

*An interview granted by Malam Ibrahim Zakzaky to an American journalist on Tuesday 8/6/2004 at the Fudiyah Islamic Center (FIC).*

**American:** - Thank you so much for joining us today, I know you are an extremely busy gentleman and I thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

Why I am here basically is to look at the religious front lines that are today emerging in Nigeria, what is going on? The Americans, the West is concerned about the crisis here in Nigeria.

What is being done to make things better, i.e. the relationship between the religions, and between government effort to try and stabilize the nation?

As a very significant leader in the Muslim community, I could not have thought of any better person to give us a pulse of what exactly is taking place today in Nigeria and what are some of the solutions to this problems?

**Zakzaky:** - Well, this is a general question you have to be specific about ...

**Cuts in:** - Yes absolutely, we will get to the specifics, ok! Thank you Sheikh for given us some of your time today, Can you tell us what is the state of Islam today in Africa?

**Zakzaky:** - Well, Africa is a vast continent with diverse regions, which have different historical backgrounds, different cultures, and even different colours

You have the North Africa which is predominantly Arab also almost 100 percent Muslims, you have the West African region which is in the hinterland is 70 percent Muslim and has a history much more linked to North Africa even though it is not Arabic speaking, Arabic is widely spoken.

The Southern part where you have different nations predominantly Christians somehow the partition for Africa made sure that in West Africa each of the nation had its share of The North and The South and you have The East Africa with a different background.

So to make a general statement about Africa will be very difficult but on the whole, we might say that Islam has closer link to Africa than any other religion, more than, for example, Christianity, which came by way of the colonialists that came at the beginning of this century or end of the last. But Islam has been here for about 10 centuries and therefore African culture generally is closer to Islam than any other.

And today we might say that on the whole Islam is a living religion in the

**African continent. Most of the nations are determined after a significant factor in their politics, social affairs, cultural and what have you.**

***American:* - Is, today, Islam increasing or decreasing in Africa?**

***Zakzaky:* - Yes, Islam is on the rise. In the first place the Muslim people have been Muslim people from olden days to now and the population is growing, so they are growing and secondly, they are winning more converts from among the non-Muslims mostly from those who practice the African traditional religion and even from the Christians.**

***American:* - What is it about Islam that is attracting people today?**

***Zakzaky:* - Let me say someone else's opinion not mine, I read somebody's opinion who has made research about why the African people accept Islam, for example, more than Christianity.**

**This is written by one Christopher Ajayi Crowther, a Christian Missionary who said that whenever they convert one man to Christianity, they were sure 10 are converted to Islam despite the fact that Muslims do little as compared to the Christian Missionaries in evangelical activities.**

**One of the reasons, he said is Islam is simple to understand, its really simple, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger".**

**Secondly, that it is closer to African culture than Christianity which looks alien to their culture, these are some of the reasons and of course I have said that traditions are long rooted very much in Islam for so many centuries, for example, here we speak the Hausa language and you know a language is the vehicle for the transformation of a culture and if you study the language you find that about two-third of the total words in the vocabulary came from Arabic origin, that is, if you remove Arabic from the Hausa language, you can't even speak the language.**

***American:* - I've had a chance to visit in my stay here in Nigeria, to look at the growth of Islam and the growth Christianity specifically Nigeria being the most populated nation in Africa.**

**I visited some of the biggest churches today in Nigeria. From the Redeemed Church of God to the Winners Chapel, are you amazed at the kind of growth that is today taking place amongst the Christian community?**

***Zakzaky:* - No I am not amazed but I don't think that the growth rate is rising anyway and if you compare it with Islam, Islam has higher growth rate than Christianity because not only those practicing African Traditional Religion are converting to Islam, the Christians are also converting to Islam.**

***American:* - Do you see the Christians, I mean, when somebody from the outside looks at it, you have two great monotheistic faiths that are in a fierce battle for souls, unlike any other religion, these two religions are fighting for**

**the souls of people, to convert people. Do you see Christianity today in Nigeria as a significant threat to this nation?**

***Zakzaky:* - No.**

***American:* - Does the number of Christians, i.e. number of Nigerians that are becoming Christians, concern you?**

***Zakzaky:* - No.**

***American:* - Does the number of Muslims that are becoming Christians' concern you?**

***Zakzaky:* - Muslims are not becoming Christians, converting a Muslim to Christianity is near to impossible.**

***American:* - Why?**

*Zakzaky:* - Obviously, Islam by its own nature unless somebody does not understand it. You convert to something you consider to be higher and there is no enlightened Muslim that will consider Christianity anything closer to Islam let alone to leave it.

*American:* - And if he does convert to Christianity what will be the penalty?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, there is no law, which says he cannot be converted anyway; at least the nation hasn't made the law.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - Lets talk about what is going on today in the Northern parts of Nigeria, 13 states have embraced Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'a Law) you have been critical of, for example, His Excellency the Governor of Zamfara, you've been critical of the way that Shari'a law today has been imposed in these 13 states, why have you been critical?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, I don't know whether you have actually heard from me or you read from other papers, it seems to me that some people were only interested that I have a different view.

I am not against the law itself but I have my reservation concerning the way it is being implemented. I think there are steps laid down by the law itself on how it should be implemented; it is not the duty of any politician to decide how that law can be applied. One has to ask the law, the steps, i.e. what are the provisions provided by you, The Law.

*American:* - What are your reservations about what is going on today in the 13 states in the Northern Nigeria?

*Zakzaky:* - The Shari'a law has governed this society before the coming of the colonialists and certainly it didn't come about spontaneously.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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First of all, people converted to Islam in large numbers and of course large number of people migrated with their faith and settled in this area, then came a sort of reformist movement which seeks to change the laws from the old traditional system to the Islamic one and then came at the beginning of this century, the British Colonialists who also changed the law from what it used to be to what it is now, call it anything but it is not Islamic.

So it is my view that when next you change to Islamic system, you need to make similar changes as well. One has to see that now it is the Islamic system governing the society then you can apply the law but to apply an Islamic law in a system, which is generally accepted, as un-Islamic is like taking a different system of law to work with a different system of government.

*American:* - What do you think about the Nigerian constitution?

*Zakzaky:* - This is too general a question; anyway, the Nigerian constitution...

*Cuts in:* - Do you accept the Nigerian constitution? Do you think it's a legitimate constitution or would you accept a Shari'a based constitution?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - Well, in any case, there is a paper called The Constitution which I don't think the majority of the people of Nigeria are aware that this is a constitution neither do those who are in authority care about any provisions of the constitution.

The country is ruled by a sort of Military Junta since the mid 60's and it is still the military type of rule, of course, there is a paper called the constitution but they don't care about it's provisions, so you can not speak of a nation having a constitution unless, for example, a nation follows that constitution.

When you have a piece of paper on one side and you have Managers doing what they like on another, well, I don't think there is any need to call for a constitution in this case.

*American:* - The Governor of Zamfara, a couple of weeks ago, it was reported in the western media that Governor Sani had introduced what he called the second phase of Shari'a law and in the second phase, he said that all non-Muslim organizations, and houses of worship should cease to exist, all places of employment should make time for their men and women to observe five times a day prayer services. Do you believe that this is Islamic?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, first of all, I don't think such a thing has happened anyway, I am in Nigeria, and I didn't know...

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Cuts in:* - But this is what Governor Sani, two weeks ago announced in Zamfara, you are disputing that he said this?

*Zakzaky:* - I don't think so, maybe he was misunderstood anyway, but if it is the time for prayer, this is something some Muslim countries observe, that this is the time for prayer, you respect it, if you have shops you close them. But for someone to say that all non-Muslims organizations should cease to exist, I don't think he said so.

*American:* - He did.

*Zakzaky:* - Well, I am not aware, so I will not...

*Cuts in:* - If he did say that, is that Islamic?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - I really don't think he would have said so, so I wouldn't answer that question unless I am sure that he has said so.

*American:* - Would you like to see today Nigeria become an Islamic State?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, it is an Islamic State already except that it is not practically one but in reality it is.

*American:* - Why do you say that?

*Zakzaky:* - It is a state, which has its own history, rooted in Islam, Islam has reigned here six centuries before the coming of the colonialists and the coming of the colonialists is the beginning of the last century, just about a hundred years ago.



## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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So what has been in practice for the last 700 years, you cannot say that today is no longer there. Basically it is there, we are Muslims and we believe that our state is Islamic except that something contrary to our own belief is imposed upon us.

*American:* - But correct me if I am wrong, Nigeria is made up of Muslims, Christians and Animists and The Constitution the last time I read it does not state that Nigeria is an Islamic State.

*Zakzaky:* - Yes in practice it isn't but in reality it is and even before the coming of the colonialists the state of affairs have been the same, of course there were no Christians but there were people practicing different religions.

To have an Islamic state doesn't mean that all people within the state must be Muslims there can be people following different other religions but when you have the majority of people having their culture rooted in Islam automatically you have an Islamic State.

*American:* - The Northern States have embraced Shari'a Law do you envision a day not in the near distant future that all state in Nigeria will embrace Shari'a law?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - If it is the sort of Shari'a, which is been practiced in Zamfara, it has been there, even before the so-called declaration of application of Shari'a. It has been there before the coming of the colonialists, after the coming of the colonialists, during the colonial rule, after the so-called independence and even now, so I don't think there is any thing new except the name.

*American:* - But I don't think it has been brought to such prominence like it has in the last five years?

*Zakzaky:* - Yes, you didn't here it until when noises were made about it, you heard the noises, but practically nothing has changed.

*American:* - Is Shari'a in all these 13 states actually being practiced in all the terms and purposes, we've not seen one woman been stoned, we have not seen a thief had his hands chopped off, I mean is Shari'a law actually being practiced in these 13 states or is it just on paper?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, that actually even shows what your perception of Shari'a is, you think that Shari'a is stoning of a woman to death and chopping of hands, that is not Shari'a.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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Shari'a is a code of life governing the life of Muslims and it has been in practice practically by the Muslim people, Shari'a governs the life of an individual who is a Muslim as well as the Muslim community, what have been in practice before the noise about the implementation of Shari'a was that there were courts called Shari'a Courts and even Shari'a Courts of Appeal. They have limited jurisdiction concerning what is called Muslim Personal Law.

The scope of these courts was widened in what should have been rightly called Legal Reforms, but noises were made that it is total implementation of Shari'a. The legal reform only widens the scope of jurisdiction of those courts, which had hitherto been called Shari'a courts, which are now also been called Shari'a courts.

But instead of saying we are making a legal reform to widen the jurisdiction of those courts which were limited to Muslim personal law to include criminal law as well, there was noise about total implementation of Shari'a and that is why you heard all those things you are talking about.

But practically study the whole Northern region, it is today, what it was 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 5 years ago, and so on, but practically there has been no change Shari'a wise.

*American:* - Sheikh you are constantly using the word noise about Shari'a law, do you think that is what it is?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - Yes it is.

*American:* - It's all noise?

*Zakzaky:* - Nothing more than that.

*American:* - Who is creating the noise?

*Zakzaky:* - The Politicians, it is political noise.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - Back in 1988 a group of Muslim leaders gathered together in Africa and produced the Abuja communiqué. In that conference there were a number of agendas;

- 1- To spread Islam all across the continent,
- 2- To bring about Shari'a law,
- 3- To eradicate the continent off Christians.

Do you see the fulfillment of that communiqué today in Africa?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, I don't think the last point was there, even though at that material time I was in prison and I haven't come out at the time when the conference was taking place.

I had the opportunity to even view some of the session at least on TV and I have seen some Christians who were invited to the conference including those with sort of Christian garments like Reverend Fathers and Bishops and so on. I don't think they will be there to hear that one of the items in the communiqué was to eradicate Christianity from the continent.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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It has never been the aim of the Muslim to eradicate any other religion, the aim of the Muslim is to live according to the Islamic perspectives, not to impose their religion upon others or even force conversion upon others. It has never been our objective.

*American:* - What is going on today in your country? We are hearing so many reports of clashes between Muslims and Christians; thousands of people are being killed, what is going on?

*Zakzaky:* - You need to study the historical background of the places where these clashes take place and perhaps understand the social problems and also the political situation.

Most of those problems they term clashes between Muslims and Christians are actually social problems but because it happened between people some of who are Muslims and others Christians, then it is given the general idea that it's a clash between Muslims and Christians.

Sometimes it is politicians that are trying to stamp themselves on their own constituencies by proving to be the heroes of their own area using one sentiment or another, for example, what

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

---

happened recently in Plateau state. It is very clear that the local politicians have a hand in it; they tell you that they were becoming heroes of their own people by instigating some communal clashes so that they will appear to be champions of the course of their own people.

To understand the conflict you have to understand the politics of that area. What has been happening in Kano, which always, people call religious clashes have always been social ills, poverty is there, ignorance is there, all those social ills, which sometimes when it erupts is manifested in some sort of anger over some people who are considered to be strangers in the area and it has been given the connotation of Christian/Muslim.

And what happened in this state, Kaduna State has been also similar to what happened in Plateau State. It is a sort of some tribal groups, majority of who happen to be Christians, who have been complaining that the other groups who are predominantly Muslims have dominated them. In their way of showing their grievances, they make some attacks and immediately, in the papers or media- print and electronic, it will be portrayed as Christian/Muslim clash.

To my own understanding, you can say that there is clash between Christians and Muslims when the reason for the difference happens to be religious, i.e. purely religious in which case, you will see the religious leaders at logger heads with one another, but you don't see it here (i.e. in all these cases), you have the people manifesting their own grievances whether political, community, and so on and it is given the connotation of religious crisis. As far as I am concerned this conflicts are not basically religious, they are either political or social.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - Unfortunately in these clashes houses of worship are been destroyed...

*Cuts in:* - Yes! Yes!! That is true

*American:* - Does that concern you to see Mosques and Churches destroyed?

*Zakzaky:* - It is unfortunate that people show their anger in that way, but still when you study and define it, it all goes down to what I have said, it's social ills but when they manifest it they show it in that way.

*American:* - Talk a little bit about what can be done today to mend these religious conflicts?

*Zakzaky:* - Those which are basically social, the society has to address those social ills at least one will testify to the fact that some 20 years back, such clashes did not use to happen and we had Christians and Muslims living together, Why now?



## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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And this is unfortunately the societal ill those in authority don't care to address the original cause of; instead they only study the branches and not the root. When these social ills are done away with, automatically the clashes will no longer be there.

*American:* - You are certain of that?

*Zakzaky:* - Certainly.

*American:* - I'm seeing here some very significant Shi'a leaders, some who have recently passed away in various incidences around the world, how much of US foreign policy and event that are taking place in the Middle East, does it have any effect on the Muslim community here in Nigeria?

*Zakzaky:* - Well in the first place to correct you, what we have are pictures of either symbols of Islamic faith or Martyrs not necessarily Shi'a because if you look round you can see that there is the picture of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, he is not Shi'a and you see the picture of Dr. Abdulaziz

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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Rantisi also not Shi'i but both of them are Martyrs and you see also the picture of Sayid Baqir Al-Hakim another Martyr all recently killed, we believe by the same hands anyway, the same Zionists who killed Sheikh Ahmad Yasin and Dr. Abdulaziz Rantisi, are the same hand that killed Sayid Baqir Al-Hakim in Iraq.

*American:* - How did the event in the Middle East affect...?

*Cuts in:* - Yes this (commitment) is one of it, as we are now seeing, of course, one might say that the event took place in Iraq and that the other one in Palestine.

But it also affects us because we are part of the same Muslim world and this is direct attack on our faith, it is attack on our religion, attack on our community, attack on our nation.

Recent events in Iraq showed it clearly, despite the fact that they tried to brush it aside, the humiliation of prisoners in Abu Guraib Prison showed clearly that they were actually at war with Islam and Muslims.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - Who was at war with Islam and Muslims?

*Zakzaky:* - The international anti-Islamic ideology expressed in any terms whether in form of Zionism, which we believe is behind all these things or as is being explained by America in form of what it called democracy, freedom, and human rights.

We have seen their democracy, freedom, human rights, and even civilization. They have shown it in Iraq, that is American civilization.

*American:* - Tell me specifically, how does it make you feel when you see the images today from Baghdad or Ramallah or West Bank or Gaza, how does it make you feel?

*Zakzaky:* - Well, I feel that this is an attack on our own people, it is an attack on us as well and we feel that whoever has the mind to do this to our Muslim brothers elsewhere will just do the same when next he comes here.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - Is there a lot of resentment today against the United States?

*Zakzaky:* - Obviously, because it is becoming more clearer than at any other time. Previously of course, we know that Americans used to attack different nations but this time around it is very clear that within their own words, which came from their own mouths and their own actions, they now tell us that they are fighting our religion and they are fighting our nation.

They said it in their words since we can see the President of the United States, George W. Bush, talking of crusade and I think he ought to know what that word means even if he is joking, it actually means a fight between Muslims and Christians.

And we don't know also why in the cause of the torture of the Muslim prisoners, that someone will force them to renounce Islam or give them pork to eat or alcohol to drink or make them naked in front of women when he knows that according to Islam a Muslim can not be naked in front of his family.

And I even learnt that one of the actors in the game a lady known as Linda England was asked why, as a woman, she was asked to do this and she said that you know Muslims according to their own religion and tradition, they resent been exposed naked particularly in front of a woman.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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You can see this, because in Islam you are not supposed to do that, we are now forcing you to do it. Where then is the freedom of religion, where is the human right, where is the freedom of expression and where is the freedom of determination, all these things are forgotten.

*American:* - I've been reading a lot about you over the years; you are not the Zakzaky of 10 years ago, what happened?

*Zakzaky:* - No I am the same person; you haven't known me that's why. It is only now you are seeing me; I am the same person 10 years ago, 20 years ago, in fact even 40 years ago.

*American:* - But people in this nation say you have become like a mouse, you have been very quiet, you are not as active as you were, 5-10 years ago, even before the present government came into power, what happened?

*Zakzaky:* - I have always been quiet, I was quiet and I will remain quiet, if active means to attack, I have never attacked anyone, we have never waged war on anyone, we have never

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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taking arms, we speak and we remain speaking.

We have a newspaper, which has celebrated its 20 years anniversary now; it has been there, every week it comes out with the same thing it has been writing, our lectures, and our speeches. But when we came to the news was when the government decided to attack us in a bid to crush us, then it became news.

Now government has stopped doing that, that is why you hear quietness it is not that we are quiet, it is the government that remain quiet, if they attack us today, you will begin to here things.

*American:* - So the Sheikh Zakzaky of 10 years ago is the same Sheikh Zakzaky...

*Cuts in:* - I will remain the same of tomorrow as well.

*American:* - You haven't changed?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - I will not change.

*American:* - Some have said that the reason why there is this perceived quietness from your group is that today you are perhaps perceived as no longer relevant in the Muslim society, do you still see that?

*Zakzaky:* - When was I noisy? I was never noisy.

*American:* - Only because you've got so much attention, I was driving down the road here and I saw these posters that said "Free Zakzaky" ok! You are obviously a person of great 'notoriety'.

My question is what happened to you. In the last few years, what has happened, have you had to rethink your way of communicating?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - I remain what I have been, you see the world heard about us when the last regime tried to crush us, they saw that we are crushable but at the end of the day, it was clear that we can beat our chest and say that we are un-crushable and if this government will try it, we are ready.

*American:* - And has this government tried to crush you?

*Zakzaky:* - They haven't but if any government, even including the government of your own country the United States. If it will try, let it try but we remain un-crushable.

The noise you heard about is when they were trying to crush us then we became news, now that they kept quiet, they say we are quiet but we remain what we are.

*American:* - Do you think there is a sort of a war within Islam here in Nigeria, in the sense of leaders like yourself and others who are trying to position themselves to gain a kind of prominence and significance in the society?



## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - No I don't think so, at least you can not tell me which are the leaders who are new that we don't know before, the same Muslim leaders that we have now are the same Muslim leaders we have been having and they are doing the same thing they have been doing and quiet contrary we are even coming closer than we had been before.

*American:* - The United States in just the last couple of weeks have announced it's going to deploy a US navy carrier off the coast of Nigeria, how do you feel about that?

*Zakzaky:* - Well I don't know for what reason anyway.

*American:* - How does it make you feel that the American Navy is getting closer and closer?

*Zakzaky:* - Well I think that they are coming here to rob oil, which they have been robbing in other places. They have occupied Iraq in order to rob, in effect or in a sense, actually they are Armed Robbers.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - The United States are Armed Robbers?

*Zakzaky:* - What are they? what else are they? They have robbed oil, they are robbing oil in Iraq, and they are coming here to rob.

*American:* - Do you think Nigeria is next?

*Zakzaky:* - Well it is in fact; they have started already, unannounced.

*American:* - Does that concern you?

*Zakzaky:* - Why shouldn't it, the oil belongs to us, it doesn't belong to the United States.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - If you had a chance to sit with the president of the United States today, what would you say?

*Zakzaky:* - I will ask him to mind his business, I will ask him to consider the general welfare and morality of the people of the United States and not meddle in the affairs of other countries.

For the main time they leave their own country and their people suffering, they don't care about that and they spend millions outside in a war, which is not good for the people of the United States.

I don't think the war in Iraq in anyway benefit the people of the United States, if there is any beneficiary, it is the international Jewry, the Zionists who formed the state of Israel who are dreaming of having a greater Israel, which George Bush is now calling the greater Middle East.

*American:* - What do you think about the presidents attempt to bring democracy to the Middle East?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - I don't think he is bringing any democracy to the Middle East. A change in attitude in a form of government, social system this and that is a gradual process, which takes place in every society.

The western society hasn't changed over night, it wasn't someone who went and imposed it upon them so also in the Arab world things are gradually changing. I don't think he came to make any change; he came for a different reason. If it is a change, it is a gradual process and its effectively taking place.

One wouldn't say that the middle east of 10-20 years ago is the same Middle East of today, things have changed. Just study the Gulf States, they have changed totally. It is not because the United States has invaded the area.

*American:* - A couple of years ago, I think about 2 years ago Usama bn Laden in one of his communiqués, mentioned Nigeria specifically and in his communiqué, he urged that all Muslims should help in liberating the Muslims in Nigeria, what do you think he meant by that?

*Zakzaky:* - I don't know and even if he said so, maybe it is based on some misinformation because I don't think he knows Nigerian society anyway.

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*American:* - You don't think he does?

*Zakzaky:* - I don't, what is liberation of Muslim people of Nigeria, is it Muslim people or Nigerian people?

*American:* - The Muslim people of Nigeria.

*Zakzaky:* - Ok! What does that mean?

*American:* - So you have not heard him make this statement?

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - Unless based on misinformation. In any case, if the Muslim people are under anything they consider they need to liberate themselves from, it is their own business anyway.

*American:* - What is the future for Sheikh Zakzaky?

*Zakzaky:* - Future for what?

*American:* - What is the future for you, are you going to remain quiet?

*Zakzaky:* - Yes, as I have been and noisy as I have been as well...

*American:* - Laughs...

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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*Zakzaky:* - Yes! I will remain what I have been.

All: - ...Laughs...

*Zakzaky:* - I have been quiet if quietness means not having some clash with someone.

Even at the time when the government attacked us, it was not we who were attacking, we were not even defending ourselves, they thought that it was a matter of little time that we will be done away with and we will become history.

*American:* - Today, you travel all around the world, what is the message that you carry to the rest of the world about your country, what do you tell your fellow Muslims?

*Zakzaky:* - We are part of the Muslim world, what affects them affects us and we are doing the

## His Interview with American Journalist

Written by freezak

Sunday, 18 September 2011 10:24 -

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little we can in our own area.

*American:* - Thank you very much.

*Zakzaky:* - Thank you.

*The end.*

*Transcribed by the Resource Forum of The Islamic Movement in Nigeria*