



By Mahdi Garba

The Nigerian media and its audience seemed to be less informed about the Sheikh Zakzaky-led Islamic Movement Nigeria. One can easily understand how this media operate locally, often hunting for sensational stories and going ahead to publish them without little or no investigation.

To have a clue of why the members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria are expressing solidarity for Lt .Gen. Qassem Soleimani and his country, Iran, it is pertinent to know the mission of the movement and its history as well.

Going back to memory lane, in 2004, when Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, a leader of Hamas movement was assassinated in Palestine, despite being a Sunni-Muslim, the Islamic Movement that majority of its members are theologically Shia mourned his murder and decorated their schools and centres with his pictures.

In July 2006, when a war broke out between Israel and Lebanon, the Islamic Movement that was siding with the Lebanese resistance movement, Hezbollah, reported every bit of the feats recorded by the Lebanese group in its Hausa newspaper, Almizan, which was then among the most widely circulated newspapers with readers in Nigeria and some parts of Niger Republic.

After the United Nations-brokered ceasefire on 14 August, 2006 following the 34-day war, members of the Islamic Movement celebrated the ceasefire as a victory for the Hezbollah. Public gatherings were held and Hausa songs that eulogized Sayyid Hassan Nasrullah, its Secretary-General were played in solidarity with the Lebanese armed movement. Sometimes, Hezbollah's martial songs are being played to express solidarity with the group.

It is also crucial to underscore that the events happening in the Occupied Palestine and the atrocities committed by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) against them is always at the fingertips on Sheikh Zakzaky's followers. They keenly follow local and international news, precisely that of the Middle East. This spurs them to join people of conscience globally to commemorate the International Quds Day. Annually, the event is marked in more than 22 Nigerian cities with millions in attendance.

Notwithstanding the cordial bilateral relationship that exists between Nigeria and Israel, flags of Israel and its allies are desecrated after the 'Death to Israel' chants that resonate throughout the peaceful processions.

There's no gainsaying that the Islamic Movement in Nigeria is no friend to Israel and its allies. In 2010, when Sheikh Zakzaky was called to address a conference jointly organized by Universal Justice Network and the Islamic Human Rights Commission in London, a popular Israeli newspaper, Jerusalem Post mischievously reported the Sheikh's outing as "Anti-Semitic preacher to address London conference" and in less than an hour after public outcry for describing the scholar as anti-Semite, the publication backslid, changing the content and headline of the report to "Islamic movement preacher to address London conference".

Prior to that, the Islamic Movement's Resource Forum had in May 2008 organized a

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conference in Kaduna to condemn the illegality of the occupation of Palestine over the last 60 years, then. The event had participants from the press, academia, and civil servants among others.

The Syrian Civil War was another evidence that the Islamic Movement is that is out to seek social justice as preached by Prophet Muhammad and his progeny. The movement supported the democratically elected government of Bashar Al-Assad despite efforts to topple his government by the United States of America and impose their stooge. Sheikh Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria had unanimously stated that, they are not in support of every decisions taken by Assad but they are behind the Syrian president at that trying time.

Similarly, during the 2011 post-election violence that led to loss of lives and properties especially in the northern part of Nigeria, the benevolent leader shielded Christians who were prone to attacks by mobsters. As an influential personality his subjects, he ordered all his disciples to do the same wherever they are. This humanitarian gesture had saved many non-Muslims would have been unjustly killed.

Few months after, in an interview with Sunday Trust, the leader accused Nigerian politicians of being the architects of the carnage for political reasons by dividing people along religious and ethnic lines.

Shortly after the Zaria Massacre that hundreds of Sheikh Zakzaky's followers were killed extra judicially, famous Saudi Arabian preacher and activist, Sheikh Nimr Baqeer Nimr was executed by Saudi government on 2nd January, 2016, members the Islamic Movement whose leader's whereabouts was still unknown to them after being whisked away by men of the Nigerian military, came out en masse to condemn the killing late Nimr.

The absence of Sheikh Zakzaky didn't change the ideals of the movement for fighting against injustice and standing with the oppressed, rain or shine.

Furthermore, in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia first invaded Yemen, under the pretext of installing its ally, Abdu Rabbu Mansur Hadi, Yemen's fugitive president, at different occasions Sheikh Zakzaky had condemned the invasion before his illegal detention. As expected, members of the Islamic Movement since the inception of the crisis have remained with the Ansarullah fighters, who are resisting Saudi's military action against their country.

In the same vein, when an African-American journalist was recently detained in America, Marzieh Hashemi, supporters of Sheikh Zakzaky who come out daily to protest his illegal detention in Abuja used their hard-earned money to print placards, calling for her release.

Now fast-forward to January, 2020, when General Qassem Soleimani, commander of IRGC's Quds Force was assassinated in an airstrike in Iraq, which the US claimed responsibility. The Islamic Movement in Nigeria immediately issued a statement condemning the action by the United States. Hours later, members of the movement in Abuja and other cities took to the streets holding posters and banners of the slain military General chanting anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans. Afterwards, the US flag was desecrated.

Expectedly, because of Nigeria's age long bilateral relationship with the US, it generated a great furore over the Nigerian media space. Before one can say Jack Robinson it had gone viral. Newspapers, blogs and TV stations that hardly report the activities of the movement all carried the news. It was a calculated move by the media to further show that there's a string holding the Islamic Movement and Iran, but mischievously.

Like the people Islamic Movement had mourned and supported in the past, Soleimani is an oppressed person. Despite restoring stability in Syria and Iraq after ISIS held them on rampage, he was instead rewarded with murder, in the most bestial way. There is a need to underscore

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the fact that, the movement is not mourning Soleimani as a 'Late Iranian General', but as a person who had paid his dues by serving his country, region, humanity and most importantly his religion by adamantly resisting imperialists.

The armchair analysts that are often called upon by the media to comment on issues that affect the Sheikh Zakzaky-led Islamic Movement in Nigeria before feeding gullible audiences with half-truths. The Islamic Movement in its quest to seek social justice for all had stood with the oppressed not minding their race, religion or social status and will continue doing it till hell freezes.

Mahdi writes from Jos