the [National Broadcasting] corporation but I once found that there was once a

person who was in charge of programming at the TV station so why would he not give advantages to Christian activities? These discriminations are there because you have the majority of functionaries of government to be Christians and sometimes this creates potential discriminations and I find my friends thinking that they have been discriminated. They say that "these people, they don't like us."

Q. Why have the Muslims [harbored this] and not talked about it [for national discourse]?

A. That is it, because we [the Muslims] have a weakness up front. Our front is divided. For example, they [will think of themselves] as ahl-Sunna, we are Tijaniyya, so we do not have a platform to discuss common concerns. So our own inner struggles will divert out attention from important things that will help [the Muslim community].

Q. I know that your research work is on conflict resolution. That is to say that the point you just made is not something new. So would you talk about some of those conflicts and how they have been resolved so they do not become national crisis?

A. Usually theorists will tell you that you cannot have a world without conflict. Conflict is therefore part of our nature and in fact they have their advantages. Conflicts need to be managed and controlled so that the negative side of conflict could be kept at bay and the positive side of the conflict could be used to enhance human development. This is the aspect that the Muslim community has not come to appreciate. Even by thinking about this from the research [perspective], we see that conflicts arose from disagreement and we come to understand as an attempt by one to neutralize or destroy you so people react [negatively]. But if you do not think of it in those terms, then it is only a disagreement! We should be able to appreciate this to be good and that is the reason why the Holy Prophet tells us that "The differences of opinion among my community are a mercy." [And on major issues, the Prophet also said "That My community will never disagree"]. But unfortunately we have not come to appreciate this. Secondly, we also have not come to terms that even in dealing with the differences [or in the process of differing] there is room for harmonization and therefore there is room for dialogue and openness to dialogue. This is a very important tool for arriving at harmonization instead of wanting to see only our opinions. The absence of this process is the seed of emerging conflict. In Ghana, we have had evidence that conflict has been destructive, it has broken family ties, and life has been lost. For example as early as the 1960s, Tamale [The Northern Regional Capital] was [the scene of major] conflict between Ahl-Sunnah and Tijaniyya Muslims when Afa Jura and Malik Muhammad all representing the two diametrically opposed positions within the Muslim community regarding sectarian differences represented by two personalities. This means that sometimes [these conflicts] are a matter of personality cults. Each one wanting to show how powerful he is. Afa Jura was the Ahl-Sunnah person in this reoccurring people in Tamale. He declared the leading Tijanni (Mallam Mikanu) a persona non grata in Tamale by his opponent, and anytime he was invited to Tamale, there was a conflict because he [Afa Jura] was at conflict with Mallam Mikanu. The issue of conflict was over the question of Tijanni and Ahl-Sunnah interpretations-- that is whether Tijaniyya was acceptable Islam. Afa Jura and his supporters will say that

Tijaniyya is not Islam but innovation and we need to fight it and remove it. The other side will say "No Tijaniyya is Islam and we have to practice it."

This shows that interpretations of doctrines become a problem. For example, the Afa Jura view is that Islam is unalloyed. It cannot be mixed with anything and should be based only on the way the Prophet did it, so that is the Islam we want. This raises the question of what is "sunna" or traditions. One will say, "This is not in harmony with [Prophetic] traditions and the other will say no, this is in harmony with tradition." So who is right, but even it was no longer about who is right because they continued to debate and out of the debate comes conflict. The two sides are influential and have large following so sometimes this leads to personal attacks which bring the followers into the conflict and this was the case from the early 1960s, through the 1970s even into the early 1990s. The latest incidence was in Tamale in the late 1990s. The conflict was over the issue of the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday. We have the Ahl-Sunnah (they are the Ghana version of the Wahabi sect)... [Interruption due to guests to see the Acting manager. This interview is stopped to be continued shortly].

Part II: Interview with al-Hajj Shaibu Armiyawo  
Acting Manager of the Islamic Education Unit, Greater Accra  
11 July 2005

We were conversing with regards to the issue of conflict in the Muslim community and on a discussion of examples as to how conflict resolution. We left off on the discussion on Interpretation of the Quran-the disagreement among Muslim personalities but the disagreements were not seen as a character of Islam.

A. [Continued] I was giving examples and I said that the latest one took place in the late 1990s over the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday. The Tijaniyya Muslims [the main Sunni Muslim group in Ghana] has a tradition of venerating and extol the Prophet--an act which the Ahl Sunnah [the Wahabi type] are opposed to. The Ahl-Sunnah would say that the "man was a prophet, and he was sent to bring the message and he has done that and therefore it is finished. He does not occupy any spiritual hierarchy." The Tijaniyya see the Prophet as "more than a human being and so therefore he must be extolled and that his Birthday must be celebrated." So before the celebration, there had been signals of possible clash. And also the [Ahl-Sunnah] Imam had thought was not invited to the activities. So a group from the Ahl-Sunnah unleashed an attacked on the Tijaniyya who were celebrating the Birthday of the Prophet., One person died and property was destroyed. Any time there was conflict between these groups in Tamale, there was blood shed.

In Kumase there was also conflict in [between Ahl-Sunnah and the Tijaniyya] and life was lost. [Much of the conflict was led by leading and hard core Ahl-Sunnah imams in Kumase]. These are the hot-tempered Evangelist (if we were to compare them to the Christian preachers). The whole enterprise of bring about reform and change has been misapplied. But those who misapply it think that they are doing the correct thing. For



example, a scholar of the Wahabi [Ahl-Sunnah] tradition will tell you that the prophet has told us that "whoever amongst you see anything wrong must change it with his hand, or use his tongue, or use his heart but that is the weakest of faith." So now they look at this prophetic statement on the order of preference--the first in the list is to "use your hand" and the hand means that you have to establish authority. They have not evaluated the authority or mandate needed to act.

Q. How this particular [interpretation of the prophetic statement] been evaluated or raised in the Muslim community in Ghana?

A. No! This is because people do not understand the how to analysis text very well and see to its application. Text is one thing and application is another.

Q. If that is the case, then how do you resolve conflict and why hasn't Ghana exploded into Islamic conflict?

A. The explosion is what I have given you a catalog of examples. All these have happened because these things have not been understood. So then, somebody say I am commanded to use the hand and I used the hand. And then the "tongue" must be must, but it is being used to vilified and castigate in a manner that generate response from the other side and lead to conflict and the loss of life. Another reason is also because there is an entrenched position [by those in the conflict] and everyone thinks that they have the right to do what they are doing and no body has the right to stop me... So whenever an attempt is made to stop one from exercising their religious expression, conflict emerges. So we have several conflicts in Tamale and in Kumase, and Wench that led to deaths and loss of property. In Sekondi, there were conflicts between the Tijaniyya and the Ahl-Sunnah communities, and so on and so forth.

But to a point, there were not effort from the Muslim community to redress the conflict because the community itself did not have a good structure of leadership that was recognized and respected by the general Muslim community in such a way that it could intervene in conflict and redress the situation. So that is a fundamental weakness. As the Muslim community became more and more unpopular in the Ghana [because of its conflicts, the image of Muslims became linked or likened] or related to other Muslim world [violent actions] such at that in Palestine and other places which the Western Media [had already] portrayed Muslims as violent. The non-Muslims following these events have already made their conclusions so what was happening in the Ghana Muslim community was seen as giving credence to an already conceived opinion of Muslims elsewhere.

As this was happening, at one point, the government became concerned and thought that terrorism was gradually fining its way into Ghana. President Rawlings at that time had a distinct feeling that certain people were being trained somewhere and that they were bringing into Ghana this kind of violent expression of Islam. He at one point, [President Rawlings] invited the Chief Imam personally for discussions behind close doors and asked that this nature of conflict be resolved. This became his challenge. BUT how can

the chief Imam solve a conflict in which he is a part? He belongs to the Tijaniyya and the whole conflict was between the Tijaniyya and the Ahl-Sunnah. This is the reason why that the Ahl-Sunnah [Wahabi] in Ghana had declared that they also have the desire to establish their own hierarchy--[have their own Chief Imam of the Ahl-Sunnah]. Because whenever there was a problem, the [government] sought the Chief Imam. Now the Ahl-Sunnah had a Press Conference and announced their Chief Imam and inaugurated him--Hajj Umar who is now the Chief Imam of the Ahl-Sunnah.

Q. So now the Ghana Muslim Community has Ahmadiyya Imam, then you have the Tijaniyya Imam, and now you have the Ahl-Sunnah [Wahabi] Chief Imam!

A. Yes, but you see, the [national] Chief Imam by his own association is a Tijaniyya. But in his position he is not to represent the interest of the Tijaniyya. It is only that he has not been able to position himself outside the conflict and be viewed as a National leader. That is the reason why the Ahl-Sunnah people have not been able to recognize his as such. But he could have played a role that could have attracted the respect of the other side. But how could he have done so since he is a very loyal Tijaniyya or no small standing and he sees the Ahl-Sunnah people as opposed to Tijaniyya. So he is in a very [difficult] dilemma. So what the Ahl-Sunnah people did was to establish their leadership so in this case, a third party will have to intervene to resolve problems because the [Ahl-Sunnah people] saw themselves as the losers every time there was conflict because people saw the Tijaniyya as the established community that was being challenged by the new comers, or rebels and so on. [Thus, by establishing their own Imam, the Ahl-Sunnah community was trying to be seen also as an established group and not as challengers to an old cause.] So when there is a problem between us, then somebody can come to intervene. But the Ahmadiyyas did not have a problem at all because they were seen as a [theologically] separate group. They are regarded as a heretical group and therefore in the Sunni community, they Ahmadiyyas are not seen as a problem at all. [With the exception of the Wa incidents] I do not remember any one seeing the Ahmadiyya in conflict with the Sunni Muslims. We are able here in the southern part of the country to sit down and talk with the Ahmadiyya and even do things together, [but not so much in Wa in the northwestern corner of the country.] This is the reason why the Ahl-Sunnah created their Imam. So with the creation of the Ahl-Sunnah Imam, and when the president called for reconciliation among the Muslims, the [National Advisory Committee to the President] took central stage in looking for a solution to the problem. One prominent person named Mr. Abbas Kilba--he worked with the Lands Commission. He was a very intelligent man who took a leading role in moving from place to place [imam to imam] to see to the solution of the issue. This did not solve the situation fully as there is no great procedure developed to solve the conflict. There was however an exception—that in Tamale when the chief of Tamale convened an assembly of the two sides and asked the two leader scholars to come to present their messages. The whole debate was about the prayer and formulation of prayer which the Ahl-Sunnah rejects even though it was the name of the prophet Muhammad that was being mentioned and he was being extolled. The value that is associated with the prayer is what the Ahl-Sunnah reject--(that the recitation of this prayer once is equal to recitation of the whole Quran). By implication, the Ahl-Sunnah thinks that the Tijaniyya value to the prayer should not supersede the value to the whole



Quranic revelation. The Ahl-Sunnah could not sit down for such a blasphemous thing to happen. So they came and the Tijaniyya imam took a style by taking the prayer apart by also locating verses from the Quran to indicate that the prayer is acceptable. While this may have satisfied some [in the assembly] the Ahl-Sunnah rejected it by insisting that they wanted a citation from the Quran itself where it has been argued that such a prayer can substitute for the whole Quran. Well, this ended the assembly but it did not solve the conflict.

Q. So in these cases we see the secular political national leader who tried to find ways to resolve the conflict in the Muslim community; and in the second instance we see a traditional Muslim chief who also tried to find a way to resolved the conflict.

A. The traditional Muslim chief of Tamale was the first one, and the second what the secular State effort to resolve the conflict by calling on the national chit imam to solve the problem. The conflict was however dying down following the creation by the Ahl-Sunnah of their own National Imam. Now they will be doing things on their own without the [Ahl-Sunnah responding to the National Chief Imam who they consider and a Tijaniyya Head]. The other possible means to resolve the conflict is to take the legal course.

Q. What would be the legal mean for Muslims?

A. To take advantage of the State legal system though a secular court. But this is a problem so the whole thing remains as it is. What I will add is that in Tamale for example, what they did was to try to create a committee for Conflict Resolution among the leadership of the Tamale Muslim community. They tried to find representative from both side that could intervene and resolve conflicts but still the failure of that committee was obvious as evidenced in the latest conflict that took place in that town. So in going through the whole [list] of Muslim conflict, we find out that the coming out with resolution based on procedures and also in terms of [identifying] persons [endowed] with authority and respected or accepted by all [involved in the conflict] that has not been achieved. Except that the conflicts [themselves] die down. So now everybody is doing their own thing... The nice thing is that there [appears] to be mutual recognition of the Imams [the Ahl-Sunnah Imam and the Tijaniyya Chief Imam]. The two are recognized during functions and the two are invited and the Chief Imam (Tijaniyya Imam) invited the Ahl-Sunnah Imam to redress issues and he [the Ahl-Sunnah Imam] readily responds. The last time they all went to Mecca together. I talked to the Chief Imam and he said "well, Al-Hajj Umar [Ahl-Sunnah Imam] was very friendly with me." And being the older one, the Chief Imam relied on the Ahl-Sunnah Imam because the latter studied in Saudi Arabia. So he was full of assistance. So I told the Chief Imam that when I go to the Ahl-Sunnah Imam, I will mention to him that you have said these nice things about him. So one day when I saw him, I told him that this is what the Chief Imam said about him and I think this is good.

So, a means to solve these problems is through the leaders own overtures and as a result of this things are calming down. But what we need to do is to appreciate the fact that

once such conflicts had been experienced in our history, it must be noted that even when they die down there is no guarantee that it will not reoccur because conflict is part of human nature. What is important is to ask about what procedures [we need to put in place to deal with these situations] and to ensure that when the conflict comes up again, we will be able to deal with them. I think this is a question that needs to be addressed but it has not been done yet. Research such as this should explore the resolution to conflict resolution based on the Quran. In fact there are cases in the Quran and the Quran accepts conflict even within the Believing community. When this occurs, the Quran calls for Peace. Let there be a third party or a superseding authority that will make peace between them. So this one is an injunction to make peace between Muslims. So then we have to look to the modalities or the details to be determined by our own traditions and circumstances which we can use the teaching of the Quran to back up. That is what we need. You see the Quran is not a handbook of laws but it set the broad principles and allows you to interpret your own circumstance on the principles. So for example, the Quran will say that "Make Peace between them", but the Quran does not give you the details of it. You can see the model to follow from the Hadith [Prophetic examples], but even here the model may not be applicable, so there is no hard and fast rule that we should do it his way when it does not suit us. So the collective wisdom of the [Muslim community] must also be applied. Our circumstance--such as the traditional extended family system--could be used so you can call your elders and family friends to solve the problems. We can for example use the Prophet's example in [the history Hudabiyya, when the Prophet agreed to resolve conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims through a treaty. This can become an example because the principle was trying to make peace through negotiations. The parties must be brought together; stress what is common to them--that is peace. Stress how the conflict can affect them and stress what they could loose because of the conflict. So there is the need for mediation, a tradition that has been common in Ghana. Even the Prophet's travel to Medina when he resolved the conflict between two Jewish communities that had become tied of their own conflict. The Prophet therefore was a mediator so they were brought together. You should also [ensure the authority of the mediator]--his experience, background. All these are important things and more importantly [institutionalize] the process. That is what is needed now.

Q. Are there not such institution in Ghana [though which Muslims can resolve conflicts]?

A. No. Not for the Muslim community in Ghana. But we have the traditions for resolving conflict through our chief [ethnic Muslim chiefs]. But somebody would say [that the best things is to have the Islamic one]. So [it will be good to have an Islamic institution for conflict resolution] for which people are trained to know how to be responsible. [This is important] because there are times that a mediator can even create conflict or aggravate the conflict because he has not fully appreciated the issues at stake. Muslims should know that [mediation] is even now a profession that they can take advantage of or if they like they can also explore the Islamic approach to conflict resolution in a more scientific way so that they can even present an alternative (systems of resolution that have been tested in the Muslim community).

Q. Is this an approach [or a course content that] can be introduced into the Islamic Education system [of the Islamic Education Unit]?

A. I think so but not at the basic level. For example we can think of it at the University of Ghana level for example. This is important because Muslims are being drawn back because of conflict and therefore it is important that conflict is dealt with at the intellectual level and in a more scientific level so that people [graduates] come out with more specialized training in Islamic conflict resolution. It is painful for me to say that I did not complete my [graduate studies] at the University of Ghana and my department is disappointed in me for not doing so but I have been interested in this work. This is a model I was researching on and I think that it could have been used for our National Reconciliation Commission [2004] because at one point the State was even exploring different models of conflict resolutions. I remember at a meeting when they appointed a Reverend Minister to explore the Christian model and I asked why they have not asked for an Islamic approach. They laughed and said okay, but they did not [because they did not think that there could be an Islamic model.

Q. Christian-Muslim Relations--what are your views on this in the context of Ghana?

A. Other than the little conflicts regarding the preachers [we do not have any major problems with Christians]. In fact, it has been fantastic. I can give you an example: the Forum of Religious Bodies has brought together leading and highly placed religious leaders such as the National Chief Imam, the leaders of the National Federation of Muslim Council (FMC), the Chairman of the Ghana Christian Council, the Leader of the Catholic Bishop Council etc. all these people have worked in harmony with Muslims--an inter-faith effort. There is even an Inter-Faith Dialogue Committee in Tamale which is headed by Sheikh Zakaria of Tamale and he has learnt a lot from this though he faces his own problems in Tamale. In fact, people thought that there was no dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Tamale and they even did not see why a Muslim scholar of his status could be promoting dialogue between Muslims and Christians. He stood his ground and with all the Islamic texts at his disposal he has explained [in Islamic terms why such dialogue is necessary]. The latest function I attended in Tamale, I was invited by the Catholic Secretariat to give a paper on "Politicians and Preachers: How do we bring Peace". Though the paper was not religious, I still spoke from the Muslim point of view. I must give credit to the Catholics and I must also say that in the effort to bring inter-faith dialogue, no one religious denomination in Ghana can match the Catholic effort. They have been so sincere, so tenacious, and so consistent in pushing inter-faith dialogue for inter-faith peace and relationship. In fact, they themselves have studied Islam and one way to ensure peace is to know more about the others and to ensure communication. They [the Catholics have done this]. They have also carried ahead by showing recognition of all, including calling the traditional priests into dialogue--even to Rome. Cardinal Francis Arinze was in Ghana [in 2004] and they [the Catholics] invited Muslims [to their functions]. Every year they will also send token gifts of food items on Muslim festivals {end of Ramadan or Prophet's Birthday to the Muslim community}. The Catholics for example have invited some of us to Nigeria where we went to participate in a workshop on Inter-Faith Dialogue. This is an eye-opener and we

Muslims should be initiating our own plans and move ahead and look at areas where we are exploited and clarify it to ourselves through dialogue.... END