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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.

[20 August 2020]

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

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

## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is home to more than 206 million people, and is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south: approximately 50 percent of Nigeria’s population practices Islam, and 40 percent practices Christianity. Nigeria is experiencing a humanitarian crisis and an increasingly genocidal situation for Christians who are continually the target of religiously motivated violence.

Once again, the ECLJ calls to this Council’s attention that, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations (U.N.), 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>1</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>2</sup>. It is increasingly clear that Nigeria cannot protect Christians within its borders from these horrific genocidal acts, and the U.N. must act now.

## 2. Background

Christians in Nigeria face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram, as well as from Fulani herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders<sup>3</sup> who are often armed with machetes and guns<sup>4</sup>.

According to one report, approximately 1,202 Nigerian Christians have been killed by Fulani herdsmen and radical Islamic terrorists in the first six months of 2020 alone<sup>5</sup>. The report indicates that approximately 812 Christians were killed by Fulani Herdsmen and 390 were killed at the hands of Boko Haram. The report also detailed how horrific these attacks against Christians are, stating:

Thousands of defenseless Christians who survived being hacked to death have also been injured and left in mutilated conditions with several of them crippled for life. . . . Hundreds of Christian worship and learning centers have been destroyed or burnt; likewise thousands of dwelling houses, farmlands and other properties belonging to Christians<sup>6</sup>.

## 3. Atrocities

In May of 2020, a group of Fulani herdsmen carried out a series of attacks in the Kajuru area of Kaduna, resulting in the deaths of at least 23 Nigerian Christians<sup>7</sup>. During one of the

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

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. VIII, 9 Dec. 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Nigeria, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 19 August 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Lee, 14 Christians Killed in Nigeria Attack, Christian Today (6 August 2020), <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/14.christians.killed.in.nigeria.attack/135338.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> 1,202 Nigerian Christians Killed in First 6 Months of 2020: NGO Report, The Christian Post (15 July 2020), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/1202-nigerian-christians-killed-in-first-6-months-of-2020-ngo-report.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Over 20 Killed in Spate of New Fulani Massacres on Nigerian Christians, The Christian Post (14 May 2020), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-20-killed-in-spate-of-new-fulani-massacres-on-nigerian-christians.html>.

attacks, Fulani herdsmen broke into a house and killed the entire family: a husband, wife, and their three children ages 13, 6, and 4. In a neighboring village, the attackers killed a 25-year-old mother and hacked to death her 6-year old child. Miraculously, her three-month old son survived a gunshot to the head and is being cared for by a local church<sup>8</sup>. One village resident stated: “Yesterday morning, while people slept in their houses, the Fulani people came in and slaughtered people . . . . We have pictures of how they used machetes to cut open heads of people and kill a lot of people”<sup>9</sup>.

In July of 2020, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) executed five aid workers that they had kidnapped the previous month<sup>10</sup>. In a video put out by ISWAP, they claimed these executions were in retaliation for efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity<sup>11</sup>. In the video they stated, “This is a message to all those being used by infidels to convert Muslims to Christianity . . . . If you don’t heed our warning, the fate of these five individuals will be your fate”<sup>12</sup>. According to reports three of the aid workers were employees of Christian aid organizations<sup>13</sup>.

On 24 July 2020, Fulani herdsmen carried attacks out in predominately Christian areas around Kafanchan, Lema’a County over a four-hour period<sup>14</sup>. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 10 Christians, including a 5-year old boy<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, an additional 11 people were injured and three homes were burned<sup>16</sup>. One resident stated in a text to a news agency that, “Christians are getting killed like chickens; children getting slaughtered; women getting raped and molested. Southern Kaduna is bleeding, and the government is silent; we need help”<sup>17</sup>.

On 29 July 2020, Fulani herdsmen carried out an attack in a village located in central Nigeria’s Kogi state that resulted in the death of 14 Christians and wounding 6 more<sup>18</sup>. One village resident stated, “They invaded the village armed with guns and riding motorcycles . . . . They were speaking in the Fulani language as they attacked our people. This is not the first time they’re attacking our communities, as other villages around us had been attacked in a similar way by these herdsmen”<sup>19</sup>.

In August of 2020, Fulani herdsmen carried out multiple attacks on communities in the Atyap Chiefdom in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area resulting in the deaths of approximately 33 individuals<sup>20</sup>. During these attacks, Fulani herdsmen, armed with guns, raided several villages killing innocent civilians and burning homes along the way<sup>21</sup>. Attacks within this region have been ongoing since January, and the government has yet to take action to put an end to it<sup>22</sup>.

As we have stated in previous written submissions, L. S. continues to be held captive by Boko Haram. L. S. is a Christian teen who was kidnapped by Boko Haram in February 2018 along

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> “Beyond Reprehensible”: Christian Aid Workers Executed in Nigeria, Catholic News Agency (28 July 2020), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/islamic-extremists-execute-christian-aid-workers-in-nigeria-13045>.

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Nigerian Pastor Among 10 Christians Killed in Herdsmen Attacks, Evangelical Focus (29 July 2020), <https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/7286/nigerian-pastor-among-10-christians-killed-in-herdsmen-attacks>.

<sup>15</sup> Id.

<sup>16</sup> Id.

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Muslim Fulani Herdsmen Kill 14 Baptist Christians in Kogi State, Nigeria, Morning Star News (4 August 2020), <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/08/muslim-fulani-herdsmen-kill-14-baptist-christians-in-kogi-state-nigeria/>.

<sup>19</sup> Id.

<sup>20</sup> At Least 33 Killed in Southern Kaduna State Despite 24-Hour Curfew, CSW (7 August 2020), <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/08/07/press/4755/article.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> Id.

with 110 other girls. Five of those girls are dead and 104 were set free<sup>23</sup>. L. 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 L. S.'s case as she remains in serious danger and immediate action must be taken to free her before it is too late.

#### **4. 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. Again, the U.N. Charter calls for the removal of threats to peace, and the Genocide Convention calls on the U.N. to prevent acts of genocide, not merely to respond to them. It is of utmost importance that meaningful action be taken immediately to put an end to the daily violence that Christians in Nigeria are facing. Repeatedly they cry out to their government and the international community for help, but no one responds.

It is imperative that the U.N. take swift action and work with the government of Nigeria to ensure that L. 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. 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 already carried out attacks in neighboring Chad, Cameroon and the Niger. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that Boko Haram activity in these three countries has created more than 684,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, the Fulani Herdsmen have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians over the last decade<sup>25</sup>.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that this Council work with the government of Nigeria to protect the vulnerable, prevent further attacks, prosecute those responsible for these brutal atrocities, and provide aid and assistance to the victims.

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<sup>23</sup> Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home, BBC News (25 March 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4355872>.

<sup>24</sup> Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 19 August 2020).

<sup>25</sup> The Deadliest Conflict You've Never Heard Of, Foreign Affairs (23 January 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2019-01-23/deadliest-conflict-youve-never-heard>.