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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.

[4 February 2023]

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



A Multitude Of Human Rights Violations and Security Concerns In Nigeria

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council's attention the multiple and varying human rights concerns and security issues taking place in Nigeria.

For the purpose of this statement, it is imperative to clarify that when we identify Fulani militants as perpetrators of violence, we recognize that they are separate from the broader Fulani ethnic group who is largely peace-loving, and that we do not seek to stigmatize the entire ethnic group.

Persecution of and Violence against Christians by State and Non-State Actors

Perhaps one of the most infamous forms of religious persecution taking place in Nigeria is the application of blasphemy laws to arrest (typically by state actors) and attack (typically by non-state actors and private citizens) Christian individuals accused of blasphemy. One of the most recent and horrific of such incidents occurred in May 2022 in Sokoto State, where Christian university student Deborah Samuel Yakubu was stoned to death and set on fire on her college campus by her Muslim classmates who were angered over her allegedly blasphemous remarks. The perpetrators alleged that she had committed blasphemy when days before, in the class WhatsApp group chat, she questioned why they were discussing religious matters and stated that she was able to pass her exams by believing in Jesus. Nine months later, Deborah's killers have reportedly still not been located, arrested, and prosecuted for their crime; this is despite that the video of the incident – which circulated on the internet and gained international condemnation – clearly shows the perpetrators' faces and their verbal confirmation of committing the murder. In the following months, one middle-aged Nigerian mother of five, Rhoda Jatau, was arrested and charged with blasphemy for forwarding a video on WhatsApp of a Muslim condemning Deborah's killing; immediately after news of Jatau's actions reached the general public, a Nigerian Muslim mob initiated riots which led to the severe injury of 15 Christians. It is important to note that there are other Nigerian citizens of different faiths who have similarly been targeted for allegedly committing blasphemy, including Tijaniyya Sufi Islamic gospel singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu [sentenced to death, though later overturned by an appellate court, for a song in which he reportedly elevated an imam above the Prophet] and humanist activist Mubarak Bala [sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment].

During the previous session of the Human Rights Council, Jubilee Campaign submitted a written statement expressing concern about the increasing intensity and prevalence of violent attacks targeting individual Christian citizens and entire Christian communities. The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa reported that between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2021, jihadist assailants – including Fulani militant groups, Islamic State West Africa Province, and Boko Haram – killed 8,560 Nigerian Christians and were responsible for a substantial proportion of the 2,417 Muslim deaths during this period as well. With regards to recent incidents of violence against Christians, in December 2022 suspected Fulani militants ambushed the farm of and killed Christian couple C.U. and C.U. and their 17-year-old daughter. Also in December, a mob of Fulani militants descended upon Christian communities in two villages in Kaduna State, where they burned and looted no fewer than 96 homes and subsequently killed 40 Christian civilians using machine guns, swords, and axes. Also in December, in Enugu State, Fulani militants killed approximately 62 Christians. Militants have also specifically targeted Christian leaders for attacks and killings, and January 2023 attacks victimized Father Isaac Achi of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Niger State (burned to death), Father Collins (shot and injured), and Pastor Jerry Hinjari of Christ Nation International in Adamawa State (kidnapped from his home and murdered).

Radical Fulani militants are believed to be responsible for the 5 July 2021 abduction of 140 Christian schoolchildren from Bethel Baptist boarding school in Kaduna State; while 28 of the kidnapped students have been freed, the rest remain in captivity. In April 2021, Fulani militants abducted three students from a Plateau State Christian mission school; while two

students were able to escape during the incident and only one was transferred to the Fulani militant camp, it is likely that had it not been for the swift intervention by local security forces, the situation could have become a mass kidnapping of tens or even hundreds of students.

Atrocities Committed by Nigerian Military Forces

In December 2022, Reuters published a series of stories in which they revealed that, in an alleged effort to combat Islamic insurgency and identify militants, the Nigerian military has committed violence against women and extrajudicial killings of unborn and living children. In one fragment of this operation, Nigerian soldiers conducted covert, unsafe, illegal, and forced abortions on at least 10,000 pregnant women and girls. The military specifically targeted women and girls who had been previously kidnapped by Islamic State West Africa Province/Boko Haram and subjected to rape in captivity; military forces consider these unborn children as future Islamist insurgents that must be eradicated. Unconscionably, the pregnant women and girls were neither informed of the procedure prior to the abortion, nor were they asked consent for the terminations; a substantial portion of victims have expressed that they wanted to carry their children to term and raise them. Survivors have reported being drugged and physically threatened into submission for forced abortions – often committed in unsanitary military barracks – and injected with medications that occasionally caused infections and overdose-related deaths of women and girls. This years-long atrocity was kept under wraps for so long largely because survivors were threatened with death should they reveal what they endured.

In its follow-up report, Reuters interviewed 40 former Nigerian soldiers who witnessed the killing of children by military forces, or otherwise committed such murders themselves. Similar to the ridiculous and indefensible rationale of aborting ‘future militants’ in order to combat insurgency, the military, in a program called Operation No Living Things, targeted living children who were children of Boko Haram militants, were located in conflict zones, or were suspected of being currently involved in or predisposed to Islamic militancy. The majority of child victims were shot in the head, but soldiers would confiscate younger kids – including toddlers and infants – from their mothers and smother them to death by asphyxiation. In some cases, soldiers would round up and execute children in large groups.

Electoral Violence

Another major security issue that has expanded over the past couple of months is electoral violence leading up to the 2023 presidential campaign. In December 2022, unidentified assailants set ablaze a municipal office of the Independent National Electoral Commission, adding to the list of 50 electoral offices that have been fully or partially destroyed since the 2019 election season. Also in December, Islamic State West Africa Province targeted President Muhammadu Buhari in an explosion in Kogi State and later took credit for the attack.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign makes the following recommendations to Members and Observer States of the Council:

1. Hold the Nigerian government accountable to its human rights obligations as a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, as well as a State party to numerous United Nations human rights mechanisms.
2. Establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the violence that remains unmitigated in Nigeria, especially the violence committed by Islamist jihadist militias against Christians, as well as military atrocities against women and children.

3. Hold the Nigerian government accountable to its human rights obligations as outlined in Article 34 of the Constitution, which states that “no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment”.
4. Appoint a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria.

Jubilee Campaign makes the following recommendations to the government of Nigeria:

1. Continue to accept visits from and cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, who releases timely and accurate reports regarding the violence in Nigeria.
2. Take measures to preemptively respond to potential militant attacks and, when such attacks are committed, properly investigate the incidents, identify and prosecute perpetrators, and provide medical and material aid to victims.
3. Develop a comprehensive plan and/or policy to address and eradicate the violence against Nigerian Christians at the hands of Islamic jihadist Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, and Fulani militants. Ensure that such a program does not engage in the atrocities mentioned in this submission, including forced abortions and extrajudicial killings.
