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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, 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.

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

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Religious persecution and impunity in Nigeria

Overview

Currently, Nigeria is ranked the 12th most dangerous nation for Christians, according to Open Doors' World Watch List 2020.¹ Similarly, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) classifies Nigeria as a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern with regards to religious persecution.² Nigeria is an incredibly religiously diverse nation, and the population is made up of primarily Christians (91,122,000) and Muslims (90,269,000) but also Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Baha'is, as well as some atheist and agnostic individuals.³ While Christians are the larger population they are heavily targeted in the Northeast and Middle Belt region by Islamist militants and terrorist organizations.⁴

This increasing strife along religious lines has been occurring simultaneously with political strife, economic growth, and disputes over land ownership, all of which combine with violent religious persecution to foment an incredibly dynamic and interconnected relationship that makes such problems difficult to separate and solve.

Blasphemy Law in Nigeria

According to Open Doors, 12 Northern Nigerian states have adopted- either in full or in part- Sharia law as part of their penal code: Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, Yobe, Kaduna, Niger, and Gombe.⁵ Additionally, Chapter 19 Section 204 of Nigeria's Criminal Code states "any person who does an act which any class of persons consider as a public insult on their religion, with the intention that they should consider the act such an insult, any person who does an unlawful act with the knowledge that any class of persons will consider it such an insult, is guilty of a misdemeanor and is liable to imprisonment for two years."⁶

While there have been few instances in which the blasphemy laws have been used to unfairly target Nigerian Christians, the existence of such laws has fostered a climate of persistent "street" violence where Muslims in the community riot and attack Christians for flimsy reasons or false accusations of blasphemy," which is likely heightened by the fact that 'insult' is so loosely defined in the Criminal Code.⁷

Boko Haram and Islamic State violence against Christians

Boko Haram, though having been in a state of relative decline since the height of its activity around 2013 and 2014 due to its control being restricted to some smaller regions in northern Nigeria through government intervention, has continued to carry out attacks against Nigerian Christians, notably since 2018.⁸ Despite President Muhammadu Buhari's repeated condemnation of Boko Haram activity over the past few years, and his claim in 2015 that

¹ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Nigeria-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

² https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_NIGERIA_2019.pdf

³ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Nigeria-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁴ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Nigeria-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁵ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Nigeria-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf> ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_in_Nigeria

⁶ <http://lawsofnigeria.placng.org/laws/C38.pdf>

⁷ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Nigeria-WWL-2020-Country-Dossier-February-update.pdf><http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Nigeria-WWL-2020-Country-Dossier-February-update.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.cfr.org/blog/update-numbers-behind-sectarian-violence-nigeria> ; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/nigeria>

Boko Haram militancy has been “technically defeated,” attacks have appeared to be on the rise.⁹

In early January 2020, Boko Haram militants abducted Pastor Lawan Andimi, and shortly after his kidnapping, he appeared in a circulated video making a testimony that “I have never been discouraged, because all conditions that one finds himself in is in the hands of God...these people have been doing good to me. They are filling me with all that I want to eat. They provide a nice place for me to sleep.”¹⁰ Despite this video raising hopes of his safety and health, it was confirmed that Pastor Andimi was killed after the Church community was unable to raise the full two million naira ransom price, and due to the fact that Pastor Andimi was relentless in his devotion to God.¹¹

Only a few days following Pastor Andimi’s tragic murder, another video circulated in which 22-year-old University of Maiduguri student Ropvil Daciya Dayep was shot and killed by a child soldier of the Boko Haram-affiliated Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).¹² Before committing the murder, the young child speaks in both Arabic and Hausa, stating that this was an act of revenge against Nigerian Christians, that “we will not stop,” and that “we must avenge bloodshed that has been done like this one...”¹³

These murders exhibit a recent rise in Islamist violence and murder of Christian individuals. In December 2019, suspected IS or Boko Haram militants killed 11 Nigerian Christians, the militants justified their killing of innocent civilians as an act of vengeance for the deaths of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abul-Hasan al-Muhajir by a US air strike in Syria.¹⁴ In the video, the militants state “This is a message to Christians all over the world.”¹⁵ Two months prior, in September, Boko Haram militants killed Christian aid workers Lawrence Duna Dacighir and Godfrey Ali Shikagham, the militants claimed that they will continue to kill every Christian they abduct as revenge for the deaths of Muslims in “past religious conflicts.”¹⁶

Fulani Militants

While Boko Haram remains a large threat to stability and inter-religious peace in Nigeria, violence caused by and involving Fulani extremists has steadily been on the rise. According to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index, “in Nigeria, terrorist activity is dominated by Fulani extremists and Boko Haram. Together, they account for 78 percent of terror-related incidents and 86 percent of deaths from terrorism.”¹⁷

These deadly incidents are often classified as “farmer-herder” clashes, which is partly true. Nigeria’s Middle Belt region is increasingly the battlefield in which herders from the North and farmers from the South come into contact over land rights.¹⁸ Climate change has caused land in Northern Nigeria to deteriorate, forcing herders to usher their cattle into southern lands, where farmers are reluctant to let animals graze on their fertile croplands.¹⁹ As northern herders are mostly Muslim, and southern farmers are mostly Christian, it is impossible to ignore the implications of these attacks on religious pluralism and peaceful coexistence, as they add another point of contention.²⁰

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35173618>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soGoDzvJ868> ;

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/nigeria-boko-haram-kidnapped-pastor-hostage-video-testimony.html>

¹¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nigerian-pastor-who-praised-god-in-ransom-video-beheaded-after-refusing-to-deny-christ.html>

¹² <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38777>

¹³ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38777>

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50924266>

¹⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/27/791784171/islamic-state-group-in-nigeria-reportedly-executes-christian-hostages>

¹⁶ <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/09/boko-haram-executes-two-christian-aid-workers-in-nigeria/>

¹⁷ <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

¹⁹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

²⁰ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=78f8e09004444d718cd7bb763c94f55a>

In November 2019, Baroness Caroline Cox visited five villages that fell victim to attacks by Fulani militants, where 116 had collectively been killed.²¹ Baroness Cox concluded in her report that over 1,000 Christians have been killed since January 2019, in addition to the total of over 6,000 deaths since 2015.²² In speaking with grieving victims of the attacks, the victims describe mutilations, abductions, dismemberments, bombings, rapes of Christian men, women, and young children, as well as the arson, theft, and desecration of churches, farmland, religious materials, and homes.²³

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program reports a large increase in violence committed by Fulani militants from 2017 (556 deaths) to 2018 (1302 deaths).²⁴ While there was an observed increase in violence in which Fulani militants were the primary actor, the number of incidents in which Nigerian Christians were the perpetrators or instigators has drastically decreased from 2000 (1853 deaths) to 2018 (36 deaths).²⁵

In January 2020, a series of attacks by Fulani militants on Christian communities led to the deaths of 14 members of the Church of Christ in Nations as well as the deaths of human rights worker Dalyop Solomon Mwantiri, as well as Christian mother Mary Machief and her infant child.²⁶

Recommendations to the Government of Nigeria

Jubilee Campaign urges the State of Nigeria to:

- Publicly condemn and take actions to prosecute those committing acts of violence against religious groups, such as Fulani militants and Boko Haram militants.
- Train police forces and armed forces to respond to and resolve these violent incidents.
- Station protection forces in regions of Nigeria where violence is common, such as the Middle Belt Region.
- Compensate the families who have lost loved ones due to the lack of security and result of the recent Boko Haram and Fulani militant violence.
- Call and work for the release of Leah Sharibu and other prisoners.
- Abolish blasphemy laws.
- Release journalists and other prisoners of conscience.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council

Jubilee Campaign urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Hold Nigeria accountable to its obligations to promote and preserve human rights as a state party to the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Offer any necessary support to the State of Nigeria to combat violence (economically motivated, religiously motivated, and/or electorally motivated) either through assistance in training or funding for anti-violence initiatives.
- Offer support to the victims of the terrorist

²¹ https://www.hart-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Nigeria-Visit-Final-Report_Nov-2019-1-1.pdf

²² https://www.hart-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Nigeria-Visit-Final-Report_Nov-2019-1-1.pdf

²³ https://www.hart-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Nigeria-Visit-Final-Report_Nov-2019-1-1.pdf

²⁴ <https://ucdp.uu.se/actor/607>

²⁵ <https://ucdp.uu.se/actor/607>

²⁶ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/muslim-fulani-herdsmen-kill-16-christians-in-nigeria-govt-condemned-for-inaction.html>