



Fatal Commentary

When Nigerian journalist Isioma Daniel wrote a comment on Prophet Mohammed and a beauty pageant, little did she know that her words would change her life

By Hilde Marie Tvedten

When journalist Isioma Daniel wrote a commentary article on the Miss World contest in 2002, it resulted in violent riots and a death threat from the Muslim community. At the GIJ-conference, the journalist who now lives in Norway will share her experience of having a fatwa issued on her life.

- It's important for me to convey that when you are writing about religion, you have to be

aware of the cultural and religious tensions present. I was a young, inexperienced writer who did not know enough about the situation of the Christians and Muslims in my country. Even if I don't regret what I wrote, I made an error in not seeing things from a historical point of view, she says.

The article was printed in the Nigerian newspaper This Day on 16th of November 2002. "The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring 92 women to Nigeria and ask them to rev-

el in vanity. What would Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from one of them", Daniel wrote.

The following week, this remark led to clashes between Muslims and Christians in the north of Nigeria. The fundamentalist Muslim groups felt that she had insulted Prophet Muhammed. According to the BBC, one of the offices of the newspaper was set on fire, and 200 people died in the riots. Daniel took refuge in Benin, where she found out about the fatwa that called for her death.

Google revealed fatwa

- I received e-mails from friends who told me to not take it seriously, but they never said what "it" was. I wondered if there had been any development in the situation, and when I googled my own name, I found out about the fatwa, Daniel tells.

When hearing about the fatwa, she found herself truly scared for the first time.