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## Human Rights Council

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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Requesting that the UN recognise the spread of ISIS and persecution against Christians all around the world**

### **Introduction**

In February of 2019, the ECLJ submitted its eighth written and oral testimony to this Council requesting that the United Nations (U.N.) declare that the Islamic State is committing genocide against Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities.

As the ECLJ has submitted before, the actions ISIS has been carrying out against Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic clearly embody the definition of genocide as enshrined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide<sup>1</sup>.

ISIS's systematic pattern of widespread murder and sexual abuse has forced thousands of Christians to flee from Iraq. These acts are leading to the wholesale destruction of Christians as a group in the region. Massive deportations, widespread killings, and countless rapes may be construed as steps in the process of 'gradual weakening of the population' that will result in a religious cleansing of all Christians from ISIS controlled territories.<sup>2</sup>

We applaud the Security Council for recognising the horrific nature of the Islamic State's atrocities in Iraq and calling for the creation of an Investigative Team to collect and preserve evidence of the crimes of Islamic State fighters. We also believe that similar work should be done by a similar Investigative Team in Syria. As of now, we are unaware of any such efforts being made, and we encourage the Council to take action.

Unfortunately, these atrocities and acts of violence are spreading around the globe. Increasingly, we see attacks being carried out against Christians in countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, and now Sri Lanka. ISIS is on the run from Iraq and Syria, but the escaping fighters take with them their ideology and commitment to the destruction of Christians. ISIS and its affiliates are spreading around the globe, promoting terror and perpetrating religiously based attacks.

### **Background**

In Iraq, the ISIS abuses include beheadings, burning victims alive in caskets, and other barbaric acts, such as 'killings, rape, kidnapping, enslavement, theft . . . destruction of religious sites . . . sexual slavery, forced conversion, ransom demands, property seizures, and forced business closures'<sup>3</sup>. Islamic State fighters destroyed Iraq's oldest Christian monastery, St. Elijah's<sup>4</sup>. Father Paul Thabit Habib, a Catholic priest 'who now lives in Kurdish-administered Irbil', said that Iraq's 'Christian history was "being barbarically leveled"'.<sup>5</sup> He added, "[W]e see it as an attempt to expel us from Iraq, eliminating and finishing our

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<sup>1</sup> Genocide is "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. II, 9 Dec. 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *Karadzic*, Case Nos. IT-95-5-R61, IT-9-18-R61, at ¶ 63.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., U.S. Dep't of State, Iraq 2014 International Religious Freedom Report 2 (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Iraq's Oldest Christian Monastery Destroyed by Islamic State, BBC News (20 Jan. 2016), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35360415>.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

existence in this land”.<sup>6</sup> Such savagery has been punctuated by evidence that the Islamic State is burning Christians alive in locked caskets.<sup>7</sup>

Within Nigeria, Christians are facing a rapidly deteriorating situation where they are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence. Immediate action must be taken to ensure that their plight does not rise to the level of their fellow Christians who have suffered so greatly in Iraq and Syria.

It is estimated that since May of 2011 Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people, displaced 2.4 million, and created 228,000 refugees<sup>8</sup>. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnappings to instil fear and intimidate. They target Christians and anyone else whom they see as a threat to the establishment of an Islamic State.

Boko Haram’s atrocities have no limit. Horrific examples of its cruelty include: executing 59 boys in their sleep and burning down their school,<sup>9</sup> utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshippers.<sup>10</sup> These and countless other acts of terror and senseless sectarian violence provide an example of the gruesome and dehumanising atrocities targeting Christians and others who are vulnerable.

Action must be taken to not only stop the spread of violence within Nigeria but also the spread of violence in west Africa. Boko Haram has in fact already begun carrying out attacks in neighbouring Chad<sup>11</sup> and Cameroon.<sup>12</sup>

We further see this spread of religiously motivated attacks targeting Christians in the recent deadly attack on Christians in Sri Lanka. On Easter Sunday of this year, eight bombs were detonated at three churches and three hotels resulting in the deaths of nearly 300 people and wounding 500 more. One survivor described the scene as “absolute carnage” and said “There were people screaming and dead bodies all around.” Unfortunately, these types of attacks are becoming far too common.

In Egypt, Christians are routinely the target of Islamic extremists, and it is not uncommon for these attacks to occur during major religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter where Christians gather to worship.

In April of 2017, 50 Christians were killed as a result of a coordinated bombing at two churches on Palm Sunday by the Islamic State.<sup>13</sup> Marian Abdel Malak, a 26-year-old who lost three loved ones in the attack, issued a startling warning: “If things stay like this and we don’t get our rights we definitely have no future. We would be better off dead because we don’t have any place anywhere in the country – in schools, or in government departments. We don’t have any value”.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Anuragh Kumar, ISIS Burns Christians Alive in Locked Caskets, Escaped Prisoner Reveals, Christian Post (5 Jan. 2016), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-burns-christians-alive-locked-caskets-escaped-iraqi-soldier-islamic-state-prisoner-reveals-154281/>

<sup>8</sup> Boko Haram in Nigeria, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker?marker=19#!/conflict/boko-haram-in-nigeria>, (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Nigerian Boarding School Attack by Boko Haram Gunmen Leaves 59 Pupils Dead, Officials Say, ABC News (25 Feb. 2014, 9:49 PM), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-26/scores-dead-in-boko-haram-nigerian-school-attack/5284250>.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Chasmar, Boko Haram ‘Fake Preachers’ Slaughter 45 Worshippers, The Washington Times (5 June 2014), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/5/boko-haram-islamists-pose-preachers-slaughter-45-w/>

<sup>11</sup> Nigeria’s Boko Haram Militants Attack Chad for the First Time, BBC News (13 Feb. 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31453951>.

<sup>12</sup> Suspected Boko Haram Fighters Kill 11 in Cameroon, Aljazeera (25 Aug. 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/suspected-boko-haram-fighters-kill-11-cameroon-170825145004120.html>

<sup>13</sup> Orla Guerin, Egyptian Christians Living in Fear for the Future, BBC News (27 Apr. 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39694408>

<sup>14</sup> Id.

## **Request**

It is imperative that the United Nations works to ensure all people are able to freely exercise their religion without fear of persecution. The spread of religious persecution cannot continue any longer and it must stop immediately to ensure that more people are not killed because of their faith. This is why declaring the ISIS atrocities carried out in Iraq and Syria as acts of genocide is so imperative, as such a declaration would greatly contribute resources, and therefore ability, to aid in holding ISIS fighters accountable for their actions. Such a declaration would also demonstrate the international community's firm stance against religiously motivated violence and the commitment to the protection of the freedom of religion.

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