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## **Seven Christians killed in Christmas Eve attacks in Nigeria**

***More than 30 Christians killed in prior attacks in Kaduna state, sources say.***

Morning Star News (27.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/397SNHM> - Islamic extremist militants killed seven Christians in Christmas Eve attacks in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, according to area residents, while two people were reportedly killed in neighboring Adamawa state.

Residents of the villages of Pemi and Debro, near Chibok, Borno state said the insurgents were members of Islamic extremist group Boko Haram, and that the militants burned a Church of the Brethren (EYN) building in Pemi. In addition, seven people were reportedly kidnapped, including a pastor.

Across the border in neighboring Adamawa state, residents of Garkida told Morning Star News that Boko Haram attacked at the same time on Dec. 24, but that Nigerian army forces repelled them. Adamawa Gov. Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri, however, released a statement on Christmas Day saying two civilians had been killed in the attack, including a 5-year-old boy, before soldiers drove the rebels away.

In Borno state, the jihadists began their attacks on predominantly Christian Pemi and Debro at about 6 p.m., area residents said.

"Seven Christians were killed at Pemi, and the church building of EYN was completely burned by them," area resident Awiya Lawan told Morning Star News by text message.

"Houses, cars and stores were burned down. The Boko Haram gunmen carried out the attacks for three hours before soldiers arrived at the area at 9 p.m."

Peter Solomon, another resident of the area, also said that heavily armed Boko Haram rebels, who seek to establish sharia (Islamic law) throughout Nigeria, killed seven Christians.

"The Boko Haram attackers destroyed the church building of EYN and looted foods from many houses before burning about 10 houses in Pemi, which is located about 20 kilometers [12 miles] away from Chibok town," Solomon said

In Adamawa state, the attack by suspected Boko Haram militants forced Christians to halt Christmas preparations and flee into bushes to escape, area residents said.

"Garkida town in Adamawa state is under a massive attack," area resident Joel Bahago said in a text message to Morning Star News. "Please pray for us, as this isn't how we planned for Christmas, Lord."

Another area resident, Rhoda Yadiwutuwa, said in a text message on Christmas Day that Nigeria's armed forces had repelled the assailants but that most of the residents were still hiding in bushes and nearby hills.

"It is well with us people of Garkida, we shall hold our peace, because victory belongs to our God and Lord, Jesus Christ," Yadiwutuwa said.

Markus Bulus wrote in a Christmas Day text that area resident were thankful.

"Whatever Boko Haram planned against us has failed," Bulu said. "Whatever it is, we shall still celebrate Christmas. Jesus, we're so grateful this day even with the bad experience we had last night. We have nothing to offer as our thanksgiving, but we offer our hearts in deep supplication to your majesty on this Christmas Day."

### ***Terror in Kaduna***

In north-central Nigeria, a series of attacks by Muslim Fulani herdsmen across three counties of southern Kaduna state earlier this month killed 33 Christians, destroyed 18 homes and displaced more than 2,500 people, Christian leaders told Morning Star News.

On Dec. 17 in Zangon-Kataf County, the herdsmen killed at least 10 Christians in Goran Gan village and destroyed 18 homes, and on Dec. 21 they killed three others at Ungwan Jatau and Ungwan Gimba villages, area residents told Morning Star News in text messages.

Sule Tinat Bodam, general secretary of the Atyap Community Development Association and a Christian community leader in Zangon-Kataf, confirmed the attacks.

"On Dec. 17, the Gora Gan community was attacked by armed gunmen suspected to be Fulani militias on motorcycles," Bodam said. "The attack left over seven people dead, and over 17 houses were burnt down. The Sheyin family was wiped out almost completely by the attackers."

He identified those killed as Ayuba Sheyin, 69; his wife Jummai Sheyin, 55; their son Saviour Sheyin, 14; son Goodluck Sheyin, 11; daughter Patience Sheyin, 5; Peter Akau, 70; Joel Ishaya, 35; and Binta Musa Tauna, 85. In addition, 16-year-old Henry Jonathan was hospitalized with gunshot wounds.

"The Sheyin family lived just in front of the primary school where the military, meant to secure the village after previous attacks, are stationed," Bodam said.

Luka Biniyat, spokesman for the Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), added in a Dec. 21 press statement that three more corpses had been recovered, bringing the number of Christians killed in Gora Gan to at least 10.

SOKAPU executives visited a camp for Internally Displaced Persons in Zonkwa, Zangon-Kataf County, where 2,500 Christian women and children were taking refuge after raids by armed herdsmen, Biniyat said.

Also in Zangon-Kataf County on Dec. 19, herdsmen killed four Christians in four other villages: Ungwan Gaiya, Ungwan Gimba, Ungwan Makama and Apimbu, according to state Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs Commissioner Samuel Aruwan.

"The military confirmed that two houses were burned in the Apimbu attack," Aruwan said.

In Chikun County, herdsmen on Tuesday (Dec. 22) killed seven Christians and wounded four in Gbaja village and killed two more Christians in Ungwan Gwaiva, area sources said.

In Kajuru County, herdsmen killed three Christians in Kujeni village on Tuesday (Dec. 22), sources said.

The Rev. Ali Buba Lamido, archbishop of Kaduna Province of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), issued a statement on Thursday (Dec. 24) expressing concern over kidnappings that have accompanied the killing.

"Kidnapping has become the order of the day as these kidnappers get into people's houses and abduct them without any resistance or challenge from the security agents," Lamido said. "Many people have been abducted, and a lot of millions of naira were paid as ransom. Those kidnapped were subjected to dehumanizing conditions and traumatizing experiences. Some family members of the those kidnapped were shot while trying to escape from the kidnappers."

On Dec. 10 the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, issued a statement calling for further investigation into crimes against humanity in Nigeria.

On Jan. 30 Christian Solidarity International (CSI) issued a genocide warning for Nigeria, calling on the Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council to take action. CSI issued the call in response to "a rising tide of violence directed against Nigerian Christians and others classified as 'infidels' by Islamist militants in the country's north and middle belt regions."

Nigeria ranked 12th on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of countries where Christians suffer the most persecution but second in the number of Christians killed for their faith, behind Pakistan.

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## **Mubarak Bala must be released, Abuja High Court says**

***On 21 December 2020, a judge at the High Court in Abuja, Nigeria, ruled that Mubarak Bala should be immediately released from detention in Kano State, where he has been held since April 2020.***

Humanists Int'l (21.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3rqrfFY> - The ruling in which the judge declared Bala's continuous incarceration as illegal and ordered his immediate release follows a 'fundamental rights' petition detailing how Bala has been detained without charge for more than seven months, for five months of which, he was denied access to his legal representatives. The Court also awarded 250,000 Naira (around \$500USD) against the Respondents.

Humanists International is supporting Bala's legal team in Nigeria, and is in touch with them to understand the impact of this ruling, and what effect it will have in practice.

Nonetheless the organization reaffirms its call that Bala should be released immediately and without delay to a safe location.

**Andrew Copson**, President of Humanists International, said: "Today's ruling by the High Court in Abuja is a victory for the human rights of all citizens in Nigeria. It is time our colleague Mubarak Bala was released immediately and unconditionally and we call upon leaders in Nigeria to respect due process and the rule of law."

**Leo Igwe**, who has been coordinating much of the campaign to free Mubarak in Nigeria, said: "This is welcome news, and we are cautiously optimistic about what it means. It is now imperative that the legal authorities in Nigeria comply with this ruling."

### **Background**

President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, was [arrested on 28 April](#) in connection with a Facebook post. He has subsequently been detained without charge for more than seven months. Bala's lawyers, who only [gained access to their client](#) in October, filed a fundamental rights petition before the Abuja High Court challenging the legality of Bala's ongoing detention and arrest. Humanists International believes that Mubarak Bala is being targeted for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and religion or belief.

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## **Nigeria one of the most dangerous countries for Christians**

ADF international (18.12.20) - <https://adfinternational.org/news/nigeria-one-of-the-most-dangerous-countries-for-christians/> - Thousands of Christians have been killed in Nigeria over the last few years. Now, the United States Department of State has designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for engaging or tolerating "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom." This comes after years of terrorism carried out by violent Islamic extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, that has targeted Christians in the Northern part of the country.

"Persecution against religious believers around the world must end. For too long, Nigeria has violated the fundamental rights of people of faith by allowing impunity for egregious crimes committed against religious minorities, and in particular against Christians. The United States' designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern sends a message that atrocities committed based on religious motives or identity will not be tolerated. This designation is a wake-up call to Nigeria to protect everyone's inalienable right to religious freedom," said Kelsey Zorzi, who serves as Director of Global Religious Freedom for ADF International.

### **Nigerian government must act to protect religious minorities**

The designation of Nigeria as a CPC is a win for advocates of religious freedom even as the situation in the country grows more troubling.

Samuel Brownback, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, [stated](#) in an on-the-record briefing at the release of the designation: “[A] major concern for us is the lack of adequate government response in Nigeria. You’ve got expanded terrorist activities, you’ve got a lot of it associated around religious affiliations, and the government’s response has been minimal to not happening at all. . . . [T]he government really needs to act. We stand ready to work with them.”

Gayle Manchin, the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, [said](#): “Nigeria is the first secular democracy that has been named a CPC, which demonstrates that we must be vigilant that all forms of governments respect religious freedom.”

### ***Persecution of Christians in Nigeria***

Thousands of Christians have been killed in Nigeria over the last few years. Millions of people have fled the devastating violence and have become internally displaced. As a result of the violence, 13,000 churches have been closed or destroyed altogether. Many victims have also been kidnapped, raped, forcibly converted or married, or sold into slavery. One of the main perpetrators in attacks against Christians and other religious minorities are members of Boko Haram, a terrorist group that emerged in 2003. Christians also face attacks from other militants throughout the North and Middle Belt region, as well as discrimination more generally in these areas.

There is a growing international awareness of the serious and worsening human rights situation in Nigeria. On 11 December, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court released a statement announcing her conclusion of preliminary examinations on Nigeria, which began in 2010. Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced that the statutory criteria for opening an investigation had been met, and that there was a reasonable basis to believe that members of Boko Haram and its splinter groups had committed acts constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes, including persecution on religious grounds and intentionally directing attacks against places of worship.

Paul Coleman, Executive Director of ADF International, said: “The recent statement from the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court reminds us that Nigeria remains a country of grave concern for people of faith. Christians in particular face widespread and severe persecution. No one should turn a blind eye to the plight Christians and other religious minority groups are facing today in Nigeria.”

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## **Nigerian Christians facing 'calculated genocide,' Catholic bishop tells Congress**

By Matt Hadro

Catholic news agency (18.12.20) - <https://cutt.ly/thMgtXS> - The world must not ignore the “genocide” of Christians in Nigeria, the Catholic Bishop of Gboko told members of Congress on Thursday.

“The mass slaughter of Christians in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, by every standard, meets the criteria for a calculated genocide from the definition of the Genocide Convention,” Bishop

William Avenya of Gboko, in center of Nigeria, told a congressional commission on Thursday.

The bishop said that “it is depressing that our Middle Belt region has truly become a vale of tears, a region where mass burials are very common!”

Bishop Avenya was testifying at a Dec. 17 hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, a bipartisan congressional commission, on “Conflict and Killings in Nigeria’s Middle Belt.”

The Middle Belt is a fertile region stretching across the central part of Nigeria, the site of an increasing amount of violence in recent years where many farming villages in a predominantly Christian have been attacked.

According to the International Crisis Group, there were an average of more than 2,000 fatalities per year from 2011 to 2016 in the Middle Belt. Although 600 have died in the Middle Belt this year, the number is nearly six times that when the area of concern includes the country’s north, said Robert Destro, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the State Department.

Christians and Muslims in Nigeria have suffered an mounting toll from violent attacks by Fulani militants in the Middle Belt and in the country’s northeast by the terror groups Islamic State West Africa Province (Iswap)—formerly Boko Haram—and by the new Boko Haram group that split off from Iswap.

According to the UN’s refugee agency (UNHCR), more than two million are estimated to be “internally-displaced” in Nigeria.

The drivers of the violence are complex, members of Congress and State Department officials said on Thursday.

Fulanis are nomadic herdsman who populate the broader region of the Sahel, some have been driven south into the Middle Belt by desertification caused by climate change, commission co-chair Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) said on Thursday, and he noted there are also counter-reprisals committed against Fulanis.

Nevertheless, “[t]he largest, dominant driver of conflict in the Middle Belt region is committed by Fulani extremists, who appear driven in large part by ethno-religious chauvinism, against mostly Christian farmers – though I do note that elsewhere Shia Muslims are also victims, and that intra-Sunni conflicts also exist within the Muslim community as well,” Smith said.

Many of the reported attacks on villages are “massacres,” Smith said, as civilians are targeted for killings, injuries, and rape.

In 2017, Catholic bishops reported an increasing number and intensity of attacks by Fulanis, who were employing sophisticated weaponry not before seen in previous herder-farmer clashes.

Some bishops have emphasized the ethno-religious nature of the attacks, claiming that the largely-Muslim Fulani militants specifically target Christian villages and churches.

However, one Nigerian priest involved in conflict management recently told Aid to the Church in Need that the violence “is more of a resource conflict than a religious one,” as the nomadic herdsman are in search of water and grazing land because of desertification.

U.S. religious freedom ambassador Sam Brownback said on Thursday that violence “often plays out along faith lines” even if the conflicts were not religious in origin.

Non-governmental organizations have warned of “increasingly religious undertones” to the conflict in the last year, he said, with reports of religious sites burned and forced conversions of some kidnapping victims.

Bishop Avenya charged the Nigerian government for failing to protect Christians in the Middle Belt.

“How can one explain a scenario where as many as a hundred innocent and defenceless villagers are killed in one single attack and no one says anything about it?” he asked.

“It appears that the system has not only permitted but is also aiding the enthronement of supremacist views of one religious group against the others,” he said.

Destro said that religious and political leaders and aid groups have emphasized the lack of security in the country.

“If a community calls the Nigerian equivalent of 911, nobody answers. There is no effective police protection,” he said. Local communities do not have the resources to protect themselves and prosecute the perpetrators of violence.

Destro noted that “the Nigerians themselves are beside themselves” over the violence, and that “[t]here is some denial that there’s religious violence, but I did not find that to be the case in most instances.”

The hearing came after two more attacks on civilians were reported in international media this week. On Dec. 15, the Islamist terror group Boko Haram admitted culpability for the kidnapping of hundreds of schoolboys at a school in northwestern state of Katsina, and in the country’s southeast a Nigerian priest was kidnapped by four armed men on Monday, and later released on Wednesday.

Due to the ongoing violence against civilians in Nigeria, the State Department last week designated Nigeria a “country of particular concern (CPC)” for the first time ever—a listing reserved for the countries with the worst records on religious freedom, such as China, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia.

The CPC designation is “hopefully a true wakeup call” to the government, Smith said, noting that if there is no proper response to the designation, the U.S. should consider using sanctions.

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## Uscirf condemns Boko Haram attacks and threats against Christians

Uscirf – (17.12.20) - <https://cutt.ly/khMhHS2>

WASHINGTON, DC – The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)) today condemned recent attacks by Boko Haram in Niger and northwest Nigeria, as well as threats by the group against Christians in the run up to the Christmas holiday.

“Boko Haram continues to commit gross violations of religious freedom in the Lake Chad Basin,” said USCIRF [Vice Chair Tony Perkins](#). “These atrocious acts and religiously motivated threats are nothing short of deplorable.”

Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for a December 11 attack on an all-boys school in northwest Nigeria that has left over [300 students missing](#). The group also claimed responsibility for a December 12 attack in Niger that left [27 people dead](#). In a three-minute video sent to French news agency AFP, Boko Haram [promised](#) Christians more attacks ahead of Christmas.

*"The U.S. government must pressure the Nigerian and Nigerien governments to act fast to protect Christian communities from these despicable threats of violence in the coming days,"* added [Commissioner Fred Davie](#). *"Christians have the right to celebrate free from fear and intimidation no matter where they live."*

In its [2020 Annual Report](#), USCIRF recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate [Nigeria](#) as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, and that Boko Haram be designated an "entity of particular concern," or EPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

Earlier this month, the State Department designated Nigeria a CPC for the first time ever.

## **U.S. Human Rights Commission Calls Nigerian Violence 'Genocide'**

By Jillian Cheney

Religion unplugged (17.12.20) - <https://cutt.ly/JhMhp7b> - Last week, the U.S. State Department listed Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for what it called its severe violations of religious freedom and government tolerance of such actions. Fatou Bensouda, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, said that "a well-founded basis exists for investigating Nigeria for crimes against humanity and war crimes."

The designation comes after Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the [kidnapping](#) of over 300 schoolboys, who on Dec. 17 were given back to security agents and safety. Boko Haram and Fulani militants, both Islamist groups, are a threat to Nigerian civilians, particularly in a region called the Middle Belt.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, a bipartisan caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives, held a panel on Dec. 17 to discuss these human rights violations and how the U.S. can help moving forward.

Over the past several years, Nigerian citizens have been subject to kidnappings, mass execution, sexual assault and other forms of violence. More than 600 people have died in 2020 alone in Nigeria's Middle Belt, according to statistics presented by Robert Destro, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. That number increases to 5,695 if Nigeria's North Central, Northeast and Northwest regions are included.

Rep. Christopher R. Smith, Co-Chair of TLHRC, mentioned the Commission's past focus on Nigeria and the importance of this issue going forward.

"The United States and international community I believe must do more to mitigate the violence because, above all, the dire situation on the ground warrants it," Smith said. "The killings, the kidnappings and sexual abuse is absolutely unconscionable."

Many panelists mentioned that the violence carried out fits the standards required to label it a genocide of Nigerian people.

“Especially when it comes to situations with a risk of atrocities like mass killings, prevention must be a priority,” said James P. McGovern, Co-Chair of TLHRC.

Panelists say that the violence is motivated by political, economical, geographic and religious factors. Fulani herdsmen, who are Muslim, have attacked Christian farmers and churches as desertification reduces the availability of arable land.

“Unfortunately, violence often plays out along faith lines even if conflicts were not originally religious,” said Sam Brownback, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, “both because of the composition of farmer and herder groups and because of the history of ethno-religious tension exacerbated by a lack of accountability.”

Brownback cited the burning of churches in Nigeria from earlier this year and similar targeting of religious organizations that has carried on for years: in June 2013, when the U.S. government added Boko Haram to its list of terrorist organizations, the group targeted churches for three weeks in a row and killed over 50 worshippers.

“Since the consistent attacks began some five years ago, there has hardly been a single day gone without killing in one part of the region or the other,” said Rev. William A. Avenya, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gboko, Nigeria in a statement. “Interestingly, no one has ever been arrested or questioned or prosecuted or convicted of any charge relating to this spree of killings.”

Others emphasized the lack of response from Nigerian government, who credits many of these attacks to “bandits” or blames them entirely on political or economical reasons — rather than religious ones.

U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, a member of TLHRC, noted that the main targets in Boko Haram’s terrorist activity are Christians and Shia Muslims, many of whom are farmers. However, everyone from schoolboys to pastors to mothers have been affected.

Baroness Cox, Life Peer in the U.K.’s House of Lords, shared the story of a woman she met in Nigeria named Veronica who was targeted by Fulani militants: “They said they wanted my daughter to suck my finger. So they amputated my forefinger and I passed out. When I woke up, I saw my six year-old daughter on the ground, dead, with my chopped finger in her mouth.”

All panelists were in agreement that this violence is religiously motivated and a serious threat to Nigeria that the U.S. and U.K. should get involved in.

Destro said some of the greatest problems facing the Nigerian people come from a lack of resources. There’s no local police or help from the army. Humanitarian aid organizations are pulling out of the region because it’s too dangerous. When civilians call the Nigerian equivalent of 911, no one picks up the phone.

“We have to start with civilian security,” Destro said. “Without civilian security, there is no protection of human rights.”

He proposed a solution in which the U.S. government would partner with churches, civilians and other local organizations to form a “warning network” that would inform Nigerians and allow them to avoid and prevent more of these attacks.

Destro said this would require the growth of U.S. intelligence in Nigeria to “develop a ground-level understanding of what Nigerians need to help themselves.”

In agreement, other panelists called for funding from the Trump administration and Congress to complete this work, as well as to complete more research that would allow better and more complete reports of death counts that have previously gone unnoticed.

Brownback emphasized the importance of not conceding to Boko Haram and other militant groups.

“Religion, at its heart, is peaceful,” he said.

He hopes to work with Nigeria and interfaith organizations of Abrahamic religions in order to spread this idea of peace throughout the country and quell religiously-motivated terrorist groups.

None of these solutions would be possible without the cooperation of the Nigerian government, however.

“We will be engaging on all levels with President Buhari’s government, but they’ve got to want to change,” Destro said.

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## **After 100,000 Assassinations, An Urgent Call for Religious Freedom in Nigeria**

***100,000 Nigerians have been killed in ten years. The world should act now, says one of the most well-known Nigerian Catholic human rights activists.***

By Msgr. Obiora Ike

Bitter Winter (17.12.20) - <https://bitterwinter.org/urgent-call-for-religious-freedom-in-nigeria/>

There is no shortage of pronouncements that the inalienable and fundamental rights to freedom of conscience and religion as enshrined in international constitutions, covenants, statutes, and the United Nations Charter of 1948 are seriously undermined and threatened in Africa’s most populated country, Nigeria.

Rising cases of persecution for religious reasons, particularly of Christians, increase with the daily news. The statistics indicate shocking but serious revelations—with over 100,000 people killed in ten years due to religiously motivated killings, the highest in any country in the world at this time. Nigeria is not at war with another country, and has never been. However, the northern parts of the country, with the Boko Haram terrorist organization, the Fulani herdsmen, now called “bandits,” and some Muslim religious fanatics, have followed the paths of the politicians who in the year 2000 tried to

undermine democracy in Nigeria by forcefully, and contrary to the federal constitution, pushing through the Sharia law upon 12 States of the country.

This action has fueled bigotry, hatred, ignorance, religious fanaticism, Islamic expansionism, land-grabbing ambitions to displace indigenous traditional and Christian owners, in a politically tele-guided acrimony designed to instrumentalize religion for their purposes. The President, Mohammed Buhari, is an avowed Islamic fundamentalist, who has used his presidency to institutionalize Muslim and Northern political hegemony over the rest of the country, through political appointments to the entire military and security outfits, the civil service, political positions, the economy, and even international positions.

There is evident and urgent reason to confront the gradual but speedy "Talibanization" and Islamization policies taking place in Nigeria at this time. Nigeria is the most populated country on the African continent, with a growing population of well over 210 million people. Nigeria is largely multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious, with over 400 languages showcasing diversity in a territory of contradictions and possibilities. The country is inhabited by people of indigenous African Bantu origins, but migrations have happened over decades, with Africans from other backgrounds including Fulani nomads, immigrants from inter-African commercial dealings, and persons of Arab and Caucasian background settling in the country. For much of this period, people had lived peacefully throughout the country. There are an estimated 80 million Muslims and 80 million Christians, with the rest made of adherents to the traditional African religions. Catholics are the majority of the Christian population.

With the largest number of Muslims living in any one country of Africa, and the largest number of Christians living in the same country, the colonial era under the British decentralized the management of the country, so that each section could live with their own traditions and systems. Under the Military since 1966, and increasingly, a centralized form of government has emerged, and the Muslim elite uses this apparatus as a cover to rule over the rest of the entire population, imposing the religious and cultural bias of their worldviews. The country under civilian administrations has suffered a void of good leadership, and a civil war broke out in 1967 between the mainly Christian-populated south-eastern parts (then known as Biafra) and the rest of the largely Muslim parts of Northern Nigeria. Over two million people, mainly children, died during the Biafra civil war, the effects of which are still evident. There are enormous mineral resources and vibrant hardworking people involved in making the country and Africa great, yet Islamic fanaticism continues to draw the country on the brinks of disaster.

In 1985, a military dictator, Mr. Ibrahim Babangida, surreptitiously smuggled Nigeria against the will of the majority of the citizens into the forced membership in the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which action increased the polarizations, conflicts on religious affiliations, suspicions of Islamization, and the current full-blown attempt by the dominant political Muslim elite to impose the Islamic legal, religious, cultural and social systems into the mainstream of public life in the entire country.

In 1999, 12 out of the 36 states that make up the Federation of Nigeria, contrary to the letters and spirit of the Federal constitution of the Republic, simultaneously legislated to adopt the Islamic Sharia against the secular constitution on which Nigeria was founded at its very beginning. By thus proclaiming themselves "Sharia-governed States," and imposing the Sharia Islamic jurisprudence in both personal and criminal law upon their citizenry, they heightened tensions and suspicions across the country, causing more

deaths of innocent citizens, and wanton destruction of property and livelihoods, including places of divine cult and worship.

*In green, the Nigerian states that adopted Sharia (credits).*

There is disruption of the peace within the social space, and many Christians have fled their places of abode, as their churches and homes are destroyed. These acts of arson and rape of women are criminal, yet the law enforcement agencies, beyond public condemnations, have not managed to assuage or bring the situation under control, fueling the suspicion that there is a conspiracy by the government, largely controlled by the Muslim political elite, and the security forces with their intelligence to condone this illegality and effrontery.

In some cases, there is tacit encouragement of government officials, at the highest levels as is evidenced under the current President Buhari (in power from 2015), to condone perpetrators such as the Fulani herdsmen, who contravene the laws of the land and carry heavy weapons and machinery while moving about with their cattle, causing mayhem, and forcing indigenous citizens into refugee status through internal displacement and land grabbing. The rising cases of international migrations are linked directly to these forms of insecurity.

Cities in the once peaceful middle belt of the country, with a large population of Christians and traditional non-Muslim inhabitants, are under tremendous pressure and compelled to vacate their homes. The ravaging Fulani herdsmen, who are nomads with cattle, in recent times have invaded towns, villages, and homes in places like Jos in the Plateau, Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, and Adamawa States. The entire North-eastern part of Nigeria is experiencing the actions of a group of terrorists, who called themselves "Sunnah Lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching Jihad) and are commonly known as Boko Haram. Boko Haram means "Western (or non-Islamic) education is a sin." The agenda of the group is to impose Islamic law as the only law in Nigeria, and they follow a fundamentalist variety of Sunni Islam.

The terrorism hiding behind the group known as Boko Haram has increased the tension, with the escalation in deaths of innocent citizens, destructions of property, and general insecurity. The United States intelligence (FBI) has added to its list of terrorist and dangerous organizations world-wide Al Qa'ida, Al Shabab, Boko Haram, and a branch of the Fulani herdsmen. As mentioned earlier, the latter were originally cattle nomads, but some of them have joined in unleashing terror and taking over the lands of natives through land-grabbing and displacements of indigenous persons, the often-Christian populations, and traditional natives. Most surprising in all this is that in no single case since the past thirty years was anybody held accountable or responsible—a clear sign of the complicity of the government of Nigeria, currently controlled by Muslim elites, military personnel, and intelligence.

While Christian church groups and moderate Muslims and civil society groups in Nigeria preach peace and coexistence, this appeal must be sustained. The international community especially in Europe, the USA, and the United Nations cannot look away from the ongoing contradictions of the tenets of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and covenants upon which the U.N. and its member states have set human rights and democratic standards for the global community.

In a country where the agenda of Islamization and religious fanaticism using the Islamist terror groups is being assisted by government officials within the system, to establish a firm foothold in Africa's most populous country by ethnically cleansing Christians in the

Middle Belt and overall in the southern parts of Nigeria, cannot be allowed to continue. Violence linked to religion contradicts the tenets of most religions, as it is believed that religions teach peace, promote life, abhor killings of persons irrespective of their faith persuasions and promote harmony. Religious peace and coexistence are often the foundation for all other freedoms and liberties.

This is an urgent and crucial call to the international community to focus on Nigeria, where now ethnic intolerance, terrorism and State-sponsored religious fundamentalism are growing, before it is too late. The migration and security issues and its conflagration for the globe would be too much to handle aside the humanitarian crisis in the event of a full-blown confrontation. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria and the Christian Association of Nigeria, moderate Muslims, the Vatican, and some enlightened voices continue to call for mutual understanding, peace, stability, and progress in Africa's largest economy and most populated country.

Unfortunately, Christians and many others in Nigeria feel that the West, the businesses, the international community and its diplomacy are standing aloof and watching without engagement, pressure on government, and educational intervention, including all-round attempts at poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts. If left unchecked, cataclysmic consequences may follow as the clouds of patience are already running out among the civil populace who do not wish to stand by without adequate self-defense for their lives, their faith, and their livelihoods.

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## **The mass murder of Nigerian Christians**

***The world is determined to look away from a horrific campaign of killings being perpetrated in Africa under the name of Islam.***

By Rabbi Abraham Cooper & Rev. Johnnie Moore

Tablet Magazine (01.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3qiOZv3> - Michael Nnadi was the kind of Nigerian whose face projected a nearly supernatural joy. His pronounced features made him look both older and younger than his 18 years. His skin was dark, aglow with a smooth radiance that reflected the sun. An ever-present smile consumed his entire face, easily lighting up a room.

Michael was one of 270 students studying at the Good Shepherd Seminary in Kaduna State on the main highway to Abuja. On the evening of January 8, 2020, his world was upended when an armed gang, disguised in military fatigues, breached the gate of the school. They snagged four seminarians, including Michael, and made their escape.

The straightforward words of the seminary's registrar, Rev. Joel Usman, belied his anguish. "After [taking] the headcount of the students with security agents, four Seminarians have been declared missing. Kindly say a prayer for their release," Reverend Usman pleaded.

By the end of the month, three of the four boys had been freed, but not Michael. A few days later he was found dead, his body dumped on the side of a road, massacred by his kidnapers. Local authorities attributed the kidnappings to criminal activity by bandits whose interest was in whatever they could extort from the Catholic church or the relatives of the four seminarians.

At Michael's funeral, the esteemed Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto denounced the injustice of his murder, trying to use the power of his words to awaken the conscience of a nation: "This is for us the moment of decision. This is the moment that separates darkness from light, good from evil. Our nation is like a ship stranded on the high seas, rudderless and with broken navigational aids ... Nigeria is on the crossroads, and its future stands precariously in a balance."

Michael's twin brother, Raphael, spoke to the Nigerian press the week he and his brother would have turned 19. He saluted the path of spirituality, faith, and service that his brother had selected. "Michael was so much committed and loved the things of G-d, that his choice to become a priest did not surprise many people who knew him. My consolation is that he did not die in vain, pursuing things of the world, but rather he died in the service to G-d, training for the priesthood."

It remained a mystery to Raphael, his family, and the seminary as to why Michael had been killed while the others had been freed. The same negotiators had been working on behalf of all four abductees. Some Nigerians, as well as local and international authorities, thought that he may have been disposed of as a negotiating tool to increase the ransom for the others, but no one knew for sure—until April 30, 2020.

That's the day the murderer, Mustapha Mohammed, was interviewed in prison by Nigeria's Daily Sun newspaper. The jailed gang leader detailed to the reporter that his gang took five days to survey the property, which was already familiar to one gang member who lived nearby. Then they attacked.

Mohammed spoke openly about Michael's fate, saying, "He did not allow me any peace; he just kept preaching to me his gospel."

So why did Mohammed kill Michael?

"I did not like the confidence he displayed [in his faith], and I decided to send him to an early grave," said Mohammed. This terrorist murderer is 26 years old and not a member of Boko Haram or ISIS in West Africa. He is a local Fulani Muslim and one of the 45 members of a gang that has been working this area for years, brazenly kidnapping, extorting, and murdering the innocent.

The French intellectual and human rights activist Bernard-Henri Lévy traveled throughout the Middle Belt in late 2019 to focus exclusively on the Fulani raids against Christian communities. In a Wall Street Journal essay reflecting on his visit, published days before Hanukkah and Christmas that year, Lévy wrote:

A slow-motion war is under way in Africa's most populous country. It's a massacre of Christians, massive in scale and horrific in brutality. And the world has hardly noticed.

A Nigerian Pentecostal Christian, director of a nongovernmental organization that works for mutual understanding between Nigeria's Christians and Muslims, alerted me to it. "Have you heard of the Fulani?" ... The Fulani are an ethnic group, generally described as shepherds from mostly Muslim Northern Nigeria, forced by climate change to move with their herds toward the more temperate Christian South. They number 14 million to 15 million in a nation of 191 million.

Among them is a violent element. "They are Islamic extremists of a new stripe," the NGO director said, "more or less linked with Boko Haram."

Officials' initial refusal to attribute the attack in Kaduna to Islamists—in any form—reflects a black hole of denial that is pronounced in Nigerian politics. This endemic self-censorship has now been absorbed by many professionals in the foreign policy establishment who have adopted a policy of not mentioning the religious components of these outrages at any cost, in order to prevent being accused of politicizing religion. This denial serves as an accelerant of religion-fueled conflict—until the facts and blood on the ground can no longer be denied.

Accelerant is the word the United States ambassador to Nigeria, Mary Beth Leonard, used in our meeting in February 2020. We asked her about the religious aspects of the violence and conflict in the heart of the country. She denied it was in any way about religion, and described the conflict as “fundamentally a resource issue.” Religion was, according to Ambassador Leonard, only relevant as it served as a potential accelerant to conflict. She left us with the impression that, by speaking up for victims of religious persecution, people like us were a part of the problem. We found this to be hugely alarming.

Later we looked at the embassy's public statements and social media accounts and discovered that they said almost nothing about the conflict, let alone any of its religious components. We found Ambassador Leonard's perspective particularly disheartening, given that she serves a secretary of state whose foreign policy has held little ambiguity as to the role of religion in the conflict and the importance of protecting religious freedom in Africa's largest country.

Of course, no one disagrees about the need to depoliticize religion in Nigeria. Even Aid to the Church in Need, an international Catholic aid organization, addressed whether the Kaduna attack was “religiously motivated,” using these carefully selected words: “There has been no indication of the abduction being religiously motivated up to now” (emphasis ours). Yet in this same statement, five days following the attack, they rightly left open the door for subsequent information to come to light and further noted:

What is [also] concerning is the security situation of the whole of Nigeria's so-called Middle Belt—which includes Kaduna. The situation is already extremely precarious owing to the numerous and repeated attacks on mainly Christian villages by members of the nomadic Fulani people. Thousands of people have lost all their properties and been left as refugees. At the same time, [the] Islamist Boko Haram terrorist group has continued to perpetrate its atrocities across the northeast of the country.

They were right to leave this door for further information open because Michael was killed not for money but—in the words of his killer—because of his faith. After all, many of the atrocities being committed in Nigeria today occur not only at the hands of Boko Haram terrorists in the northeast but at the hands of Fulani militants in the heart of the country, not far from its capital.

This Middle Belt is populated by both Christians and Muslims and serves as a de facto dividing line between the predominantly Islamic north and predominantly Christian south. Those who survived one of the hundreds of surprise attacks on Christian communities here (including everyone we personally interviewed) recounted that the Fulani militants were yelling “Allahu Akbar” as they attacked—before they stole land, cattle, and other resources.

These attacks are clearly enabled by a kind of Islamic supremacy, which makes the attackers feel entitled to Christian property, akin to what previous generations of Fulani Muslim raiders believed when initially establishing their foothold in Northern Nigeria 200 years ago. In fact, the Sokoto Caliphate itself was established through an Islamic jihad in

the early 19th century, and its leaders were “most, but not all ... Ethnic, Fulani.” Expansionist efforts by Fulani jihadists have continued for generations.

While these Fulani attacks are distinct from Boko Haram, their tactics are eerily similar. Virtually every Christian, and many Muslims, concede that these Muslim militants have been emboldened by Boko Haram, even if they aren’t aligned with the latter’s political insurgency. In the first three months of 2020, more than 400 civilian Christians were killed in Fulani raids and hundreds of homes burned.

On our visit we were supposed to meet with a representative from one of these villages. Instead, the leaders of the entire village came, filling up our hotel room, with the adult men still bearing a look of total shock on their faces even though the attack had occurred many weeks before. They described the Fulani raiders arriving under the cover of darkness with their jihadist chants and their AK-47s. The marauders swiftly maimed and murdered Christians while burning down every structure and pillaging what remained.

Hundreds of similar incidents have occurred. We reviewed one confidential list that precisely documents attacks by Fulani militants on 79 Christian villages over the last five years in one state alone. Yet we haven’t identified a single case where the perpetrators were brought to justice or where security forces prevented an attack.

Survivors recount that all these attacks were punctuated by jihadi calls. Nevertheless, countless policymakers, scholars, and diplomats refuse to acknowledge that the Fulani attackers are at least partially inspired by Islamic extremism. In 2018 when Fulani raiders massacred 86 Christians and burned 50 homes around Jos, the Associated Press headline read, “86 Killed in Nigeria as Farmers, Herders Clash.” A similar report in Time magazine included a photo of a large Christian funeral but didn’t mention the words “Christian” or “Muslim” and instead simply described the conflict this way: “Bloody clashes between farmers and nomadic herders in Nigeria’s central Plateau State in late June claimed at least 86 lives, as each group vied for the region’s increasingly scarce farmland.” The reporter attributed the cause of the attacks to “climate change.”

Denying the religious element in Nigeria’s conflict defies credulity. We are writing to nullify this immoral status quo; the time has come to demand that those who promote this accepted narrative prove that religion plays no role in the ongoing slaughter.

Even efforts to acknowledge the complexity and “nuance” of the conflict convey more than a whiff of denialism. Take what John Campbell, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in 2019:

When Christians or Muslims are killed in the Middle Belt, it is not clear exactly why. Is it because they are a farmer or a herder? Or because they are ethnically Fulani, many of whom are herders, or of a small ethnic group, who are often farmers? Or is it because they are Muslims, which most Fulani are, or Christian, which those of many small ethnic groups are? These questions are not easily answered.

Perspectives such as Dr. Campbell’s unintentionally befog the facts on the ground and allow the world to avert its eyes from the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. After all, there are virtually no Christian raids on Fulani to report. We were able to identify only one incident when the Christians under attack were even able to defend themselves. This is a one-sided, violent campaign, with the Fulani attacking the innocent in the dead of night.

The rare incidents of Christians attacking Fulani herders happened in retaliation to an initial attack by Fulanis, and there are almost no incidents of Fulani herders attacking

Christian farmers without the accompanying jihadist cry of "Allahu Akbar!" More often than not, defenseless Christians are taken as lambs to a slaughter.

In an attempt to avoid blame for striking the kindling of a holy war, too many so-called experts would rather twist their analyses into verbal pretzels than acknowledge that this is a deadly religious persecution that demands the world's attention and action. Nigeria has a religious freedom problem and a human rights problem, not just a problem of natural resources and poverty.

We only wish that academic residents safely ensconced in their ivory towers would take the time to come face-to-face with the victims. Let those scholars then debate what those armed militants were thinking before they barged into another Christian town yelling, "Allahu Akbar!" with their AK-47s firing. Are those thugs really thinking, I want their land because climate change has taken mine?

Whether the Fulani are violent criminals or jihadi terrorists—or both—there is one indisputable fact here: The Nigerian government is failing to stop the bloodshed, and the determined apathy of the international community is aiding and abetting their indifference.

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## **Human Rights Without Frontiers condemns the death penalty of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu on blasphemy charges**

HRWF (13.08.2020) - *Human Rights Without Frontiers* condemns the death sentence by hanging issued by a Nigerian Sharia court in Kano against a 22-year-old singer for allegedly insulting the Prophet in a song that he wrote and circulated on WhatsApp.

"Blasphemy laws are inconsistent with freedom of expression, including on religious issues or about religious figures," HRWF director declared. "They should be repealed and the sentence imposed on the singer should be overturned."

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a Muslim musician, is not well-known in northern Nigeria. His songs were not popular outside his Tijaniya Sufi group of North African origin.

The singer had gone into hiding after he composed the song as protesters had burnt down his family home and gathered outside the headquarters of the Islamic police, known as the Hisbah, demanding action against him.

The leader of the protesters that called for the musician's arrest in March, Idris Ibrahim, told the BBC that the judgement will serve as a warning to others "contemplating toeing Yahaya's path".

Sharif-Aminu can appeal the verdict.

Only one of the death sentences passed by Nigeria's Sharia courts has been carried out since they were reintroduced in 1999.

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## **Presidency replies UK Parliament report on religious genocide in Nigeria**

By Vincent UFUOMA

ICIR (19.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37RFsCA> - THE presidency has reacted to a report by the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, that cited instances of persecution and genocides of Christians in Nigeria.

The [report](#) which is titled; "Nigeria – Unfolding Genocide?" raised the concerns of escalating violence in Nigeria between Fulani herders and farmers in Northern Nigeria.

The report claimed that the violence is mostly directed at and affected by Christians in the North, most of whom have lost their lives and others, their livelihoods to violent Fulani headers.

"APPG members have been alarmed by the dramatic and escalating violence in Nigeria characterised as the farmer-herder conflict. This violence has manifested along ideological lines, as the herders are predominantly ethnic Fulani Muslims and the farmers are predominantly Christians.

"There has been significant debate about what factors are driving and exacerbating this crisis. Therefore the APPG launched a parliamentary inquiry to help develop a nuanced understanding of the drivers of violence and increase parliamentary, public and Governmental interest in the issue. The report is the result of that inquiry."

APPG stated that the response of the Nigerian Government to the conflict involving farmers and herders had been inadequate or ineffective and that this had allowed violence to emerge and escalate.

In a statement on Friday, the presidential spokesperson, Mr. Garba Shehu, rejected the content of the report. He said, unlike previous administrations, the Muhammadu Buhari's administration has been taking steps to ensure the security of lives and properties in the North regardless of religious beliefs.

Mr. Garba said religious tension between farmers and headers in Nigeria is a long age battle for arable lands by farmers and quality grazing by headers.

He admitted that religious tensions in the country became heightened due to the activities of Boko-Haram whom he claimed the Nigerian Military has brought to the minimum.

He said, "The President and Government of Nigeria wish to thank members of the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom or Belief for their report, launched a few days ago. Although it is difficult reading, the statement also acknowledges the importance of accurate, unbiased, depoliticised and truthful information when it comes to understanding the realities and addressing the challenges for those of faith in Nigeria. In this regard when uncritical attention is afforded to critics with dubious intentions, it only becomes harder for both the government and people of Nigeria to engage in constructive dialogue to resolve our differences, and uphold what is enshrined in our Constitution and laws: that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

"It is clear for all to see that there have, for generations in Nigeria, been tensions between our major religions, Christianity and Islam – and between herders and farmers – both for access to ever-decreasing arable and farmland due to a rapidly rising population, temperatures and desertification through global warming.

"Exacerbating those tensions, our nation has also been in recent times and focused within the northern states – subject to vicious and criminal attacks by the terror group Boko Haram.

"In concert with our American and British allies, Nigeria's military have pushed back the terrorists and largely reduced their capacity over the last five years compared to the previous decade.

"Boko Haram have targeted Christians and Churches specifically because they know it drives forward religious and land tensions already existent in the country. Similarly, they attack mosques and Muslims in order to issue the threat: radicalise, or become targets yourselves."

He said the president is working very hard with the vice president to make sure all of these concerns become a thing of the past.

"In the months and years ahead, our President who is Muslim and our Vice President who is an evangelical Christian pastor are irrevocably committed to addressing these multiple and long-term challenges for today's and future generations."

Some of the steps being taken by the president include "continuing and increasing Nigeria's efforts alongside our allies to fully defeat and finally finish Boko Haram, in order to bring security to the north of the country.

"Continuing to seek, negotiate for, and secure the return of all those held hostage and in captivity by the terrorists, regardless of the religious faith or belief.

"Uniting our nation through dialogue organised around respect for difference in religion.

Such a programme is already underway under the leadership of the Vice President, Pastor Yemi Osinbajo.

"Addressing, through Joint Federal and State Governments programmes, access to arable farmland – with land mandated both for farmers and herders. The federal government will issue detailed measures regarding this plan and its rollout in the coming weeks.

"Countering fake news – particularly on social and digital media – by working with the non-partisan stakeholder community, the National Broadcasting Commission and social media platforms themselves, to address the proliferation of false and inflammatory commentary," he said.

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## **USCIRF condemns arrest of prominent Nigerian atheist, Mubarak Bala USCIRF**

USCIRF (08.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3bmMOhd> - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed its deep concern regarding the recent arrest of Mubarak Bala, president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria. Mr. Bala was detained in Kaduna State on April 28, 2020, and was reportedly transferred to the Kano State Police.

His current whereabouts and wellbeing are unknown. No charges have been filed, and it is unclear if Mr. Bala has been allowed access to his legal counsel. The arrest followed a petition filed with Kano State Police by a local law firm that alleges Mr. Bala insulted the Prophet Muhammad in his Facebook posts.

USCIRF Chair Tony Perkins stated, "*USCIRF is alarmed by this arrest, which appears to be for Mubarak Bala's peaceful exercise of his rights to both freedom of expression and*

*freedom of belief. The fact that Kano State frequently enforces Shari'a law makes the situation particularly worrisome. Nigerian authorities must immediately clarify Mr. Bala's situation, ensure his safety, and provide him the full protections he is guaranteed under the Nigerian Constitution and international law."*

USCIRF has analyzed and expressed concern about blasphemy laws in Africa and the state enforcement of Shari'a laws in northern Nigeria, including Kano State. To learn more, read the reports: *Blasphemy, Apostasy, and Hate Speech Laws in Africa and Shari'ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria*.

USCIRF Commissioner Anurima Bhargava added, "USCIRF welcomes the statement by Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback about his concern for Mubarak Bala's arrest. We urge the State Department and U.S. Embassy in Nigeria to continue to sound the alarm about Mr. Bala's arrest with the Nigerian federal government. The matter is urgent; Nigerian state authorities have refused to provide any information and Mr. Bala's safety in custody is of serious concern."

In its 2020 Annual Report, USCIRF designated Nigeria as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. The Annual Report includes specific recommendations for U.S. foreign policy in order to improve the religious freedom conditions in Nigeria.

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*The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on threats to religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief. To interview a Commissioner, please contact USCIRF at [Media@USCIRF.gov](mailto:Media@USCIRF.gov) or Danielle Ashbahian at [dashbahian@uscirf.gov](mailto:dashbahian@uscirf.gov)*