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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, 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.

[22 August 2022]

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



Political violence in Nigeria

Nigeria has been challenged by several violent conflicts within the past few years. In addition to the obvious threat of Boko Haram which has terrorized parts of the country for over a decade now, as well as the activities of the so-called ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) and other armed groups who have been accused of killing a great number of civilians, counter-insurgency attacks in the North-East have reportedly led to human rights violations. The NGO Amnesty International indicated extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and arbitrary arrests by the state-sanctioned security forces. Furthermore, security forces engaging in other parts of the country have due to several media reports also been accused of severe human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings by the police unit SARS which was later renamed to SWAT and led up to the Lekki-massacre in 2020. Apart from that, the police as well as the military and DSS have according to Amnesty International consecutively been accused of torture and other ill-treatment –also within the context of the national criminal justice system.

On top of all of that and much more, the aftermath of the Biafran genocide from 1967-1970 still affects South-Eastern Nigeria up until today. IPOB, one of many separatists' groups who refers to themselves as "the indigenous peoples of Biafra", demands the creation of an "independent state of Biafra", following Nnamdi Kanu's leadership. The demands and activities of IPOB as well as the non-fulfilments of their appeals appear to be related to several human rights violations by different actors.

The Eastern Security Network – or ESN in short –, an armed wing group of IPOB, is accused of being responsible for multiple attacks on government buildings in the South-East and having killed dozens security force officers due to a media report. The Government of Nigeria has reacted in a way that some might view as disproportional: Nigerian security forces are accused of severe human rights violations during the process of their counter-insurgency-activities, including extrajudicial killings, torture, ill-treatment, and mass arrests by Amnesty International. Only last year, the current President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, has publicized a twitter-post inter alia stating that "Many of those misbehaving today are too young to be aware of the destruction and loss of lives that occurred during the Nigerian Civil War. Those of us in the fields for 30 months, who went through the war, will treat them in the language they understand". This can be considered an obvious reference to the Biafran genocide as well as an active call for violence and an open threat towards anyone who is fighting for an "independent Biafra" – or, perhaps, even anyone who is Igbo. He hasn't added any additional details regarding that; however, the first results of this statement tend to show: Nigerian security forces are accused of having killed more than a hundred people in relation to the current conflict in South-Eastern-Nigeria solely within four months in 2021 by Amnesty International. However, this kind of policy tends to go back to way before that: in 2015, Nigerian security forces apparently changed their strategy and started using more excessive violence against pro-Biafran-separatists' groups which has also led to the death of several individuals in the same year. According to a Nigerian newspaper, a rights group has accused the security forces of Nigeria to have killed over one thousand people between October 2020 and June 2022. According to another Nigerian newspaper, IPOB apparently even accuses Nigerian security forces of raping women and selling body parts of those who have been killed in the South-East.

IPOB themselves have, however, also been the subject of criticism. According to a Nigerian newspaper, suspected IPOB-members killed five gunmen in Anambra, allegedly deriving from a battle over control of the area, in June 2022. A BBC investigation has found that IPOB-supporters – many of whom operate from outside the country – use hate speech, especially on social media, and additionally spread disinformation to stoke tension between different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The latter most probably also severely affects the conflict between the Igbo and the Fulani which has been ongoing for decades.

Civilians on the grounds in the South-East of the country have furthermore reported that IPOB members have imposed a Monday-lockdown on them, apparently based on the political goal of pressuring the Government of Nigeria to release Nnamdi Kanu. However, according to an estimation of a local, there appears to be quite a high number of residents who do not agree with the ideology as well as the demands of IPOB and another resident has given the

impression of being severely intimidated by the activities of IPOB. Furthermore, the Monday-sit-ins are allegedly used by gunmen in their own favour, inter alia by calculating that their attacks might be blamed on IPOB, due to a local source. IPOB members have according to media reports been accused of killing some gunmen during clashes. It seems to be challenging to monitor who exactly ends up holding the actual responsibility for which attack(s) and killings – an issue which might be applicable for several of the violent clashes within Nigeria's country borders.

In addition, even an Igbo-person living in the diaspora has stated to disagree with the views of IPOB and their politically-motivated – even if unarmed – activities also outside of Nigeria. It might be reasonable to assume that that is not an isolated case. IPOB-members have due to an individual even been accused of recruiting diasporans by forcing them to make a vow which is backed up by traditional rituals – a serious power and at the same time an immense threat which must not be underestimated.

Apart from that, Society for Threatened Peoples would like to stress that the International Criminal Court (ICC), in this case in the person of Fatou Bensouda, has announced the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria on the 11 December 2020, inter alia stating that there is a reasonable basis to believe that members of Boko Haram and its splinter groups as well as members of the Nigerian Security Forces (“NSF”) have committed acts constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes. In addition, the ICC has also examined alleged crimes falling outside the context of this conflict. Nevertheless, as far as we are aware, actual legal proceedings under international law are still outstanding.

Therefore, the Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to:

- call upon the Government of Nigeria to ensure that the national security forces immediately stop abusing and killing unarmed civilians and protestors,
- call upon the Government of Nigeria to hold security forces as well as members of armed groups who abused, killed, or tortured citizens responsible for their actions under national and international law,
- call upon the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council to request an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legal question of whether Nigerian security forces, the DSS and the Nigerian military are guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity,
- call upon the UN Security Council to call upon the International Court of Justice to issue an arrest warrant against those who are accused of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity,
- call upon the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to desist from using the kind of language he has been using towards some of the citizens of Nigeria as these might match hate speech and furthermore could be interpreted as an incitement to violence against a specific group of the population,
- call upon the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to foster national reconciliation processes,
- call upon the Government of Nigeria to improve the general living conditions of all the citizens of Nigeria, as that will probably contribute to making it more difficult for the armed groups to recruit,
- call upon the Government of Nigeria to engage in political negotiations with the armed groups and separatists' groups,
- send an investigative independent UN fact-finding-mission to Nigeria,
- call upon the Government of Nigeria to ensure the compliance of international legal standards regarding the legal proceedings of arrested individuals and the release of those who are arrested due to the participating in demonstrations.