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Climate change could be a factor in the war in Nigeria

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NCR Today

Nigeria is one of the places in the world where wars with religious overtones are being waged.

This past week, after our interview with Jimmy Carter, we covered this conflict on "Interfaith Voices." It is largely a Christian/Muslim conflict with an underlying economic cause (no surprise).

But most interesting to me was the ecological cause cited by journalist and scholar Charles Sennott, editor and co-founder of GlobalPost, and Darren Kew, director of the Center for Peace, Democracy and Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Northern Nigeria is close to the Sahara and has been the traditional home of herders who are largely Muslim. Southern Nigeria is largely Christian, and people tend to be farmers. As the climate has heated up, grasslands for the Muslim-owned herds are disappearing, and they are taking their animals into southern farmlands, igniting violent clashes. So what looks like religious violence has a strong economic and ecological cause.

Interestingly, in the midst of this violence, there is a stark and compelling witness for peace. A Christian pastor, James Wuye, and Imam Mohammad Ashafa, who were once mortal enemies, are today the leaders of the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria. They founded that center almost 19 years ago and are often called upon to quell hateful rumors and promote peace not only in Nigeria, but in other areas of Africa, as well.

I met them a couple of years ago at the United States Institute of Peace, where I moderated a panel they presented. They are impressive, especially as they tell how the words of the Christian Scriptures and the Quran inspired them to launch lives of compassion and reconciliation rather than violence and hatred.

Listen to my interview on the situation in Nigeria and a separate interview with Imam Mohammad Ashafa.

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