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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 February 2020]

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

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## **Requesting that the UN recognise the atrocities being carried out against Christians in Nigeria and take action to end the violence**

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is experiencing a humanitarian crisis and a rapidly deteriorating situation for Christians who are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence. In fact, the government of the United States stated in a press release dated 20 December 2019, that it has added Nigeria to a “Special Watch list” for countries that have “engaged in or tolerated ‘systematic, ongoing, [and] egregious violations of religious freedom.’”<sup>1</sup>

### **Another report states**

The Nigerian government at the national and state levels continued to tolerate violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and suppressed the freedom to manifest religion or belief. Religious sectarian violence increased during the year, with Muslims and Christians attacked based on their religious and ethnic identity. The Nigerian federal government failed to implement effective strategies to prevent or stop such violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. Boko Haram and [ISIS-WA] continued to perpetrate attacks against civilians and the military throughout the year despite the government’s claims of the progress in defeating them.<sup>2</sup>

We respectfully call to this Council’s attention that, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, the very purpose of the United Nations is to “maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression . . .”<sup>3</sup> In addition, under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (‘Genocide Convention’), “[a]ny Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide.”<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that Boko Haram and groups such as the Fulani Herdsmen pose a growing threat to Christians and others. It is also clear the Nigerian government is incapable of or unwilling to act to end the violence and atrocities that are creating this humanitarian crisis, and thus it is past time for this Council to mobilise in order to prevent these atrocities from escalating further and claiming the lives of thousands of more innocent children, women, and men.

### **Background**

Nigeria is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south. As indicated above, Christians face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS, and increasingly the Fulani Herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, United States Takes Action Against Violators Of Religious Freedom, michael r. pompeo, secretary of state, u.s. dep’t of state (20 Dec. 2019), <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom/>.

<sup>2</sup> USCIRF-Recommended Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Nigeria, USCIRF.GOV, available at [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1\\_NIGERIA\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_NIGERIA_2019.pdf) (last visited 31 Jan. 2020).

<sup>3</sup> U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. VIII, 9 Dec. 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Nigeria, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that Boko Haram's terrorist activities have internally displaced over 2 million Nigerians and created 244,000 refugees.<sup>6</sup> In February 2019 alone, "35,000 women, children and men... fled a surge of attacked by Boko Haram..."<sup>7</sup> In addition, it is estimated that Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people.<sup>8</sup> Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnappings to instill fear and intimidate. They target Christians and anyone else whom they see as a threat to the establishment of an Islamic State.

In addition to the deadly attacks by Boko Haram, there are reports of growing conflict in the central regions of Nigeria between the predominantly Muslim Fulani herdsmen and the predominately Christian farmers. The Fulani herdsmen are continuing to attack Christian farmers, destroying homes, churches, and even kidnapping Christian school girls in order to marry them to Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

In 2019 alone, "[m]ore than 1000 Christians [were] murdered by Islamic militants."<sup>10</sup>

## Atrocities

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>11</sup> utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshippers.<sup>12</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.

As we have stated in previous written submissions, Leah Sharibu remains to be held captive by Boko Haram. Leah Sharibu is a Christian teen who was kidnapped by Boko Haram in February 2018 along with 110 other girls. Five of those girls are dead and 104 were set free.<sup>13</sup> Leah is the only one who remains in captivity because she refuses to deny her faith in Christ. Time is of the utmost importance for addressing Leah Sharibu's case as she remains in serious danger and immediate action must be taken to free her before it's too late. In a video released in July 2019 by Boko Haram, aid workers who had been abducted by Boko Haram pleaded for their lives as well as Leah's. In the video one of the aid workers states, "Because Nigeria cannot do anything about them, [Boko Haram] will not release but also kill."<sup>14</sup>

In August of 2019, suspected Fulani militants killed one priest while abducting five more from another church. A local bishop stated, "We should not continue to pretend about it while

<sup>6</sup> Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 30 Jan. 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Nigerian Refugees Struggle in Aftermath of Boko Haram Attacks, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/2/5c6139e74/nigerian-refugees-struggle-aftermath-boko-haram-attacks.html> (last visited 31 Jan. 2020).

<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 30 Jan. 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Ewelina U. Ochab, Trump may not be Wrong on the Fulani Herdsmen Crisis in Nigeria, *Forbes* (4 May 2018, 10:16 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/05/04/trump-may-not-be-wrong-on-the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria/#6b34945555ef>.

<sup>10</sup> Danielle Wallace, More than 1,000 Christians Killed by Islamic Militants in Nigeria in 2019: Report, *Fox News* (24 Dec. 2019), <https://www.foxnews.com/world/nigeria-1000-christians-killed-islamic-militants-fulani-boko-haram>.

<sup>11</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>12</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>13</sup> Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home, *BBC News* (25 Mar. 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4355872>.

<sup>14</sup> Leah MarieAnn Klett, Nigeria: Terrorists Release Video of 6 Kidnapped Christian Aid Workers Begging for Their Lives, *Christian Post* (25 July 2019), <https://www.christianpost.com/world/nigeria-terrorists-release-video-of-6-kidnapped-christian-aid-workers-begging-for-lives.html>.

our people are killed every day. Enugu State is not secure again. Criminals have shifted to Enugu State from Anambra.”<sup>15</sup> The spread of violence by the Fulani Herdsmen across the entire country is of grave importance and it must be stopped now.

In January 2020, Boko Haram kidnapped Rev. Lawan Andimi when it attacked the Michika local government area. Boko Haram released a video of the pastor pleading for the Nigerian government to act to secure his release. Only a few days later he was beheaded by his captors. On the same day that Rev. Andimi was murdered, Boko Haram proceeded to carry out an attack on his hometown of Chibok.<sup>16</sup>

Also in January 2020, two Christian girls were killed in the southern Kaduna State by Fulani herdsmen.<sup>17</sup> Around 5 p.m. on 17 January 2020, Fulani herdsmen were seen riding on motorbikes when they began to fire indiscriminately on the villagers. As a result of the attack, two girls died and three boys were injured.<sup>18</sup>

## Request

Clearly, horrific acts of aggression are violating the peaceful lives of Christians in Nigeria. In order to prevent further loss of life, to end increasingly religiously motivated violence, and to address this massive humanitarian crisis, we must act now. The U.N. Charter calls on the U.N. to *remove* threats to peace, and the Genocide Convention calls on the U.N. to *prevent* acts of genocide, not merely to respond to them. We have seen in Iraq and Syria – and are now seeing in Nigeria – what happens when the U.N. fails to take preventative measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people. This is only the beginning, if meaningful action is not taken now, the problem in Nigeria will worsen. ISIS and ISIS affiliate groups, like Boko Haram, have shown their resiliency time and time again. When they are forced out of one area they flee in order to regroup and fight another day.<sup>19</sup>

It is imperative that the U.N. take swift action and work with the government of Nigeria to ensure that Leah and all others who remain captured are returned home safely and to put an end to the atrocities being carried out in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen. No one should have to live under the fear of being abducted, enslaved, or killed.

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 neighboring Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The UN Refugee Agency estimates that Boko Haram activity in these three countries has created more than 550,000 IDPs.<sup>20</sup>

This is why we respectfully request that this Council work with government of Nigeria in order to protect the people who are vulnerable to attack by preventing further attacks, prosecuting those who are responsible for these brutal atrocities, and providing aid and assistance to the victims.

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Smith, Nigerian priest killed by suspected Fulani gunmen; clergy march to protest killings, Christian Post Reporter (3 Aug. 2019), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nigerian-priest-killed-suspected-fulanigunmen-clergy-march-protest-killings.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Sam Olukoya, Islamic Extremists Kill Nigerian Pastor, Attack His Hometown, Associated Press (22 Jan. 2020), <https://apnews.com/422c1b97aee55b0a750efac653da19cc>.

<sup>17</sup> Two Young Christian Women Killed in Kaduna State, Nigeria, Morning Star News (20, Jan. 2020), <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/01/two-young-christian-women-killed-in-kaduna-state-nigeria/>.

<sup>18</sup> Id.

<sup>19</sup> Tyler Hicks, Resilience of ISIS and Its Branches, New York Times (27 Oct. 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/world/africa/boko-haram-isis-nigeria-niger.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 30 Jan. 2020).