

119TH CONGRESS
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H. RES. 220

Expressing the sense of Congress regarding the need to designate Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 11, 2025

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress regarding the need to designate Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and for other purposes.

Whereas the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105–292) mandates the designation of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) for nations engaged in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom;

Whereas, Nigeria appears to maintain an open border policy that enables radicalized Fulani Ethnic Militants (FEM) and ISIS-linked extremist groups, including Lakurawa,

to enter Nigeria unimpeded from Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso;

Whereas, for over a decade, Islamic terror organizations have carried out mass murder, rape, kidnappings, and other atrocities targeting mostly Nigerian Christians and non-Fulani moderate Muslim populations, resulting in mass displacement and destruction of places of worship, in what appears to be a concerted effort for a Fulani-controlled empire modeled upon the caliphate in northern Nigeria established by Usman dan Fodio, in the late 18th and early 19th century;

Whereas, prominent Christian and Muslim leaders have been kidnapped or assassinated, including priests, pastors, and imams who advocate for religious tolerance;

Whereas, activists speaking out against persecution have faced threats, arrests, and harassment from both extremist groups and government authorities;

Whereas, northern Nigeria has seen the destruction of “over 18,000 churches since 2009” in attacks by Boko Haram militants, Fulani herdsmen, and others, according to a 2023 Vatican report, and in 2021, the Department of State reported five attacks on mosques by unidentified gunmen, bandits, and Boko Haram;

Whereas, approximately 34,000 moderate non-Fulani Muslims also died in attacks, since 2009, from extremist groups for opposing radical Islamic ideologies;

Whereas, ethnic and religiously inspired violence occurring in Nigeria is causing unspeakable suffering and the displacement of between 3.5 to 5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria, and 343,000 registered Nigerian refugees in the Lake Chad region;

Whereas, in 2020, the Department of State designated Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.);

Whereas, in 2021, 2022, and 2023, the Department of State omitted Nigeria from its CPC list and in 2024 did not release a CPC list or its annual International Religious Freedom Report;

Whereas these conflicts are often framed as resource-based disputes between herders and farmers, but the systematic targeting of Christian communities and religious leaders points to an underlying religious dimension, compounded by ethnicity;

Whereas, on May 22, 2024, then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken testified to the House Committee on Appropriations that the killings of Christian farmers in Nigeria “has nothing to do with religion,” a categorical statement which is inconsistent with readily discernable evidence;

Whereas multiple media reports, including from BBC, CNN, and Reuters, have highlighted religious persecution, attacks on houses of worship, and the Government of Nigeria has been unable or unwilling to effectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of religiously motivated violence, leading to a culture of impunity;

Whereas blasphemy laws have also been used to target religious minorities and dissenters, with harsh penalties, including death sentences;

Whereas, in 12 northern States, Sharia law is implemented alongside secular law, leading to discrimination against non-Muslims and even Muslims who do not adhere to strict interpretations of Islamic law;

Whereas the Department of State should have a coherent policy that acknowledges and addresses the ethnic, religious, financial, security, and political dimensions of the staggering levels of violence and internal displacement within Nigeria, and that the Government of Nigeria must call upon significant foreign support to house and feed those displaced by the violence;

Whereas the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury is responsible for tracking funds flowing into terrorist and organized criminal organizations who pose a threat to the national security of the United States;

Whereas the United States and Nigeria are allies and trading partners with important, shared security interests;

Whereas, since FY2020, the United States Government has obligated more than \$3.53 billion and disbursed more than \$2.24 billion in non-military foreign assistance to, or for use in, Nigeria;

Whereas, since FY2020, the Department of Defense has obligated in excess of \$83,507,253 to provide military and security assistance to the Government of Nigeria;

Whereas the United States foreign policy toward Nigeria should consider these factors and justify the purposes for, and amounts of, financial assistance provided by the United States to and in Nigeria; to identify and justify the outcomes of that assistance; and

Whereas the designation of Nigeria as a CPC would enhance diplomatic efforts to encourage the Nigerian government to take necessary actions to protect religious minorities and uphold fundamental human rights: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved, That it is the Sense of the House of Rep-*
2 *resentatives that—*

3 (1) The Secretary of State should designate Ni-
4 geria as a Country of Particular Concern under the
5 International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 6
6 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.), which mandates the designa-
7 tion of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) for
8 nations engaged in or tolerating systematic, ongoing,
9 and egregious violations of religious freedom;

10 (2) The Government of Nigeria must take im-
11 mediate and effective steps to prevent religious per-
12 secution, prosecute perpetrators of violence, take ac-
13 tion to care for the millions of internally displaced
14 persons, and uphold constitutional protections for re-
15 ligious freedom;

16 (3) The State Department should increase U.S.
17 diplomatic engagement with Nigerian officials to ad-
18 dress religious freedom violations and develop strate-
19 gies for long-term peace and stability;

20 (4) The United States should impose targeted
21 sanctions and other measures against individuals
22 and entities responsible for severe violations of reli-
23 gious freedom in Nigeria; and

- 1 (5) The United States is committed to pro-
- 2 moting religious freedom and human rights as
- 3 foundational principles of U.S. foreign policy.

