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INTELLECTUAL RENEWAL IN ISLAM AND THE IMPERATIVE OF REVIVING REASON AND RECLAIMING VALUES

By Mujahid Umar Balarabe

At the opening ceremony of an international conference hosted by the Department of Islamic Studies, Kaduna State University, on May 5, 2026, Professor Ibrahim Muhammad of Bayero University, Kano (BUK), delivered a thought-provoking paper that challenged prevailing attitudes within contemporary Muslim societies. Speaking along the conference theme, “The Relevance of Islamic Values on Achieving Sustainable Development Through Alleviating Contemporary Issues,” the respected scholar called for a renewed commitment to intellectual engagement, ethical responsibility, and context-driven scholarship.

In his presentation, Professor Muhammad identified the suppression of critical thinking and the overreliance on blind imitation as major obstacles to progress in many Muslim communities. He argued that when reason is sidelined, innovation declines and the capacity for meaningful development is weakened. According to him, Islam does not advocate stagnation but rather encourages reflection, inquiry, and the responsible use of intellect. Drawing from Qur’anic exhortations such as “Do they not think?” and “Do they not reflect?” he emphasised that faith and reason are not opposing forces but complementary tools for understanding and improving human society.

The professor further underscored the dynamic nature of Islamic scholarship, citing historical precedents where scholars adapted their views to suit changing realities. He referenced the example of Imam al-Shafi’i, who revised his legal opinions after relocating from Iraq to Egypt, demonstrating that Islamic



jurisprudence is inherently flexible and responsive. He cautioned against the uncritical repetition of classical interpretations without regard for present-day challenges, urging scholars to develop contextually relevant solutions to issues ranging from governance and inequality to education and social cohesion.

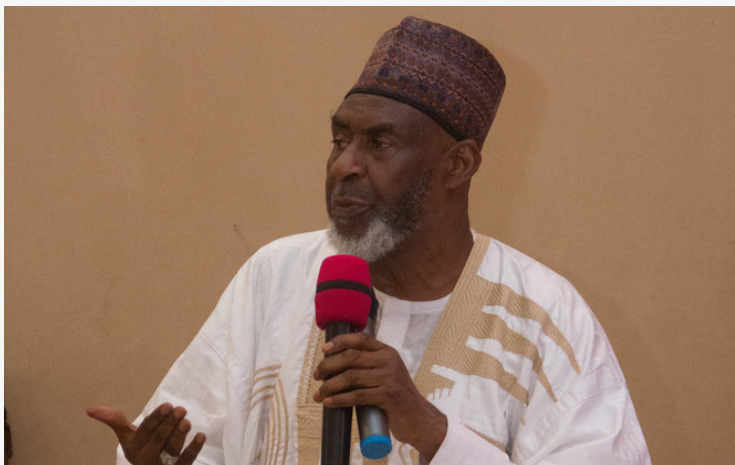
Central to his argument was the ethical framework of Islam, particularly the principle of justice as enshrined in the Qur’an: “*Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace as well as generosity to close relatives. He forbids indecency, wickedness and aggression. He instructs you so perhaps you will be mindful (Quran,16:90)*”. Professor Muhammad stressed that justice in Islam transcends religious and ethnic boundaries, applying universally to all of humanity. He noted that many of today’s crises; including insecurity, weak institutions, and social inequality, stem from a departure from these foundational values. As such, he advocated for a revival of Islamic civilisation not as a nostalgic return to the past, but as



a living, practical system capable of addressing contemporary realities.

discussions on how Islamic values can inform sustainable development strategies. Professor Muhammad's presentation set the tone for the deliberations, offering both a critique of current shortcomings and a hopeful vision for the future; one The conference, which brought together scholars, researchers, and practitioners from across the country and beyond, provided a platform for robust discussions on how Islamic values can inform sustainable development strategies. Professor Muhammad's presentation set the tone for the deliberations, offering both a critique of current shortcomings and a hopeful vision for the future

Pictures from the conference...



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