

CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA: THE CASE FOR A CPC DESIGNATION

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CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA: THE CASE FOR A CPC DESIGNATION

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:07 a.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Christopher Smith (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SMITH. The subcommittee will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the deteriorating State of religious freedom in Nigeria, and the urgent need to redesignate Nigeria as a country of particular concern pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act. I would like to recognize myself for an opening statement and will yield to my friend and colleague, Ms. Jacobs, for any opening comments she might have and members of the subcommittee.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CHRISTOPHER SMITH

According to the Catholic News Agency and EWTN News, quote, “Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama is concerned over the seemingly endless violence against Christians that has claimed at least 58 lives this past weekend and hundreds of others in recent weeks. It is our prayer, he said, that something definitive will be done to stop the situation that is inhuman.”

Shockingly, that was more than a dozen years ago and part of my opening remarks at a hearing that I held on July 10, 2012. One of several hearings, eight in all, on religious persecution in Nigeria. Since then, things have only gotten worse.

One year later in 2013, I visited Archbishop Kaigama in Jos, Nigeria. We visited churches, five of them, that had been recently firebombed by Boko Haram, and spent hours listening to survivors tell their stories.

Despite their numbing loss and pain, I was absolutely amazed at the survivors’ faith, very deep faith, their courage, and their resilience. They were not going to quit, but they were looking to the government for help, and it was not coming.

I also met with an evangelical believer named Habila Adamu dragged from his home by Boko Haram terrorists, he was ordered to renounce his faith. With an AK-47 pressed to his face he was asked: Are you ready to die as a Christian? With extraordinary courage, Habila answered: Yes, I am ready to die as a Christian.

He was asked a second time, and he repeated his answer. His wife was pleading: Please don't kill my husband, and yet he said: Yes, I am ready to die as a Christian. This time the terrorists pulled the trigger. A bullet ripped through Habila's face, he crumpled to the ground, bleeding profusely left for dead. By some miracle he survived.

I met him in an IDP camp in Jos. I asked him to come to Washington to tell his story. He did. And at the direction of the hearing, he said this to our subcommittee, this subcommittee: I am alive because God wants you to have this message—knowing Christ is so much deeper than merely knowing Boko Haram's story of hate and intolerance. He closed his testimony with this: Do everything you can to end this ruthless religious persecution, but know Christ first.

To the end, everything he did was to witness, to radiate his love for God, but he was also calling on us to get involved and do something.

Since then, however, the wanton violence against Christians in Nigeria has grown significantly worse.

A couple days ago the Pillar Catholic reported, and I quote, "While Christians were receiving ashes last Wednesday to begin Lent, news broke in Nigeria that a priest had been brutally murdered by kidnappers, who had stormed his rectory the night before and kidnapped him."

"With deep sorrow and righteous indignation, I condemn in the strongest terms the relentless and tragic wave of kidnappings—, targeting priests, pastoral agents, and the faithful," Bishop Kundi said in a March 7—just a couple days ago—press conference in which he expressed outrage over the kidnapping and the brutal murder of his priests.

According to the sources in the Diocese, Father Sylvester was bound by his kidnappers. He was shot in the head—and I saw the picture. It is heartbreaking to look at—shot at close range with an assault rifle according to the officials of his Diocese.

The systematic slaughter and abuse of Nigerian believers must stop. Delay is denial—and a death sentence to so many.

One of our distinguished witnesses today, Bishop Wilfred Anagbe of the Diocese of Makurdi, Nigeria, traveled a long distance to be with us today and will testify. This is from his testimony: "Militant Fulani herdsman are terrorists. They steal and vandalize. They kill and boast about it. They kidnap and rape. They enjoy total impunity for this from the elected officials. None of them"—I repeat his quote—"none of them have been arrested and brought to justice."

In December 2020, President Trump designated Nigeria as a country of particular concern only to be reversed without justification by Secretary Blinken in November 2021.

I know I asked him at hearings. I asked him privately, but I also asked him at open hearings. Why? I never got a good answer.

Religious leaders in Nigeria were outraged by the Secretary's decision. One Nigerian bishop challenged the Secretary and said: Christian persecution is more intense than ever. That was Bishop Mamza.

Genocide Watch has called Nigeria "a killing field of defenseless Christians." Quote, unquote.

Yet— the government of Nigeria has failed to make progress against religiously motivated persecution of Christians, despite religious freedom being enshrined as an essential human right in their Constitution.

Likewise, Nigeria’s legal framework supports pluralism at both Federal and State levels, but glaring contradictions exist, especially with laws that criminalize blasphemy—some even carrying the death penalty.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF, was quote, “Appalled that the State Department did not redesignate Nigeria as a country of particular concern. USCIRF had recommended—and we have the former Chairman here, Tony Perkins—had recommended this designation 4 years in a row from 2021 to 2024 and said, quote, there is no justification as to why the State Department continues to fail to designate Nigeria as a CPC.

Again, CPC, as you know, carries significant sanctions. A whole broad array of sanctions that the President and the Secretary of State are empowered to level on the country that commits persecution.

When the former Secretary of State Blinken held a joint press conference with the Nigerian Prime Minister on January 23, 2024, following the Christmas Eve Massacre which targeted killings by radical Fulani terrorists took the lives of hundreds of Christians. He did offer his condolences, and I watched him, and I was glad to see that. But we need to take it beyond just saying, I feel sorry for you.

These Christian killings reoccurred the following year just 3 three months ago.

Make no mistake, these ongoing attacks are based on religion. Diverting attention from it tonight—let me just say parenthetically, I tried for 3 years to get the Obama administration to designate Boko Haram as an FTO of the Obama administration a Foreign Terrorist Organization. I held hearing after hearing, and they wouldn’t do it. On the days I was marking up my legislation to do just that, the State Department said, oh, we are going to designate them as a FTO. That was for all the crimes they were committing. Later it was the Chibok girls. It was all the other atrocities being committed by Boko Haram. They wouldn’t even give them FTO status so we could start investigating where they get their money, their weapons, and the like.

Make no mistake, all of these attacks are based on religion, like I said, and diverting attention from it denies what we have seen with our own eyes. This is religious cleansing. It needs to stop and the perpetrators need to be brought to justice.

Last year the House Foreign Affairs Committee did adopt my resolution, H.Res. 82, calling on the Biden administration to redesignate Nigeria as a country of particular concern. It passed exactly 1 year ago, almost a year ago, in the committee but it never came to the floor.

While I strongly believe that President Trump will again designate Nigeria as a CPC and do much more to assist the persecuted church, including the outreach to Nigerian President Tinuba. Last night I did reintroduce the resolution. And I hope we will have a robust debate, and it will get marked up.

Help can't come fast enough. The killing fields are every day, every single day. And we need to do more and do everything within our power to try to mitigate it.

Let's not forget horrifying facts: Northern Nigeria—and this is just Northern Nigeria alone has seen the destruction of over 18,000 churches since 2009. 18,000 churches. I saw five of them totally burnt out, and many people killed with car bombs and the like.

An August 2024 report from the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa found that 55,910 people were killed and 21,000 people were abducted in a context of terror groups in Nigeria within just 4 years from October 2019 to September 2023.

I would point out that approximately 34,000 are moderate Muslims that would have been murdered in Islamic attacks. And we speak out for them as well. I have met with Imams in Nigeria. And if they speak, they are visited that following week by one of these radical Islamist groups, and it is not pretty. They will kill them or do other kinds of mischief.

About 5 million Christians have been displaced and forced into internally displaced prison camps, IDP camps, within Nigeria.

The 2023 Watch List released in January by Open Doors this past January found that 89 percent of Christians—89 percent of the Christians martyred the world are in one country, Nigeria. The target of violence starkly highlights the precarious State of religious freedom in Nigeria.

Again, we are asking the President Tinubu—he has got to take action. And we are going to—you know, I am hoping to lead a delegation to Nigeria. We have got to raise these issues, but it starts at the top.

You know, I have been to Abuja many times. The President has real power, he can do it, and we are calling on him to do that.

Let me also say that—and I will put the rest of my statement into the record—but this hearing we are hoping will be a catalyst for action by our own government and also by Congress and, of course, above all, the executive branch. You know, the new President has a lot to do, and I think he will do this, and then if necessary impose sanctions.

Where that has happened, there is change. Where it doesn't happen, that status quo, the killing fields continue.

I would like to yield to Ms. Jacobs for any opening comments she might have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER SARA JACOBS

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you, Chairman Smith, and to all the witnesses for testifying today on conflict and religious persecution in Nigeria. I think all of us here know that the African continent is at a pivotal moment. The continent is the youngest in the world. And in Nigeria alone 70 percent of the population is under 35, and 40 percent is under 15. So it represents the future generations who will continue to lead and solve the world's challenges.

Nigeria has a unique position as a bellwether, as Africa's largest economy, most populous Nation, and a significant actor in the region and on the world stage.

Meanwhile, Nigeria is facing its own challenges like rising insecurities, shrinking freedom of expression, and the struggling econ-

omy, which are preventing the country from experiencing long-term stability and prosperity.

That is why I am glad this subcommittee is convening a hearing to discuss some of the challenges facing Nigeria. And I hope we can use this as an opportunity discuss how the United States can use its full range of tools to help address conflict and violence across the country.

Nigeria is facing multiple different security challenges in various parts of the country, including violent extremist groups, criminal banditry, farmer/herder conflict, and religiously motivated violence.

Several factors are driving these conflicts. Yes, religion is a factor, but other dynamics like climate change, population pressures, and governance challenges are important drivers that need to be addressed as well.

For example, in northeast where Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa are active, decades of marginalization and oversecured responses have led to human rights abuses and instigated and exacerbated the conflict.

I actually worked on Nigeria when I was at the State Department, and I have seen that for years governance challenges like corruption, marginalization, and impunity have driven violence and conflict.

A history of marginalization and limited access to basic needs in central and northern Nigeria and among different ethnic groups have created grievances that fuel further violence.

So we must address these fundamental challenges to ensure stabilization and security and prevent violence in the long-term.

I am also concerned by the State of freedom of religion or belief in Nigeria. However, we need to be careful in our characterization of this complex challenge. Roughly half of the population of Nigeria is Muslim. While the other half is Christian. And violations of this freedom impact both groups. Oversimplistic narratives about the violence perpetuate harmful stereotypes and motivate tensions and violence based on religious identity.

On the question of a potential country of particular concern designated for Nigeria, the Trump administration should make a determination based on the criteria provided in the International Religious Freedom Act. But we cannot ignore the other tools in our toolbox, especially foreign assistance which has been effective at supporting Nigerians with addressing the key drivers of conflict and religious freedom violations.

For years, the United States has supported Nigerian institution's civil society, faith-based leaders, and researchers to address the conflict violence, and religious freedom challenges. But, unfortunately, President Trump has canceled hundreds of millions of dollars in these programs, leaving the United States less equipped to address the topic of today's hearing.

Trump canceled all of our peace democracy and governance activities worth \$74 million. These programs helped improve early response to conflict, bolster the justice system, and facilitate dialog. He canceled all of our education and economic growth programs, altogether totaling nearly \$170 million. These projects were getting at the root cause of conflict and violence across the country. And

that is not to mention all of the canceled humanitarian assistance that was helping those who survived war and conflict.

Trump's aid freeze has closed clinics and left over 2 million Nigerians without access to HIV medication. In total, President Trump canceled 54 foreign assistance programs just in Nigeria.

Mr. Chair, I request unanimous consent to submit a document listing all paused or terminated programs in Nigeria into the record.

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

[Please refer to the Appendix for this information:]

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you. So if we want the United States to help improve conflict in Nigeria, we can't pull back and eliminate our toolbox, which is exactly what the Trump administration is doing.

So I hope that during this hearing we can hear more about what the United States can actually do to support Nigerians in a whole of government approach to address conflict and violence and protect religious freedom. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Ms. Jayapal?

OPENING STATEMENT OF PRAMILA JAYAPAL

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the witnesses, and I thank you for your testimony. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and most populous country. It is a critical player in the region, and maintaining a strong U.S.-Nigeria relationship based on shared values is essential.

Nigeria is a diverse country with hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups and has one of the largest populations of Christians in Africa. Countries split nearly evenly between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. In 2023, over 3,500 people were kidnapped, almost 9,000 were killed in conflict. So the work that must be done includes essential efforts to bring these diverse communities together and strengthen governance to end corruption and violence.

It is both logical and necessary for the United States to fund projects in Nigeria that engage local communities to create space for interfaith dialog and address the root causes of violence, such as access to resources, education, and healthcare with the nuance that they deserve.

These are not trivial, unnecessary projects, this is the work that has to be done to stabilize a country, to bring humanitarian assistance to those caught in the midst of violence and conflict and extremism and bring about peace.

Let me be clear that the mass cancellation of USAID projects and the dismantling of USAID by the Trump administration will only worsen this violence and weaken the institutions needed to combat extremism before it reaches our borders.

Before the reckless actions of the Trump administration, the United States was the largest donor to the humanitarian response in Nigeria, but the administration's attack on foreign assistance, on diversity initiatives, and so-called woke-ism are weakening the very tools that we need to address these complex crises.

I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses and discussing more the situation, what the United States can do to make

sure that we remain a strong partner in supporting the governance of Nigeria. I thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. I would like to welcome our very distinguished panel and thank them for taking the time to be here, and traveling a long distance, Bishop. I am looking forward to your testimony because we need your insights as we proceed forward.

Let me first begin by introducing Nina Shea, a Senior Fellow of the Hudson Institute where she directs the Center For Religious Freedom, an entity she founded back in 1986. Ms. Shea has been a human rights lawyer for over 30 years who works extensively for the advancement of individual religious freedom and other human rights and U.S. foreign policy. She has been a frequent witness—before the House and Senate—on a myriad of countries and issues, especially China and its egregious human rights abuses, particularly as it relates to religious freedom.

Beginning in 1999, she was appointed for seven terms by the U.S. House to serve as a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. She was appointed as a U.S. delegate to the U.N.'s main human rights body by both Republicans and Democrat administrations.

A lawyer by training, she undertakes analysis and strategic advocacy regarding religious freedom as a component of U.S. foreign policy.

Her first client before the U.N. was Soviet Nobel Peace Prize Andrei Sakharov. She was also the principal leader of the coalition for International Religious Freedom Act in 1998. She initiated the executive order on advancing religious freedom, directing the prioritization of religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy, which was signed by President Trump on June 2, 2020. She co-authored three books on religious persecution, including *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*. She writes frequently in the *Wall Street Journal*, *National Review*, and elsewhere.

We will then hear from Tony Perkins who is president of the Family Research Council. He's also the former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Prior to joining FRC in August 2003, he served in the Louisiana legislature where he was a leading pro-life, pro-family voice. During his tenure, he expanded the organization to reach beyond Washington and has made a huge network of churches overseas, which really are speaking up for—not just for faith, but for freedom, and I appreciate that.

In 2018, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell appointed Tony to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. In May 2020, he was reappointed, and he served as both chair and vice chair of that very important commission, which was created by the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998.

Then we will hear from his Excellency, Bishop Wilfred Anagbe. Bishop of Makurdi Diocese in Benue State of Nigeria. Thank you for traveling all this way to be here, Bishop. A very long route. We deeply appreciate that.

He entered religious life as a Claretian missionary and has carried out many administrative duties of the order. He was ordained as a priest on August 6, 1994, and then by Pope Francis on October

4, 2014, Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi to be a bishop. His motto is to serve Jesus and the Brethren.

The diocese that he leads is where the worse of the violent persecution in Nigeria is occurring by Militant Fulani, causing the highest number of displaced people living in internally displaced person camps. As a matter of fact, those camps are the source of daily attacks by the Militant Islamic extremists.

One of the things that I have raised with Nigerian leaders—and I hope that the U.S. President will raise it himself is that if Nigerians had an act of some kind, such as theft, murder, or anything, and you call the police, they don't show up. That is what is happening throughout Nigeria. The delay becomes denial, and then there is no investigation, and nobody is held accountable. It is unbelievable that can exist, but it does. So thank you Bishop for, again, for bearing witness to a very ugly truth.

We will then hear from Ms. Onubogu. Onubogu—who is the African Program Director at the Wilson Center. She is a governance and democracy professional with nearly two decades of experience on Africa and U.S.-Africa relations, including working with African governance, international partners, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

She most recently was the director of the West Africa program at the U.S. Institute of Peace where she led the strategic development and expansion of USIP's portfolio and in Nigeria and coastal West Africa. In this position, she oversaw the design and implementation of projects to mitigate violent conflict, promote inclusion, and strengthen community arts and security by partnering with African U.S. policymakers, civic leaders, and organizations.

I would like now to turn the floor over to Ms. Nina Shea, and thank you—all of your statements in their entirety will be made a part of the record without objection. Please take the time that is necessary. We are not in a hurry, we want to hear from you. So please make sure that you can convey your thoughts to us.

STATEMENT OF NINA SHEA

Ms. SHEA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Representative Jacobs, and members of the subcommittee for prioritizing conflict and persecution in Nigeria as your very first hearing of this subcommittee for this session. And, Chairman Smith, you have been a congressional hero to legions of victims of persecution around the world, and congratulations on your leadership on this subcommittee and your chairmanship.

My testimony will focus on the persecution of Christian farming communities by Militant Fulani Muslim herders. In the interest of time, I will not address the Islamist terror groups that are already designated as terrorists and sanctioned by the U.S. Government. They include Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa, which attacks Nigerians of all faith backgrounds.

Nigeria now ranks sixth out of 66 on the just released 2025 Global Terrorism Index. Nigeria is the world's deadliest country for Christians, according to the respected group Open Doors. Currently, Militant groups of nomadic Fulani Muslim herders are reported by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, among others to be the greatest threat to Nigerian Christians,

particularly those that we are now seeing in the Middle Belt farming communities.

In Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, and other Middle Belt states, thousands of Christians have been killed, maimed, and raped, and millions of them have been driven from their lands and are now homeless due to Fulani attacks. This is the heart of Nigeria's bread basket. And as their farming families are slaughtered or forced to flee, the region's suffering is compounded by growing mass hunger.

Moreover, the targeted indigenous people, the Middle Belt Christian communities face the Nigerian Government's decision to tolerate this persecution.

The Federal Government in Abuja remains passive in the faith of desperate cries for help. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, reports of Mimi, one of two million IDPs, internally displaced persons in Benue State. She survived a Fulani attack 3 years ago, while her family was tending the yam fields on her farm.

It reports when they looked up, they saw armed men. There was no time to run. The men raped and killed Mimi's 11-year-old daughter. Mimi herself was raped, and her husband was killed. A hunter later found her injured and unconscious and helped her into the bush. They hid her there for 2 days before it was safe enough for him to bring her to the camp. There she received medical treatment and reunited with her two sons, now age 12 and 15.

I lost everything, says Miami. If you go to my village, everything has been burned down. I cannot farm any longer, and it is not only me, we all went through these things.

The government allows Fulani violence to continue with impunity. There is broad concern that this reflects a plan to forcibly Islamize Nigeria in violation of its secular Constitution. Last week the Nigerian Catholic Bishop's Conference released a letter expressing deep concern that some of the 12 northern states that impose Sharia law ordered Catholic and other Christian schools closed for 5 weeks and forced observance of Ramadan. And they cited the Constitution's guarantee of a secular State.

Over the last generation, a portion of the Fulani nomadic herder population has become well-armed with automatic weapons and aggressive in targeting undefended Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt farming areas. Various observers on the ground assert that the Fulani Militants are not attacking to graze cattle, as some maintain, but rather to drive out the Christians from their ancestral land and to take control of land of villages in larger geographic areas.

The UNHCR report above states, quote: Nearly all the 3,790 residents of Ichwa IDP camp and many other camps dotted around Benue State were smallholder farmers forced here by violent land grabs.

A Benue Catholic priest told reporters: It is all about seizing the land and changing the demography of Benue State. The Fulani terrorists want to seize the fertile lands of Benue, chase away the people from the land, and occupy the land for themselves, he said.

A 2023 study by Nigerian scholars on Plateau State found the great majority of Plateau's indigenous people from non-Fulani ethnic groups believe that Fulani violence is motivated by land grabbing, jihad, and Fulanization; compared with smaller percentages

who blame cattle rustling. Cattle rustling does occur, but Fulani attacks are indiscriminate and devastate entire Christian villages.

Ignoring citizens' appeal for help, Nigeria's Government fails to effectively stop these attacks. Take Benue where Catholic priests and other Christians were recently abducted in Fulani raids. A priest identified to the press three key areas along the Benue River, and he names them. It is in my testimony. Where Fulani terrorists cross from Nasarawa State to attack overwhelmingly Christian villages in Benue.

The government ignores church pleas to place military posts near these known hotspots or have naval patrols on the river of Benue, priests tell me.

Or Kaduna, where on February 26, TruthNigeria reported over 200 Christians are being held hostage, starved, and tortured in a camp near an Army base in a wooded area off the busy Kaduna-Abuja expressway. It came to light when 3 months after being abducted from their homes, eight hostages in dire condition were released after a ransom payment equivalent to 27,000 U.S. dollars. They had been chained, whipped, and starved and referred to as infidels by captives speaking the Fulani's Fulfulde language. They witnessed others dying from starvation or shot dead when the ransoms didn't come. And as far as we know, it is still there.

Just last weekend, a Christian from Adamawa State, Sunday Jackson. Had a death penalty upheld by the high court of Nigeria in self-defense killing an attacker on his property.

The pontifical Aid to the Church in Need counts scores of priest kidnappings in Nigeria with over 20 murdered in recent years. Seven Catholic priests have been kidnapped since January.

A week ago, Father Sylvester of St. Mary's Church in Kaduna was kidnapped and slain. Two pastors in Kaduna and Gombe States with the Evangelical Church of Winning All were murdered this year already.

Abuja's Archbishop Kaigama strongly criticized the escalating kidnappings of Catholic priests, citing, quote: "Poor leadership at all levels, local government, State government, and Federal Government."

Some conclude that Abuja's passivity, including failing to even to collect data on the attacks shows government complicity. The board chair of the Nigerian private group International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law is among them.

The State Department report on international religious freedom solely gives a neo-Marxian, materialistic theory for Fulani aggression. It describes the relentless attacks against Christian farming families on their own farms and violence against priests and pastors in their church and rectories as clashes between two rural socio-economic groups fighting over scarce natural resources a result of climate change. It ignores the evidence. It overlooks possible radicalization of Fulani herdsmen who travel across porous borders in the Sahel and Northeastern Nigeria, regions recognized by the U.S. Government as terror hotbeds. It shows no concern for their automatic weapons distributed reportedly by the Miyetti groups, the cattle breeders, lobbying association members.

It disregards the Nigerian Government's toleration of this violence by allowing it to continue with impunity.

I therefore urge Congress to call for the State Department as a first step to designate Nigeria as a country of particular concern. I am certain that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom will soon renew its recommendation of CPC designation for Nigeria.

Placing Nigeria on the U.S.' short list of the world's most egregious religious freedom violators is warranted and would be a foundation for further human rights initiatives by the new administration here. It is the law. It is standing up for religious freedom. It is part of American exceptionalism. It is part of our heritage, our tradition, and our Constitution to respect the unalienable right of religious freedom. That concludes my testimony. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shea follows:]

Nina Shea
 Senior Scholar and Director of
 Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom
 Before the
 House Foreign Affairs Committee
 Subcommittee on Africa

March 12, 2025

"Conflict and persecution in Nigeria: the case for a CPC designation"

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Rep. Jacobs and Members of the Africa Subcommittee for holding this important hearing on conflict and persecution in Nigeria and for prioritizing this issue as the Africa Subcommittee's very first hearing of the current congressional session. Chairman Smith, for decades, you have been a congressional hero to legions of victims of persecution and conflict throughout the world. Congratulations on your chairmanship of this subcommittee!

Summary:

My testimony will focus on the persecution of Christian farming communities by militant Fulani Muslim herders. In the interest of time, I will not address the Islamist terror groups that are already designated as terrorists and sanctioned by the U.S. Government. They include Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa, which attack Nigerians of all faith backgrounds. Nigeria now ranks 6 out of 66 on the 2025 Global Terrorism Index and the index does not even take into account the violence by militant Fulani herders.

Nigeria is a country of superlatives -- Africa's most populous country, its largest economy and, alarmingly, the entire world's deadliest country for Christians. In recent years, more Christians have been killed for their faith in Nigeria than in all other places combined, reports the respected research group Open Doors.

Currently, militant groups of nomadic Fulani Muslim herders are reported to be the greatest threat to Nigeria's Christians, particularly those in Middle Belt farming communities. That central area is the intersection of Nigeria's mostly Muslim North with its mostly Christian South. In Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, and other Middle Belt states, thousands of Christians have been killed, maimed, and raped and millions of them have been driven from their lands and are now homeless, due to Fulani attacks. This is the heart of Nigeria's breadbasket, and, as their farming families are slaughtered or forced to flee, the region's suffering is compounded by growing mass hunger.

The Federal Government in Abuja remains passive in the face of desperate cries for help and detailed reports of relentless horrific violence coming from Middle Belt citizens and their elected officials, church leaders, journalists, and Nigerian and international human rights groups. The government allows Fulani violence to continue with impunity. There is a broader concern that this resolute inaction evidences a plan to forcibly Islamize Nigeria, in violation of its constitution, in which the government is complicit. Just last week, on March 3, 2025, the Nigerian Catholic Bishops Conference released a letter expressing "deep concern" that some of the 12 northern states that impose sharia law had ordered the closure of

Catholic and other Christian schools for five weeks in forced observance of Ramadan, and citing the constitution's guarantee of a secular state.

The targeted indigenous people of the Middle Belt Christian communities are said to be facing two devastating challenges: constant attacks by Fulani militants and the Nigerian government's decision to tolerate this persecution.

I am, therefore, urging Congress to adopt legislation calling for the State Department, as a first step, to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act, as it did under the first Trump administration. Placing Nigeria on the U.S.'s short list of the world's most egregious religious freedom violators is warranted under the Act and would be a foundation for further human rights initiatives by the new administration.

Militant Fulani Aggression against Defenseless Christians:

The Fulani are an ethnic group that is largely Muslim and Fulfulde-speaking, numbering in the tens of millions across 20 countries in West Africa. For four years in the early 19th century, Fulani warrior Usman dan Fodio established a caliphate in Nigeria's north. In recent decades, nomadic Fulani herders have migrated along Nigeria's approved cattle routes and grazing reserves covering four and a quarter million hectares, which run through various ethnic areas. Over the past generation, a portion of the Fulani nomadic herder population has become well-armed with automatic weapons and aggressive in targeting undefended Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt farming areas.

Nigeria's government has not undertaken a thorough, objective and transparent investigation of the militant Fulani herders' organization, leadership, motives or intent in these attacks. Numerous attacks over many years indicate that they are coordinated, systematic and growing. Survivor accounts, collected by churches and journalists on the ground, frequently report that their attackers spoke Fulfulde and shouted "Allahu Akbar" or expressed other religious sentiments as they killed, as USCIRF noted in its reports. Some, including notably two Nigerian Methodist bishops held hostage, related that their captors told them that "Nigeria belongs to the Fulani" and some let their hostages know that they singled out "infidels" for capture. On March 8, 2025, TruthNigeria's Douglas Burton interviewed a Kaduna father, whose five children were ransomed and released after being kidnapped on January 7, who said that their Fulani captors were all Muslims and contemptuously referred to the family as "infidels." It is also well known that the militant Fulanis invade from encampments in specific forested areas within Nigeria, or cross Nigeria's porous borders from the neighboring Sahel, among the world's most terror ridden regions, without significant or systematic government interference.

Observers on the ground assert that the Fulani militants are not attacking to graze cattle, as some maintain, but to take control of farms, villages and larger geographic areas and drive out the Christian residents from their ancestral lands. A recent UNHCR report states about survivors of Fulani attacks in hard-hit Benue state: "Nearly all the 3,790 registered residents of Ichwa [IDP] camp, and of many other camps dotted around Benue State, were smallholder farmers ..., forced here by [violent land grabs](#)." A Benue Catholic priest told reporters: "It is all about seizing the lands and changing the demography of Benue State. The Fulani terrorists want to seize the fertile lands of Benue, chase away the people from the land, and occupy the lands for themselves," he said.

A 2023 [study](#) by Nigerian scholars on the herder-farmer conflict in Plateau state found that the great majority of indigenous people from non-Fulani ethnic groups believe that the motives for violence by Fulani herders are land grabbing, jihad and Fulanization; compared with smaller percentages, who say the motive for conflict is in reprisal for “cattle rustling.” Cattle rustling does occur but by whom is unknown since that too goes uninvestigated by the government; whereas, Fulani attacks are indiscriminate and devastate entire Christian farming communities.

In Nigeria, Fulani interests are represented by two main organizations, often referred to collectively as the Miyetti: Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association and Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore. They are organizations run by elites within the Fulani cattle sector. Their businesses rely on the nomadic Fulani herders and, beginning in the 1980s, they started supplying the herders with AK 47s and other sophisticated weapons.

Some experts report that the northern-based Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), supports reestablishing a Fulani empire, modeled on the 19th century Fulani caliphate in northern Nigeria. Increasingly heard from concerned Middle Belt community leaders, who watch helplessly as millions of their people are killed or forcibly displaced, is that the Miyetti are behind the Fulani militant attacks, in order to take control of Christian lands and extend sharia or Islamist rule throughout Nigeria.

In January 2022, citing the “mayhem” in his state, then Benue state Governor Samuel Ortom appealed to Nigeria federal officials to declare as terrorist organizations the two Miyetti groups and the Fulani Nationality Movement, reported a Nigerian [legal press](#). Last year, the leader of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, Bello Bodejo, was arrested twice, including on a terrorism accusation, but was ultimately cleared and released from detention by Nigeria’s High Court. In 2021, the chairman of the Nigerian Indigenous Nationalities Alliance for Self-Determination, Professor Banji Akintoye, urged the United Nations to declare Miyetti Allah a [terrorist](#) group. He accused the herders, whom, he said, are government-backed, of aiming to take over “our ancestral lands for their Fulani people.”

Nigerian press [reports](#) on the two Miyetti groups state that the leadership of both say they stand for peace yet both have been quoted fomenting or threatening violence. A 2023 article gives the following example: [Both](#) Miyetti Allah groups [said](#) any state governor who opposed a federal plan of establishing exclusive communities for herders “wanted crisis to continue” and should be “held responsible for any further bloodshed,” and, it notes, both later denied this. The article also cited a 2018 report of a MACBAN chief in Plateau State who [denied](#) justifying a violent attack by herders as a reaction to cattle rustling and noted that “the [reporter](#) stood by his story” that he did justify such attacks.

Recent Examples of Attacks:

The following examples of recent attacks against Nigeria’s Christians are only a small sample of the persecution in Nigeria. The attackers’ identities are not confirmed since the government fails to investigate complaints and bring justice in such cases.

- On Christmas Eve, December 24, 2023, it was widely reported by the international Christian press that over 200 Christians were killed and 300 wounded in a series of terrorist attacks that destroyed churches and homes and displaced 32,000 residents, impacting 21 villages in Nigeria’s Plateau state.

- On February 2, it was reported that armed Fulani militants stormed a village in southern Ebonyi state, killing 16 Christians belonging to The Lord Chosen Charismatic Revival Ministry and burning homes, reported International Christian Concern. Amnesty International appealed to federal authorities for an investigation.
- On February 26, the outlet TruthNigeria broke the story that over 200 Christians are being held hostage, starved and tortured in a hidden terrorist camp in Kaduna state, in proximity to an army base. The existence of the camp, located near the Kaduna-Abuja expressway, came to light, when, three months after being abducted from their homes, eight hostages, in dire condition, were released in exchange for a ransom payment of \$27,000 to Fulani militants. The former hostages told TruthNigeria that they were chained, whipped and starved by Fulfulde-speaking captives for 85 days. They said they witnessed others dying from starvation or shot dead when ransoms were withheld.
- Churches and their leaders are a favorite target of the Fulani militias: As of this writing, the most recent example is Father Sylvester Okechukwu, a 45-year-old Catholic priest in Kaura county, Kaduna, who was abducted and slain by unknown gunmen at his rectory at St. Mary's Church, on March 4, 2025, and his remains were found the next day.
- Over [six](#) other Catholic priests have been abducted so far this year. At least two priests and a seminarian remained captive as of March 9: Father Moses Gyang Jah of St. Mary Maijuju church, Shendam Diocese, in Plateau state, was abducted on February 19, along with his niece and the parish council chairman, Nyam Ajiji, who was killed; and, in Auchi Diocese in Edo state Father Philip Ekweli and a seminarian were abducted from a parish rectory by gunmen on March 3.
- On January 30, 2025, Rev. Ezekiel of the Evangelical Church Winning All and two other Christians were killed by suspected Fulani militants in a rural village in Kauru LGA, Kaduna state.
- In mid-February, Fulani militants sought out the home of Reverend Bala Galadima, the lead pastor of a church of the Evangelical Church Winning All in Lubo, Gombe state, and, firing three shots, killed him.
- In September 2024, scores of Fulani militants, in Kaduna, raided two churches during worship services, one Catholic and one evangelical, murdering three worshipers, abducting 30 and robbing the congregations.

Nigeria Federal Government's Failure to Act:

"When a particular community is under attack by Fulani terrorists, the military always arrives after the terrorists have attacked and left," a Benue Christian leader told TruthNigeria. He added that "the military seems uninterested in stopping the Fulanis." This is a problem cited repeatedly in Fulani attacks across Nigeria. It was a problem under former President Buhari, who was the son of a Fulani chieftain, and continues to be a problem, since 2023, under President Tinubu, who is a Muslim and, breaking the country's tradition of having a religiously mixed ticket, has a Muslim vice president.

In Kaduna, Plateau, Benue and elsewhere, there are numerous examples of farming communities contacting federal authorities and appealing for help during or immediately before militant attacks, to no avail. An ongoing example involves Benue, where in recent months a Catholic priest and other

Christians have been abducted and held for ransom after Fulani raids on their villages. A priest identified to the press three key areas along the Benue river -- Gidan-Pepa, Achukpa, and Ogbaji -- where Fulani terrorists cross from Nasarawa State to attack and displace locals. The government ignores church pleas to place military posts near these known hotspots and neglects to have naval patrols on the river there, as I was told by another priest from Benue, a state where attacks are surging.

Even the large city Catholic church in Ondo that suffered a massacre in a June 2022 mass shooting in broad daylight by an extremist militia, killing 40 or more during a Pentecost worship service, has seen no justice. Prompted partly by this atrocity and the government's failure to prosecute, Nigeria Catholic bishops issued a statement of concern in September 2022. It urged the state and national governments to stand up to their "primary responsibility of safeguarding the lives and property of Nigerians."

The pontifical group, Aid to the Church in Need, counts scores of priest kidnappings in Nigeria with over 20 ending in murder in recent years. These attacks continue unabated. At least seven Catholic priests have been kidnapped since the beginning of this year, alone, Catholic News Agency reports. The federal government has shown little to no interest in prosecuting or punishing the frequent attacks against the country's churches, whether Catholic or evangelical. Abuja's Catholic Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama "strongly criticized" the escalating kidnappings of Catholic priests, as well as "those training for the priesthood [who] have also been targeted," reported *Crux* this month; the Archbishop cited "poor leadership at all levels -- local government, state government and federal government."

As a Nigerian woman explained last week in answer to my question about the dearth of outcry about these alarming developments, "we have to carefully manage our relationship with government authorities." Yet, a few Nigerian leaders have dared to speak out against the government's apparent policy of tolerating attempts to forcibly Islamize Nigeria.

On March 3, 2025, the Nigerian Catholic Bishops Conference released a letter expressing "deep concern" that some of the 12 northern states that impose sharia law had ordered the closure of Catholic and other Christian schools for five weeks in forced observance of Ramadan, and citing the constitution's guarantee of a secular state.

Others have spoken out demanding government action in response to specific violence. A prominent voice is Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto, who criticized the government for "not being more decisive in getting results" in the Plateau torture camp case reported last month. Bishop Kukah, himself, was threatened with death by a Nigerian Muslim influencer in a viral YouTube video after the bishop denounced the 2022 murder of Christian student Deborah Samuels for alleged blasphemy. The Sultan of Sokoto, a Muslim leader descended from the 19th century Fulani caliphate founder Usman dan Fodio, also condemned Deborah's murder and in reprisal a mob set fires around his home. There was no justice in these cases either.

While some concerned leaders urge the federal government to take action to stop the suffering, others conclude that its passivity, including failing even to collect data on the attacks, shows that the federal government leadership is complicit.

Emeka Umeagbalasi, the Board Chair of the Nigerian private group, International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, is among those who draw the conclusion that government inaction in the face of relentless Christian persecution -- now mostly by militant Fulani herdsmen -- indicates

government complicity in forced Islamization. “The government we have in Nigeria is for radical Islamism,” he told *Crux*, in a March 8, 2025, article.

U.S. Government Response:

The U.S. government has not acknowledged the horrific persecution of millions of Nigeria’s Middle Belt Christians reportedly by Fulani herder militants. The Biden administration removed the first Trump administration’s designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained this in testimony to the House Appropriations Committee, stating that the violent attacks against Nigerian Christians have “nothing to do with religion.” He overlooked all evidence to the contrary, some of which was included in his own State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report.

The 2023 State Department’s international religious freedom report, the most recent one, solely gives a neo-Marxian, materialistic theory for Fulani aggression. It described the relentless attacks against Christian farming families on their own farms and violence against priests and pastors in their churches or homes as “clashes” between two rural socio-economic groups fighting over scarce natural resources, a result of climate change. This conclusion ignores the two groups’ religious identities, the pattern of aggression by the Fulanis throughout the years, the shouts of “Allahu Akbar” and other religious sentiments expressed by the Fulanis as they attack, the repeated attacks on churches and their leaders, and the survivors’ own reports. It overlooks any possibility of radicalization of nomadic Fulani herdsman as they travel across porous borders from the Sahel and Northeastern Nigeria, both regions recognized by the U.S. government as hotbeds of Islamist terror. It shows no concern for the automatic weapons widely distributed, reportedly by the Miyetti groups, to thousands of herders who use them to attack defenseless farming communities. The State Department reports the revealing finding of the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa that terror groups killed Christians proportionately in much greater numbers than Muslims but discounts the finding by disingenuously remarking that it “did not draw conclusions regarding whether Christians were targeted based on their religious identity.” It does not focus on the fact that the Nigerian government “tolerates” the violence, that is, allows it to continue with impunity, which meets the criteria for CPC designation, as stated in the International Religious Freedom Act. Instead, the Biden administration stated that Abuja isn’t itself “engaged” in the attacks and on that basis removed Nigeria from the CPC list.

State’s theory that Fulani attacks on Christians are due solely to climate change is echoed throughout the foreign affairs community. Neither the State Department nor the United Nations attempts to examine militant Fulani herders’ intent and motives nor questions the Nigerian government’s apparent grant of impunity to them.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees website now posts an [article](#), dated November 2024, featuring Mimi, one of some two million IDPs in Benue state, alone. Like many of the others there, she survived a horrific Fulani herder attack three years ago, while her family was tending the yam fields on their farm about 30 miles from her displacement camp. Neither her Christian faith (Benue is 98 percent Christian), nor her Fulani attackers’ Muslim faith is mentioned. It reports:

When they looked up, they saw armed men. There was no time to run. The men raped and killed Mimi’s [11-year-old] daughter. Mimi herself was raped and her husband was killed. A hunter later found her injured and unconscious and helped her into the bush. They hid there for two

days before it was safe enough for him to bring her to the camp. There, she received medical treatment and reunited with her two sons, now aged 12 and 15. "I lost everything," says Mimi. "If you go to my village, everything has been burned down; I cannot farm any longer. And it's not only me ... we all went through these things."

The UNHCR author then concludes the report on Mimi with the astonishing finding that climate change was to blame, not the attackers. It quotes as authority for this none other than the head of the Fulani herders lobby, who casts the Fulani herders as the real victims: "Climate change is a new challenge that we didn't experience 20 or 30 years ago; it's really impacting us," says Ibrahim Galma, Secretary of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association," it relates. This explanation is accepted without question by that pivotal UN body, as it has been by the State Department.

Conclusion:

There is lawlessness and mayhem throughout Nigeria, nevertheless, within this context it is apparent that, for their faith, Christian clergy and pastors, their churches and congregations, and their villages and lands are being specifically targeted by various Islamist militant and terrorist groups operating in Nigeria -- especially at this time the Fulani herder militants in the country's Middle Belt.

Nigerian Middle Belt Christians continue to be killed, maimed, raped, abducted, and enslaved in brutal attacks. Their farmlands have been confiscated and destroyed or taken over by Fulani herder aggressors, rendering millions of Middle Belt Christians homeless and stripped of their livelihoods, and living in IDP camps, without hospitals or schools. Heavy ransoms are demanded of rural village churches and communities, leaving them impoverished. These attacks are so systematic and uniform that it has led church observers on the ground and others to conclude they are a coordinated land grab to push the Christian population from the Middle Belt and Islamize it.

After years of such attacks, Nigeria's federal government, at the highest level, has failed to take effective action to stop the Fulani violence. It is amply apparent that Abuja is tolerating this horrific violence that egregiously violates the religious freedom of Nigerian Christians.

Therefore, I urge Congress to recommend CPC re-designation for Nigeria.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Shea, thank you so very much for your testimony and for your decades of dedication to this important issue. Mr. Perkins.

STATEMENT OF TONY PERKINS

Mr. PERKINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman—and Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and members of the subcommittee. First, let me thank you for your opening comments. It is refreshing to see we have agreement. We understand that there is a problem, and now coming to a solution is our challenge. So thank you for your insight.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. My name is Tony Perkins. I served as a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom from 2018 to 2022. And as the chairman said, I served as both chair and vice chair.

From my time on USCIRF, I can tell you with certainty that the world is not paying enough attention to the growing humanitarian disaster in Nigeria. Now despite its strategic importance as Africa's most populous country, these warning lights are flashing because of this systematic religious persecution driven primarily by Islamists, and it is going unaddressed.

Christians are the primary targets. They are murdered, kidnapped, raped, and terrorized on almost a daily basis as has already been discussed. The numbers are staggering, the brutality is unspeakable, and the silence from global leaders is deafening.

Let me share just one recent example. On February 9, Fulani terrorists armed with AK-47s—these are not hunting rifles, these are rifles designed to kill. I served—probably after coming out of the Marine Corps, I worked with the State Department and antiterrorism. I am very familiar with the mode and operation of terrorists—they stormed a village in Gombe State. They first seized the 9-year-old boy from the Puma family and demanded ransom.

They then sought out the Reverend Bala Galadima's home. They found him. They broke into his home. They demanded money. He pleaded with them saying that he had none, but he offered them what he had. He had grain, so he offered them grain. They refused. They shot him three times, killing him. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident.

In late January, Boko Haram launched a series of coordinated attacks on Christian villages in Chibok. The same region where 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped in 2014. Mr. Chairman, you will remember that. We discussed it then. In fact, many of those girls remain captives to this day.

The terrorists set homes and churches ablaze, destroyed livestock, and demanded that Christians convert or they die. More than 4,000 believers have been forced to plea for their lives in recent weeks alone.

As has been mentioned, according to Open Doors, more Christians are murdered for their faith in Nigeria than any other country in the world. In 2024 alone, 3,100 Christians were killed. 2,830 were kidnapped. These are not just numbers. These are fathers, they are mothers, they are children, they are families.

The case of Leah Sharibu underscores the horror of this crisis. Leah was just 14 years old when Boko Haram kidnapped her and

108 other girls from their school in 2018. The terrorists eventually released all the girls except Leah. Why? Because she refused to renounce her Christian faith.

Reports suggest she is still alive and now held as a prize by her captors as she has been forced to bear children in captivity.

As a commission on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, I met with her family multiple times and worked with the previous administration to track her; hopefully trying to gain her freedom. We were not successful.

This is what religious persecution in Nigeria looks like. It is violent, it is brutal, and it is worsening. In 2020, the Trump administration, based on recommendations from USCIRF—and I was a part of that leadership team—Nigeria was designated as a country of particular concern. This was an essential step, recognizing the Nigerian Government was failing to protect religious minorities from systematic violence.

Yet in 2021, the Biden administration inextricably removed Nigeria's CPC designation despite the fact that attacks against Christians had increased.

Former Secretary of State Antony Blinken later suggested in a meeting with USCIRF members, which I was present, that these massacres were caused by climate change. That desperate Fulani herders were simply looking for pasture land.

Let me be clear, this is not about climate change. It is about a violent extremist ideology that seeks to eliminate Christianity from Nigeria's northern and central regions. The evidence is undeniable. This is systematic religious violence.

The U.S. Government must act, and they must act now. Nigeria must be redesignated a country of particular concern. Biden administration's removal of this designation was a reckless mistake that emboldened the very terrorists who are slaughtering Christians. The evidence overwhelmingly meets the legal threshold under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which requires CPC status for governments that engage in or tolerate, tolerate severe violations of religious freedom. That is exactly what Nigeria's government has done. It has failed to protect all of its citizens from religious violence.

The U.S. must impose consequences. Under the International Religious Freedom Act, the President has the authority to take action against CPC-designated nations, including economic penalties. The U.S. should apply targeted sanctions against Nigerian officials who are complicit in religious persecution, as well as suspend certain trade benefits until concrete actions are taken to protect all Nigerians.

Religious freedom protection must be tied to U.S.-Nigerian relations. The administration should make it clear that Nigeria's treatment of religious minorities will directly impact diplomatic and economic relations, including trade agreements and security assistance.

And, finally, the U.S. must reappoint a strong, high-profile Ambassador for international religious freedom.

During the first Trump administration, this role was used effectively under the leadership of Ambassador Sam Brown back to

apply global pressure on persecuting nations. The momentum for that must be regained.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, it is time for the United States to send an unmistakable message, to draw a red line:—the slaughter of Christians and other religious minorities in Nigeria will not be tolerated. If Nigeria continues to allow terrorists to burn churches, execute pastures, and kidnap schoolgirls with impunity, there must be consequences.

This is not just about Nigeria, it is about the future of religious freedom, the stability of Africa, the moral credibility of the United States. If we fail to act, make no mistake about it, this crisis will spread. Refugees will flood into neighboring countries. Terrorists will grow bolder. And America's silence will embolden jihadists worldwide.

Chairman Smith, members of the committee, thank you for helping raise awareness of the need to redesignate Nigeria's a country of particular concern. The world is watching, but more importantly, the religious persecution, and those who are the victims of that in Nigeria are watching. And they are waiting to see if America will stand with them and for them. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Perkins follows:]



**Written Testimony of Tony Perkins
President, Family Research Council
Former Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom**

**Before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa
Hearing on “Conflict and persecution in Nigeria: the case for a CPC designation”
March 12, 2025**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tony Perkins. I served as a commissioner on the U.S. Committee on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) from 2018 to 2022 and as the chair and vice chair during my last two years on the commission. I am also the president of Family Research Council in Washington, D.C., a Christian nonprofit research and educational organization that tracks international religious freedom concerns, among other issues.

As a former USCIRF chair, I can verify that many Western news outlets, taking their cues from the previous administration, continue to overlook the accelerating violence and bloodshed currently taking place in Africa, which is perpetrated mainly by radical Islamist groups. In Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, vicious attacks and bloodshed continue to surge, week after week, month after month. Christians are the primary targets of this terrorism, facing murders, rapes, kidnappings, and constant threats.

I would like to share a recent story that illustrates the sometimes-deadly situations Christians in rural Nigeria face.

In the early morning hours of February 9, Fulani terrorists in Gombe state stormed the village of Lubo with AK-49 rifles, shooting sporadically into the air. The terrorists first stopped at the home of the Puma family, where they harassed the head of the household and held a nine-year-old boy ransom before stealing the equivalent of just over 200 USD from the family.

The terrorists asked for directions to Reverend Bala Galadima’s house and then broke in through a window. They demanded money from the reverend, but he pleaded that he had none and offered them grain instead. Rejecting his offer, the terrorists shot him three times, killing him before fleeing the scene.¹

Tragically, such incidents have become all too common in Nigeria. In late January, International Christian Concern reported a rise in attacks by Boko Haram on Christian communities in Chibok, a Local Government Area of Borno state.² This violence has forced more than 4,000 Christians to evacuate from their homes in recent days. In a series of coordinated raids, Boko Haram targeted several Christian villages, setting homes and churches on fire and reportedly killing five people.

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Eyewitnesses have stated that Boko Haram specifically targeted Christians during these raids, intimidating them and demanding they convert to Islam or die. The violence has destroyed churches, killed livestock, and obliterated food supplies and livelihoods. Ibrahim Yana, a farmer who fled Shikarkir, said, “We are living in fear. They burned down our church and homes. Many of us have lost everything.”

According to Open Doors, a persecution watchdog group, more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country. In 2024 alone, 3,100 Christians were killed, and 2,830 were abducted.³

As a USCIRF commissioner, I met with the family of Leah Sharibu and adopted her as a part of the USCIRF prisoner of conscience adoption initiative. Leah was just 14 years old, a typical schoolgirl living in a rural region of Nigeria. That changed on February 19, 2018, when Boko Haram attacked the Government Girls’ Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State. They kidnapped 109 students but later released all of them except Leah. The girls who were freed said the terrorists kept Leah because she refused to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam. Although Leah has not been seen or heard from since, intelligence reports at the end of my tenure indicated that she was still alive.

In early 2024, the Islamic State launched a campaign called “Kill Them Wherever You Find Them,” which lasted from January 1 to January 10. During this time, there was an increase in attacks claimed by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Nigerian territory. On February 3, suspected ISWAP terrorists killed four policemen in the Nganzai Local Government Area of Borno State. A security spokesperson who witnessed the massacre said, “Some of the police officers were also lucky to have survived the onslaught of the terror attack, but the unfortunate four officers paid the supreme price while on active duty.” The terrorists left the area before the Nigerian military arrived.

Another major perpetrator of violence against rural Nigerian Christians is Fulani militants. Some groups of Fulani herdsmen have formed violent Jihadist militias that attack and abduct Christian farmers, often taking their land. In a meeting discussing the Biden administration’s removal of the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) status from Nigeria, former Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed that these attacks were driven by drought and shrinking pasturelands, causing desperate Fulani migrant herders to encroach upon Christian villages and seize land for their animals amid climate change.

The evidence of rampant bloodshed, outrageous brutality, and Islamist chants and declarations during attacks expose this as a lie.⁴

Let us be clear: this is not a climate issue; it is a religious persecution issue. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and if we don’t address the religious freedom concerns there, the destabilizing effects could spread to other parts of the continent. This instability would likely increase the number of refugees moving into other parts of Africa and beyond.

During the previous Trump administration, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern in December 2020⁵ due to its “particularly severe” violations of

religious freedom. However, in November 2021, the Biden administration abruptly lifted this designation without any explanation,⁶ even as the bloodshed in Nigeria continued to surge.

There are multiple avenues that the Trump administration can take to address the dire religious freedom conditions in Nigeria. I will now highlight a few.

First, the Trump administration should redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern. After the Biden administration removed Nigeria's designation as a CPC, then-Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), along with Senator Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) and others, urged former Secretary of State Antony Blinken to reinstate Nigeria's CPC status.⁷ Now, Secretary of State Rubio should take the opportunity to quickly redesignate Nigeria as a CPC.

The Nigerian government is not off the hook simply because non-state actors are the primary drivers of religious persecution. The government has a duty to protect all its citizens and their basic right to religious freedom, regardless of their faith. Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), the CPC designation applies to countries where the government is found to have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom."⁸ By failing to adequately address—and indeed making minimal efforts to address—routine and targeted violence against Christians, the Nigerian government certainly qualifies for this designation.

Under IRFA, the U.S. president has the authority to take certain actions, including imposing economic penalties, against countries designated as a CPC. In prior years, most CPC countries have either received waivers or the State Department has pointed out that existing sanctions imposed by the United States meet the criteria for economic penalties. This interpretation is known as "double hatting." Instead of immediately waiving all possible penalties, the president should utilize his powers under IRFA to impose penalties on Nigeria for its CPC status.

Second, the Trump administration should consider tying Nigeria's religious freedom conditions and protection of Christians to trade agreements or tariffs. President Trump has already used the threat of tariffs to influence the behavior of foreign governments. This situation in Nigeria is serious enough to warrant such measures to get the attention of the Nigerian government, which has been at best apathetic and at worst complicit in the violence perpetrated against Christians in parts of the country.

Third, President Trump should quickly promote a high-profile and effective ambassador at large for international religious freedom. President Trump's previous ambassador in this role was a dynamic figure who successfully elevated the issue of international religious freedom at the State Department and brought momentum to the movement as a whole. Once again, we need an effective ambassador to run point on this issue and give voice to religious freedom concerns that affect U.S. foreign policy.

We are still early into President Trump's second term, and there are many opportunities to make a difference on behalf of persecuted Nigerians. Addressing religious freedom in Nigeria will benefit not only Nigeria but also the United States. Ending violence against Christians and the looming threat of instability in Africa's largest and richest country will ultimately make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous as well.

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- ¹ Mike Odeh James, "Christian Cleric Murdered in Midnight Raid," *TruthNigeria*, February 12, 2025, <https://truthnigeria.com/2025/02/christian-cleric-murdered-in-midnight-raid/>.
- ² "Boko Haram's Latest Attacks Displace Thousands of Christians in Nigeria," International Christian Concern, January 24, 2025, <https://www.persecution.org/2025/01/24/boko-harams-latest-attacks-displace-thousands-of-christians-in-nigeria/>.
- ³ Open Doors International, "World Watch List 2025: Nigeria," report, 2025, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/nigeria/>.
- ⁴ Lela Gilbert, "The Crisis of Christian Persecution in Nigeria," Family Research Council, issues analysis, February 2021, <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF20G16.pdf>.
- ⁵ Laura Kelly, "Nigeria joins State Dept list of violators of religious freedom," *The Hill*, December 7, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/529121-nigeria-joins-state-dept-list-of-violators-of-religious-freedom/>.
- ⁶ Lela Gilbert, "A Shocking Reversal: The US Officially Turns a Blind Eye to Nigeria's Endangered Christians," *Providence*, November 23, 2021, <https://providencemag.com/2021/11/shocking-reversal-us-turns-blind-eye-nigeria-christians-country-particular-concern-religious-freedom-joe-biden/>.
- ⁷ Office of Senator Josh Hawley, "Hawley Leads Letter Demanding Blinken Reinstate Nigeria to Religious Freedom 'Concern' List For Violence Against Christians," press release, June 29, 2022, <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/hawley-leads-letter-demanding-blinken-reinstate-nigeria-religious-freedom-concern-list-violence/>.
- ⁸ *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998*, 22 U.S.C. §6442, available online at <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter73&edition=prelim>.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Perkins, for your testimony and your leadership as well. And your work on the Religious Freedom Commission was legendary.

We do have Maureen Ferguson here with us today who is a commissioner on the Religious Freedom Commission. Dominick Cuozzo whose a pastor from my district who is very involved with religious freedom issues. Thank you for being here.

And I would like to just point out David Trimbball is here as well from RFI. When I did the bill in 2019, it was a religious freedom—Frank Wolf. We named it after Frank Wolf. Got it passed in the Senate. It was dead in the water on the Senate side, and he did so much to get it passed. And I want to thank him for that because otherwise it would have just another House passed bill like we all know. It goes over to the Senate, and that is the graveyard of legislation. But I want to thank him for what he did to get through.

I would like to now recognize and again thank him profusely for traveling here and at great risk. Bishop, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF BISHOP WILFRED ANAGBE

Bishop Anagbe. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee for giving me an opportunity to be heard at a critical time in my country and, particularly, my State, Benue.

I am Wilfred Anagbe and appear here as the Catholic Bishop of Makurdi Diocese, the capital of Benue State in Nigeria. I am the shepherd of one of the four Dioceses, Catholic Dioceses in Benue. We have others—Anglican, Methodist, and the Pentecostals.

Benue State has a population of about of 6.1 million people, 2 million of whom are under my care as the Bishop of the Diocese. Benue State is about 98 percent Christian with very few Muslims living in towns.

Nigeria and eventually my diocese and the State of Benue have become in recent years one of the most dangerous and insecure places for Christians. Christians and Muslims are nearly evenly divided among the general large population of over 200 million persons.

Islamist extremists are fiercely contesting the position, control, and governing law of the land, especially in the countries, northern and central regions, the latter of which where Benue is located.

There are constant ethnic, political, and religious conflicts over land and the allegiance. Constitutionally, we are a secular country, but our unity has been fragile. Political and religious actions and even public speech have been carefully managed to avoid accusations of religious bias and political tensions.

Today, the clear influence of Islamic extremists the traditional social dynamics of tribe, ethnicity, religion, and the social status in Nigeria. Because those recently are the beginning of the Ramadan fast, plus those in northern Nigeria have declared closed schools because of the tensions. As you can imagine, which other country in the world does that?

Saudi Arabia is not doing it. Afghanistan is not doing it. Baghdad is not doing it, but then Nigeria is present. What kind of—Islam practices it. Five, 12 states, and not only Muslims are living in these places. What happened to the Christian program or cur-

riculum of the country? But this is what we are going through every day in Nigeria.

A long-term Islamic agenda to homogenize the population has been implemented, over several presidencies, through a strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate the Christian identity of half of the population. This strategy includes both violent and nonviolent actions, such as the exclusion of Christians from positions of power and abduction of church members, the raping of women, the killing and expulsion of Christians, the destruction of churches and farmlands of Christian farmers, followed by the occupation of such lands by the Fulani herders. And also changing the names of these villages.

They are taking a lot of places so you clearly see an expansionist approach and Islamic—and then they are making the people now flee and leave their villages and they conquer it.

The quest to Islamize the land appears high on the agenda of some of the powerful and influential Muslims in Nigeria. There is a campaign to take land to spread Islam. And there is the hemorrhaging of Christian farmers from the central region of Nigeria, and Benue State Makurdi Diocese, in particular, as they are forced to abandon fertile land that is used to feed the Nation, which classify Benue as the fruit basket of the Nation.

Militant Fulani herdsmen are terrorists destroying society. They steal and vandalize, they kill and boast about it, they kidnap and rape, and they enjoy total impunity from the elected authorities. None of them have been arrested and brought to justice. This is supported by the corrupt system in which we operate, and the abject poverty among us, which allow the criminals to easily attract more recruits and prey on more victims.

Why is this happening? Is it really a religious war? Like in the past, many jihadists are motivated less by religion than by spoils of war, and use their religion to impose themselves. In my Diocese, the spoils consist mainly of fertile, well-tended land organized around a parish. The jihadists come and abduct and kill the priests, leaving thousands without support and basic human services.

And, of course, when despite the people's habitats or the citizens or the people of the land, they take over. And any attempt to go back and take care of your farms, surely you will get killed.

The Makurdi Diocese in Benue State has been the epicenter of the invasion by these herders, who are more like hired guns of cattle oligarchs, who manipulate religion to rally the herders to eliminate the Christian population, and cleanse the land in the name of Islam.

This objective is behind the relentless attacks against Benue's villages. When we call for help to the police and the Army, they do not come. At the end of 2024, several villages were warned by the attackers of the upcoming violence, and the leaders called the police for defense ahead of time. But they did not come, and the Christmas massacres, almost customary, took place killing hundreds in Plateau and Benue with worst massacre claiming 47 people. The militants also burnt down the eight Catholic churches of St. Mary's Parish in the Diocese of Gboko, as well as the parish house, clinics, schools and other houses.

The Miliant Fulani herdsmen bear on defenseless villagers without consequence. They follow orders to conquer, kill, and occupy. They attack even those who have managed to escape into our IDP camps. Thereby, they have no place to run to.

And it is unfortunate that the police system in Nigeria, orders have to come from Abul. And such, the one call and said they have never—and by the time they arrived, this will have left and the people are now leaving a pool of their blood.

What I have recounted above is happening not only in Benue State, I believe our experience in Benue is symptomatic is what is happening elsewhere in large parts of Nigeria. The experience of a Nigerian person today can be summed up as death of a church under Islamist extermination.

It is frightening to live there. Apart from the violent campaigns and attacks against Christian villages, there are no attempts by the Islamic Council or from Nigeria and various Islamic groups to import Sharia law on the Christian populations. Already, 12 states in the north of Nigeria are under this sectarian religious law and attempts to extend the same to the south of Nigeria, which they have started.

This month, Governors in the north decided upwardly close all schools and Christian institutions during the months of Ramadan, leaving millions of students without learning opportunities for 5 weeks.

We live in fear because at any point it can be our turn to be killed. But to remain silent is to die twice. So I have chosen to speak. I speak on behalf of the millions who are in the camps.

In Benue State in my Diocese alone, in my Diocese I learned about nine camps, nine on the 5 of March, which was actually Wednesday, we visited one of the camps. And many of the my priests that are religious went to the other camps. This is for them to begin to ask one if—with the faithful who are there because we are the voice of the voiceless. We have to talk with the defenseless. We have to talk about the weak and those who cannot talk about themselves.

In one of the camps car, the mega camp, there were over 3,000 inmates of that camp. And we chose a record, give it to us by government.

I speak on behalf of them and those children who have no husband, who have no farther, and they want their own voices taken away by the politicians who promise to help them, but have become the willing tools of the jihadists. Because they are talking politically correct statements looking for next elections to come.

I speak on behalf of those whose loved ones have been killed, but no one has ever provided a word of consultation to them. I speak on behalf of the thousands of young girls who have been abducted and raped because no one, not even the media mentions them anymore.

Foremost, I speak on behalf of my flock who are unable to worship freely and unable to return to the ancestral farms and homes because that land has been ruthlessly taken from them by the armed herdsman.

And we are to say they want to live in peace with the Natives if we must fund. You have to pay tax to herd the land which belongs to you. That is slavery to say the least about it.

As proposed, Nigeria is an African continent. And I tell you, if there is outbreak of war in Nigeria, no country around us—Chad, Niger, Ghana, Guinea, Togo—no country can contain the population that will fill these places. No country can be able to house over five million refugees. It is not possible because of that. And if one million refugees run to Chad and Niger, they will call us to that country. Because there was no plan to take over there.

So we have to be very careful. Today, I ask you all to use every means within your mandate to start developing a stronger and good relationship with Nigeria where you know that when you speak of human dignity, you are also speaking of the same God-given right you believe is unalienable. Consider that Nigeria can be your ally. But it cannot be one where half the population is in the process of being murderously eliminated. Work with us, the churches, and other Nigerians of good will. We are looking for a peaceful and personal society, and our desperate plight has been set aside U.S. policy for too long to the cost of thousands of lives.

Concretely, I request and I plead, I ask you to redesignate Nigeria as a country of political concern. This had both a practical and diplomatic meaning to signal that you are paying attention to what happens to us and elsewhere in the world. Because the policies the government is trying to put in place, yet so that to return the IDPs, I mean, big camps for them, relocate them from their homes, it is not doable, and it did not work. Because the government has ordered the population that is not able to take of, and there you have millions of people in the camps, and they want to relocate them to Weha. And if you do, let's say that you do, how many houses or rooms will it give me, what, five children, another one has two, and what are they going to do for a living?

These people previously never begged anybody for food. They were managing their lives, training their children, and building their homes. So nobody should have deceive us under the guise that they want to resort to the IDPs. They have no jobs. So where you said they want to be in that place.

And, by the way, for the matter still remains, if you said to them to order camps or big place for them, what happens with the ancestral lines? Who takes care of them? And this is whereby I feel the government is complicit on this issue.

Because this terrorist Fulani displace and kill people, and they occupy the place, and they change names, nomenclatures of these towns. For what reason.

So we want to let the people go back to their homes and help for them to rebuild their lives. I implore this august body to insist on the return and order IDP to the ancestral lines, and not to relocate them to order constructed camps elsewhere, which is an invented solution now being posed by the Benue State government.

And I tell you, Nigerian Government can do that once they are held accountable. Because I know that Nigeria under the auspices of ECOMOG was able to reinstate consumer government, consumer and Liberia. And they can do that now. We have the capacity. It is because their leaders that are not prepared. And I think

that you should look. It is not just, you know, in a conspiracy of silence, it is aiding, abetting, and supporting these terrorists to keep doing their work. This is complete. Thank you very much for dissertation.

[The prepared statement of Bishop Anagbe follows:]

The Most Rev. Wilfred C. Anagbe
Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, Benue, Nigeria
Before the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Africa Subcommittee
March 12, 2025
“Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: the case for the CPC designation”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee for giving me an opportunity to be heard at a critical time for my diocese. I am Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe, and appear here as the Catholic Bishop of the diocese of Makurdi, the capital of Benue state, in Nigeria. I am the shepherd of one of three dioceses in Benue, which has a population of 6 million people¹; 3 million of whom are souls under my care. Benue state is 98% Christian, with very few Muslims.

Nigeria, and especially my diocese and the state of Benue, have become, in recent years, one of the most dangerous and insecure places for Christians.

Christians and Muslims are nearly evenly divided among Nigeria’s large population of 238 million people. Islamist extremists are fiercely contesting the possession, control and governing law of the land, especially in the country’s northern and central regions, the latter of which is where Benue is located.

There are constant ethnic, political, and religious conflicts over land and allegiance. Constitutionally, we are a secular country, but our unity has been fragile. Political and religious actions and even public speech have been carefully managed to avoid accusations of religious bias and political tensions. Today, the **clear influence of Islamist extremists has changed the traditional social dynamics** of tribe, ethnicity, religion and social status in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa. [Identification as a Muslim and a Fulani ethnic have been what exactly” are the determinant factors for recognition or identity as witnessed in the last two to three decades across sub-Saharan West Africa.]

A long-term, **Islamic agenda** to homogenize the population has been implemented, over several presidencies, through a strategy to reduce and eventually **eliminate the Christian identity of half of the population..** This strategy includes both violent and non-violent actions, such as the exclusion of Christians from positions of power, the abduction of Church members, the raping of women, the killing and expulsion of

Christians, the destruction of churches and farmlands of Christian farmers, followed by the occupation of such lands by Fulani herders. All of this takes place without government interference or reprisals.

The quest to **Islamize the land appears high on the agenda of some of the powerful and influential Muslims** in Nigeria. There is a campaign to take land to spread Islam, And there is the haemorrhaging of Christian farmers from the central region of Nigeria, and Makurdi Diocese in particular, as they are forced to abandon fertile land that used to feed the nation.

Militant **Fulani herdsman are terrorists destroying society**. They steal and vandalize, they kill and boast about it, they kidnap and rape, and they enjoy total impunity from the elected authorities. None of them have been arrested and brought to justice. This is supported by the corrupt system in which we operate, and the abject poverty among us, which allow the criminals to easily attract more recruits and prey on more victims.

Why is this happening? **Is it really a “religious war”?** Like in the past, many jihadists are motivated less by religion than by the spoils of war, and use their religion to impose themselves. In my diocese, the spoils consist mainly of fertile, well-tended land organized around a parish. The jihadists come and **abduct and kill the priests**, leaving thousands without support and basic human services.

The Makurdi Diocese in Benue State has been the epicentre of the invasion by these herders, who are more like **“hired guns” of cattle oligarchs**, who manipulate religion to rally the herders to eliminate the Christian population, and cleanse the land in the name of Islam.

This objective is behind the relentless attacks against Benue’s villagers. When we call for help to the police and the army, they do not come. At the end of 2024, several villages were warned by the attackers of the upcoming violence and the leaders called the police for defence, ahead of time. But they did not come and the Christmas massacres, almost customary, took place killing hundreds in Plateau and Benue, with the worst massacre claiming 47.² The militants also burnt down the eight Catholic churches of St. Mary’s Parish in the diocese of Gboko, as well as the parish house, clinics, schools and other houses.

The militant Fulani herdsman bear on defenceless villagers without consequence. They follow orders **to conquer, kill, and occupy**. They attack even those who have managed to escape into our IDPs’ camps.³

What I have recounted above is happening not only in Benue State. I believe our experience in Benue is symptomatic of what is happening elsewhere in large parts of Nigeria. The experience of the Nigerian Christians today can be summed up as that of **a Church under Islamist extermination**. It is frightening to live there! Apart from the

violent campaigns and attacks against Christian villages, there are now attempts by the Islamic Council of Nigeria and various Islamic groups to impose 'sharia law' on the Christian populations. Already, twelve states in the North of Nigeria are under this sectarian religious law and attempts to extend the same to the South of Nigeria have already begun. This month, governors in the North decided abruptly to close all schools and education institutions during the months of Ramadan, leaving millions of students without learning opportunity for 5 weeks.

We live in fear because at any point, it can be our turn to be killed. But **to remain silent is to die twice**, so I have chosen to speak. I speak on behalf of the millions who are in the camps. I speak on behalf of the millions of women and children who have no husband or father, and even their own voice is taken away by the politicians who promised to help them but have become the willing tools of the jihadists. I speak on behalf of those whose loved ones have been killed but no one has even offered a word of consolation to them. I speak on behalf of the thousands of young girls who have been abducted and raped because no one, not even the media, mentions them to any more.

Foremost, I speak on behalf of my flock, who are unable to worship freely and unable to return to their ancestral farms and homes because that land has been ruthlessly taken from them by the armed herdsmen.

A prosperous Nigeria is a prosperous African continent and a safer world for all peoples.

Today, I urge you all to use every means within your mandate to **start developing a strong and good relationship** with Nigeria, where you know that when you speak of human dignity, we are also speaking of the same God-given right you believe is "unalienable". Consider that Nigeria can be your ally, but it cannot be one **where half the population is in the process of being murderously eliminated**. Work with us, the churches, and other Nigerians of good will. We are working for a peaceful and prosperous society. And our desperate plight has been set aside in U.S. foreign policy for too long, to the cost of thousands of lives.

Concretely, I ask you to re-designate Nigeria **as a Country of Particular Concern**. This has both a practical and diplomatic meaning, to signal that you are paying attention to what happens to us.

Second, I urge the United States to **condition any cooperation on the return of the IDPs to their ancestral homes** and help for them to rebuild their lives. I implore this august body to insist on the return and rehabilitation of all IDPs to their ancestral lands, and NOT to relocate them to other constructed camps elsewhere, which is an invented solution now being pushed the Benue state governor.

¹ https://www.citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA007__benue/

² <https://acnuk.org/news/nigeria-dozens-of-christians-killed-last-month/?srsltid=AfmBOOpY-UNB3Ci2qBHVqo7WXlvBYSmHH86CQ6mrA470julGoaUEXmJ>

³ <https://acnuk.org/news/good-friday-turns-black/?srsltid=AfmBOOptVMvisQWtqkDJC2QFPVu1m9pZVRaZASrxajEQr7I-vqDw1SK>

Mr. SMITH. Bishop, thank you very much for your testimony and, again, for your courage to be here. We know when you go back you will face risks, our prayers are with you. We will follow up on your admonitions you have given us today.

I would like to now recognize our final witness, Ms. Onubogu.

STATEMENT OF OGE ONUBOGU

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you very much. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and distinguished committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this committee today. I serve as Director of the Africa at the Wilson Center. Although the views express here are my own.

In keeping with the nonpartisan policy-focused work at the Wilson Center, I offer the following comments and recommendations. Consecutive U.S. administrations have described the U.S. relationship with Nigeria as among the most important in Africa. This year marks 26 years of uninterrupted civilian rule in Nigeria, the longest period of constitutional governance since the country's independence in October 1960.

Furthermore, as Nigeria serves a second term 1-year chairmanship of the economic community of West African states echo us, the country's leaders understandably expect to lead regional coordination efforts, given Nigeria's size, political and economic influence, and decisionmaking power within the block.

As ECOWAS turns 50 this year, good leadership will be crucial to address the rising threats to regional integration, security, and economic stability that have beset the subregion in recent years. However, whether and how Nigeria tackles its own internal governance and security challenges will set the pace, not only at home in Nigeria, but also in the broader West Africa region.

As Nigeria's internal struggles worsen, what is clear is that the country's instability is rooted in a vital shortcoming. After 64 years of independence, the country still struggles to cultivate a national identity rooted in basic freedoms and dignity for its people.

In Nigeria today, ethnicity, religion, and language, not nationality remain the benchmarks of personal identity for the country's highly diverse population.

While Nigeria has weakness—repeated ethnic and religious clashes over the years, its ethnically and religiously diverse population is not the problem or the cause of these conflicts. The problem, however, is that ethnicity and religion in Nigeria have become instrumental markers that are used to mobilize and successfully acquire power, resources, and political dominance.

It is important to understand the nature of violence in Nigeria and its causes, which extend beyond the religious or ethnic overtones that appear to motivate that animosity.

I grew up in Jos Plateau State in Nigeria's Middle Belt region. I visit Jos regularly, including in December, 2024, just a few days before the Christmas weekend attacks that killed and displaced hundreds.

Ms. Onubogu. These types of attacks have plagued local communities in Plateau State for more than 20 years. Having grown up in the Middle Belt region, I am deeply aware of the compounding impacts of these protracted conflicts on once-vibrant communities.

Whether labeled as banditry or terrorism or communal clashes or ethno-religious conflict, at the root of this violence is a failure of governance to meet the population's most basic needs—not only livelihoods, education, and healthcare, but also their need for perpetrators to be held legitimately accountable.

Elections and political appointments are two important areas where the interplay between religion and politics is most clearly demonstrated in Nigeria. Nigerian political leaders romanticize Nigeria's unity but do little to cultivate it. On the contrary, they often stoke ethnic and religious tensions in election campaigns, seemingly to distract from their failure to deliver for the people they are supposed to serve.

The divisive political climate of the 2023 elections illustrated this tendency. Furthermore, off-cycle elections conducted in 2024 also exposed the fragility of Nigeria's electoral process, as some political actors openly intimidated election officials and violently disrupted elections, suspending by-elections in Kano, Akwa Ibom, and Enugu States.

Certainly, recent data, as that from the nondenominational global network Open Doors, appears to indicate that violence against Christians, who make up 46 percent of the population, has been unaddressed by the previous Buhari administration, and no tangible progress has been made under the current Tinubu administration.

But we also know that violence overall in Nigeria has increased over time. The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria reported that complaints of human rights rose by 25 percent in February alone.

The Nigerian Social Cohesion Survey conducted in 2022 also found that an overwhelming majority of Nigerians—96 percent, to be precise—consider human rights abuses and violations to be a problem in the country. This indicates not only that violence and rights abuses afflict many groups but also that Nigerians understand and respect the concept of human rights.

Now let me offer some recommendations. A few recommendations to the United States:

It is important to engage deeply and broadly with communities across Nigeria to better understand the nuances driving insecurity in the country. While it is never wise to dismiss religion as a cause of conflict, it is also unproductive to label a conflict as solely driven by religion when there are so many other factors at play. The root causes of Nigeria's conflicts and insecurity are deeper and more complex than generally discussed.

Second, develop a holistic and long-term vision for U.S. engagement with Nigeria on issues of governance and security. The U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, formed in 2010, already provides the framework that supports country-to-country discussions on issues of security and governance.

After 15 years, it is time to take stock. Discussions in the Commission should take a fresh look that emphasizes security partnership sustained over the long term, seeking areas where cooperation is still possible and efforts that are most promising for real change, such as local and nongovernment initiatives.

Third, work more with Nigeria's states and its growing city centers. The U.S. Government should decentralize its engagement with Nigeria by strengthening its dialog with and support to receptive government and civic leaders at the State and local level.

Next, support democratic actors that are advancing inclusive peace processes and conflict resolution. Civic and religious leaders in Nigeria can serve as important bridges between communities and government, especially in communities where the government lacks credibility.

Partner with the Nigerian Government to make accountability central to the response to conflict and persecution. Support the judiciary to uphold the rule of law, and coordinate intelligence-sharing with institutions of government that are working to track financial transactions related to suspected terrorist activity, including terrorist funding.

Next, we should rethink U.S. and international policies that lead to knee-jerk responses to crisis. Reactive, quick-win actions that may seem beneficial to Nigerians could have larger and far-reaching negative impacts.

And, finally, revive the U.S. Congressional Bipartisan Caucus on Nigeria, which served as a space to prioritize discussions on issues of U.S.-Nigeria relations. An active congressional bipartisan caucus will signify the importance of U.S.-Nigeria relations and create a forum to proactively consider wide perspectives on different issues of concern to better inform legislative response.

And, now, recommendations to the Nigerian Government:

Coordinate Federal and State action in messaging. Effective coordination so desperately needed among Nigeria's Federal and State governments is too often undermined by finger-pointing. That must stop.

Since assuming office, President Tinubu has called for better synergy and cooperation among security agencies to address insecurity in the country. However, concrete steps must be taken to move this aspiration to reality.

Nigeria also needs to get serious about police reform. In December 2004, the Governors of Nigeria's 36 states unanimously endorsed the establishment of State police as a measure to combat the Nation's rising insecurity. While this is a significant shift in policing in Nigeria, it is still unclear how this will be operationalized.

Police reform should not be about State policing only, but it should consist of a broader conversation that is rooted in the country's present realities and applies lessons learned from past efforts.

Third, Nigeria needs to make accountability of perpetrators and of the authority central to its response. Nigerians need justice. Criminality in the Middle Belt and elsewhere in other parts of the country has grown, in part because of impunity.

The trends underlining the violence that we see in different parts of the country can be traced and can be anticipated if the appropriate government security agencies have effective early warning and rapid-response mechanisms.

Nigeria should also start laying the groundwork for peaceful elections in 2027. This year, 2025, will be a critical year for elections in Nigeria, as the current chairperson of Nigeria's election commission completes his second and final term in December 2025.

Finally, Nigeria needs to appoint an ambassador to the United States. It has been 18 months since Nigeria recalled its Ambassador from Washington and other diplomatic missions worldwide. Nigeria needs senior diplomatic representation to deepen its engagement with the U.S. across all spectrums, including in discussions like these, and to support and engage with Nigeria's dynamic and largely successful diaspora communities across the United States.

In conclusion, clearly a fresh approach is needed, both for Nigeria and for the U.S. U.S. and internal policies on Nigeria must include a better understanding of the country's complexities. Stepping back to honestly reanalyze how governance in Nigeria really works—and how it does not work—is crucial to addressing the question of conflict and persecution in Nigeria.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Onubogu follows:]



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Testimony by Oge Onubogu, Director Africa Program, Wilson Center

U.S. House of Representatives – Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa

“Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The case for a CPC designation”

Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 9:00 AM
 Rayburn House Office Building 220

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and distinguished Committee members,
 I appreciate this opportunity to testify before this committee today.

I serve as Director of the Africa Program at the Wilson Center, although the views expressed here are my own. I have over two decades of experience working on peace, security, and governance issues in Africa, including almost 10 years leading projects focused on conflict mitigation, civil-military relations, and community security in Nigeria and across West Africa.

For over 20 years, the Wilson Center Africa program has actively worked to address the most critical issues facing Africa and U.S. - Africa relations, with the aim of helping to build mutually beneficial relations between the United States and the continent and enhancing knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States.

In keeping with the nonpartisan, policy focused work of the Wilson Center, I offer the following comments and recommendations

Consecutive U.S. Administrations have described the U.S. relationship with Nigeria as among the most important in Africa. Nigeria is a key economic, security, and development partner, and its population is projected to overtake the United States and become the third most populous country in the world by 2050.

This year marks 26 years of uninterrupted democratic rule in Nigeria, the longest period of constitutional governance since the country's independence from the British in October 1960. Furthermore, as Nigeria serves a second one-year chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the country's leaders understandably expect to lead regional coordination efforts, given Nigeria's size, political and economic influence, and decision-making power within the bloc.

As ECOWAS turns 50 this year, good leadership will be crucial amid the recent breakaway of three junta-led countries from the bloc, rising terrorism, and growing threats to economic stability and peaceful coexistence that have beset the subregion in recent years. However, whether and how Nigeria tackles its own internal governance and security challenges will set the pace not only at home, but also in the broader West Africa region.

As Nigeria's internal struggles worsen, what is clear is that the country's instability is rooted in a vital shortcoming: After 64 years of independence, the country still struggles to cultivate a national

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identity rooted in basic freedoms and dignity for its people. In Nigeria today, ethnicity, religion, and language – not nationality – remain the benchmarks of identity for the country's highly diverse population¹.

While Nigeria has witnessed repeated ethnic and religious clashes over the years, its ethnically and religiously diverse population is not the problem or the cause of these conflicts. The Pan-African polling institute, Afrobarometer, in a 2021 survey², showed that nine in 10 Nigerians are tolerant of people from different religions, ethnic groups, nationalities, and political parties. The problem, however, is that ethnicity and religion in Nigeria have become instrumental markers that are used to mobilize and successfully acquire power, resources, and political dominance.

It is important to understand the nature of the violence in Nigeria – and its causes, which extend beyond the religious or ethnic overtones that appear to motivate that animosity.

I grew up in Jos, Plateau state in Nigeria's Middle-Belt region, and I visit the region regularly, including in December 2024, just a few days before the gruesome Christmas weekend attack that killed an estimated 200 villagers and forced tens of thousands to flee. Such attacks have plagued Plateau State for more than 20 years. Having grown up in Nigeria's Middle Belt region, I am deeply aware of the compounding impacts of these protracted conflicts on once-vibrant communities. In actuality, religious and ethnic violence is a symptom, and the hate speech and conspiracy theories³ that often drive it are throwing fuel on a fire long ignited by Nigerians' frustration over what essentially are failures of governance.

Nigeria is faced with several different but overlapping security crises. Almost every corner of the country has been hit by some form of violence and crime. In November 2024, the Nigerian military confirmed the emergence of a new armed terrorist group known as 'Lukarawa' in the northwestern part of the country. This is in addition to Nigeria already fighting several armed groups, including Islamist militants Boko Haram and its offshoot Islamic State West Africa Province and several bandit gangs. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI)⁴, Nigeria now ranks sixth, moving up from eighth position in 2023 and 2024. Since 2011, GTI has consistently ranked Nigeria among the ten most terrorism-affected countries in the world, however, this has not changed the situation. In fact, the situation in the country has only worsened, indicating larger ongoing systemic challenges in addressing terrorism.

Whether labeled as "banditry" or "terrorism" or "communal clashes" or "ethno-religious conflict," at the root of this violence is a failure of governance to meet the population's most basic needs – not only livelihoods, education, and health care, but also their need for perpetrators to be held legitimately accountable⁵.

Elections and political appointments are two primary areas where the interplay between religion and politics is most clearly demonstrated in Nigeria. Nigerian political leaders rhetorically romanticize Nigeria's "unity" but do little to cultivate it. On the contrary, they often stoke ethnic and religious tensions in election campaigns, seemingly to distract from their failure to deliver for the people they are supposed to serve.

¹ AfroBarometer Working Paper, December 2024 "You're not like us! Ethnic discrimination and national belonging in Nigeria [WP206-Ethnic-discrimination-and-national-belonging-in-Nigeria-Afrobarometer-30nov24.pdf](#)

² Afro Barometer, News release, 2021 [news_release-tolerance_high_trust_low_in_nigeria-10march21.pdf](#)

³ The New Humanitarian, 2022: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/9/14/why-support-for-secession-is-growing-in-southeast-Nigeria>

⁴ Global Terrorism Index, 2025 [Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf](#)

⁵ Economist, 2024 [Kidnappers are wreaking havoc in Nigeria](#)

The divisive political climate of the 2023 elections illustrated this tendency. It deepened rifts among ethnic and religious groups that already existed, largely because they have long been inflamed by political, religious, or other community “leaders.” The toxic narrative of “us” versus “them” that permeated the campaign had far-reaching consequences, even fueling calls for secession in different parts of the country. Furthermore, off-cycle elections conducted in 2024 exposed the fragility of Nigeria’s electoral process, as some political actors openly intimidated election officials and violently disrupted elections, suspending by-elections in the states of Kano, Akwa Ibom, and Enugu⁶. These events confirm that political actors are succeeding in rolling back reforms introduced to enhance the integrity and quality of elections in Nigeria.

Secessionist movements, however, remain primarily isolated – for now – because most Nigerians crave the unity that at least some leaders have promised rhetorically, even as they failed to deliver. Polls show that a majority of Nigerians value diverse communities, identify equally with their ethnicity and nationality and believe there is more that unites Nigerians as one people than divides them. An Africa Polling Institute survey, [the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey 2022](#)⁷, for example, found that, while divisions among Nigerians were growing, 71 percent are still “willing to cooperate” in building unity. These data, despite Nigeria’s increasing tensions and dysfunctions, suggest that it is not concepts of unity and comity across ethnic and religious groups that Nigerians oppose but rather the structural sources of the poverty, inequality, violence, corruption, and impunity that affect their daily lives.

Certainly, recent data such as that from the non-denominational global network [Open Doors](#), appears to indicate that violence against Christians, who make up 46 percent of Nigeria’s population, was unaddressed by the previous Buhari administration, and no tangible progress has been made under the current Tinubu administration. But we also know that violence overall in Nigeria has increased over time. Nigeria’s Human Rights Commission reported that complaints of [human rights violations](#) rose by 25 percent in February 2025⁸. Indeed, the Social Cohesion Survey also found that an overwhelming majority of Nigerians (96 percent) consider human rights abuses and violations to be a problem in the country. This indicates not only that violence and rights abuses afflict many groups but also that Nigerians understand and respect the concept of human rights.

So, back to the root causes. Achieving a working democracy and improved governance that can meet people’s needs and halt violent turmoil will require Nigeria’s power structures to broaden their dialogue with society, including with groups now excluded from influence. Open Doors noted that President Tinubu appears to be introducing more balance in Muslim and Christian representation in his Cabinet. Much more will need to be done to build the people’s trust and nurture the inclusion that is currently lacking and that would strengthen Nigeria’s social cohesion.

In 2014, Nigeria’s central government held a five-month “National Conference” that proposed limited changes to the structures of government — yet years later, even these have not been implemented. To support a more thorough dialogue that advances real change, the United States can partner with Nigerians at the grassroots who are looking for solutions for their country and who are ready to confront the failings of the past six decades. That will require a dialogue between the United States and counterparts in Nigeria of unprecedented breadth and honesty, engaging not only Nigeria’s national leadership but also its state and local political leaders and with civil society.

⁶ Punch Newspaper, February 2024. [By-elections: Violence, transport problems force suspension in four states](#)

⁷ [Nigeria Social Cohesion 2022 Report.cdf](#)

⁸ NHRC Reports Over 2 million Complaints, Freedom from Discrimination Suffers the most,

Recommendations for the United States:

Engage deeply and broadly with communities across Nigeria to better understand the nuances driving the conflicts in the country. While it's never wise to dismiss religion as a cause of conflict, it is unproductive to label a conflict as solely driven by religion, when there are so many other factors at play. The root causes of Nigeria's conflicts and insecurity are deeper and more complex than are generally discussed—and that violence is more a symptom than a cause of the real problem.

Prioritize a holistic and long-term vision for U.S engagement with Nigeria on issues of governance and security: It will be impossible to advance U.S. strategic objectives of stability and prosperity in Africa without a peaceful, democratic, and economically thriving Nigeria. The [U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission](#) formed in 2010 already provides a framework that supports country to country discussions on issues of security and governance, among other areas. After 15 years, it is time to take stock. Discussions in the commission should take a fresh look that emphasizes security partnership sustained over the long term, seeking areas where cooperation is still possible, and efforts that are most promising for real change, such as local, non-government initiatives. Security assistance should be shaped with long-term goals that will enable and incentivize specific reforms. Nigeria's partners must recognize that the country's political and security leaders bear a significant share of responsibility for many of Nigeria's security challenges.

Work more with Nigeria's disparate states and its growing city centers: The country's 36 states hold significant power in the realpolitik of Nigeria — and they are distinct enough to warrant specific attention. The U.S. government should decentralize its engagement with Nigeria by strengthening its dialogues with, and support to, receptive government and civic leaders at state and local levels. The states of the Middle Belt, with its population of 45 million, would be a good place to start, given their need for assistance with local-level security to create the safety needed for agriculture and manufacturing that is its base to thrive. This does not mean purely security assistance, but rather the kind of peace-building initiatives that would be more sustainable over time.

Support democratic actors that are advancing inclusive peace process and conflict resolution. Civic and religious leaders can serve as important bridges between communities and the government, especially in communities where the government lacks credibility. Nigeria's civil society is vibrant, and surveys show that [Nigerians view religious leaders as more trustworthy, and less corrupt than public institutions](#). Supporting moderate religious leaders, community networks, and civic actors to develop balanced messaging about the crisis would help to shift the discussion from the identities and religious backgrounds of those involved in the conflict to focus more on identifying sustainable solutions to resolve conflict.

Partner with the Nigerian government to make accountability central to the response to conflict and persecution. Support the judiciary to uphold the rule of law, and coordinate intelligence sharing with institutions of government that are working to track financial transactions related to suspected terrorist activity, including terrorist funding.

Rethink U.S. and international policies that lead to knee-jerk responses to crises. Reactive, quick-win actions that may seem beneficial to Nigerians could have larger and far-reaching negative impacts. For example, the Boko Haram kidnapping of schoolgirls from the town of

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Chibok 10 years ago attracted dramatic attention worldwide with the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. But that also created unyielding pressure on both the Nigerian authorities and the international community to respond. Unfortunately, the slap-dash Safe Schools Initiative crafted by Nigeria and international donors to improve security at schools in the northeast region turned out to be unsustainable, and its effectiveness is now being questioned. Such kidnappings have not only continued in the region but also have spread west.

Revive the U.S congressional bipartisan caucus on Nigeria, which served as a space to prioritize discussions on issues of U.S-Nigeria relations. An active congressional bipartisan caucus will signify the importance of U.S-Nigeria relations and create a forum to proactively consider wide perspectives on different issues or concerns to better inform legislative response.

Recommendations for the Nigerian Government:

Coordinate federal and state action and messaging: effective coordination so desperately needed among Nigeria's federal and state governments is too often undermined by finger-pointing. That must stop. Since assuming office, President Tinubu has called for better synergy and cooperation among security agencies to address insecurity in the country. However, concrete steps must be taken to move this aspiration into reality.

Get serious about police reform. In December 2024, the governors of Nigeria's 36 states unanimously endorsed the [establishment of state police as a measure to combat the nation's rising insecurity](#). While this is a significant and forward leaning shift towards addressing the [perennial](#) problem of policing in Nigeria, it is still unclear how this will be operationalized. Police reform should not be about state policing only, but it should consist of a broader conversation that is rooted in the country's present realities and applies lessons learned from past efforts. There has already been a failure of at least three police reform committees under different administrations (in 2006, 2009, and 2012).

Make accountability – of perpetrators and of the authorities -- central to the response. Nigerians need justice. Criminality in the Middle Belt, as elsewhere, has grown in part because of impunity. The trends underlying the violence can be traced and can be anticipated if the appropriate government security agencies have effective early warning and rapid response mechanisms.

Start laying the groundwork for peaceful elections in 2027: This year will be critical for elections in Nigeria. The current chairperson of the election commission will complete his second and final term in December 2025. This leadership transition will have significant impacts on the management of elections in 2027. The government must prioritize restoring citizen trust in the electoral process by building national consensus on the composition of the commission's leadership and management structure. It should also identify both key stakeholders and potential spoilers and secure their commitment to peaceful elections.

Appoint a Nigerian Ambassador to the United States. It has been 18 months since Nigeria recalled its Ambassador from Washington, and other diplomatic missions worldwide. Nigeria needs senior diplomatic representation to deepen its engagement with the U.S across all spectrums (including on discussions like these), and to support and engage with Nigeria's dynamic and largely successful diaspora communities across the U.S.

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In conclusion, Clearly, a fresh approach is needed, both for the U.S and Nigeria. U.S policies should certainly embrace Nigeria as an aspiring democracy and strategic partner in Africa, but those policies must include a better understanding of the country's complexities. Stepping back to honestly re-analyze how governance in Nigeria really works -- and how it does not -- is crucial to addressing the question of conflict and persecution in Nigeria.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I look forward to your questions

Mr. SMITH. Thank you so very much for your testimony.

And I think your point about failure of governance couldn't be stronger stated. When the Bishop said a moment ago that when they make calls to law enforcement to respond, they don't come—I have heard that over and over and over again, particularly as it relates to the Fulani.

But I remember, in the early days of Boko Haram, I had Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson testify at several of my hearings, Africa Assistant Secretary, and he just said Boko Haram was a group of bandits, they had no thread of wanting a caliphate, which we found out later they did; that they were not promoting aggressive Islamist views, which they were.

And I did indicate in my opening comments how we tried to get Boko Haram designated as a foreign terrorist organization. And they had even blown up a building that killed some U.N. types, including an American, in Abuja. And all of that was just overlooked.

What Johnnie Carson said here in this room at that hearing was that all Boko Haram was trying to do was to embarrass Goodluck Jonathan, then the President. I said, are you kidding me? You know, embarrass him?

How about they—I mean, when they took the Chibok girls—and I met with several of the Chibok girls that escaped. There were few that escaped, and I met with many of their parents. It had everything to do with turning them into slaves and abusing them horribly and forcing them to change from being Christians—some were Muslim to begin with, but not many—to, you know, a coercive conversion on their part.

And that woke up some people here but not enough.

So, you know, your point about failure to govern couldn't—and I brought it up with Buhari many times as well and got nowhere.

There was an effort to have cooperation on the security side. There was a fusion center, as you might know—I visited it—where our military wanted to work side-by-side with there military to especially use the best and latest means of combating Boko Haram at the time, and it went nowhere.

The Leahy Amendment was invoked by our side, so I had a hearing on that, found out that half of the people that we could have trained would have easily passed muster under the Leahy Amendment—in other words, they didn't have human-rights violations attributed to them—but it never happened. It was a great idea, but it went nowhere.

So you are right, we need to revisit how do we work together on security.

And, again, if I called my local police department in Manchester, New Jersey, because a crime had been committed and they don't show up, that is a gross neglect and a gross failure to govern. That is what, as we know, Christians are facing each and every day.

So I thank you for that. I thank all of you.

Just a couple of quick points, and I will yield to my distinguished colleagues.

In 2016, I wrote the follow-up to Frank Wolf's famous, historic law called the International Religious Freedom Act, and we put a couple of things in there: "Entities of Particular Concern," Boko Haram is on that list, but I do think the Fulani need to be on that

list as well. That is something we should ask the administration to do.

We had a “Designated Persons List” for individuals committing egregious violations of human rights—Back in 2004, I was the author of the Belarus Democracy Act. That legislation, which was the first of its kind led to the Magnitsky Act. We put that into the NDAA to get it passed. It said we targeted individuals, not just the whole country but individuals, who are particularly severe in what they do. These individuals were denied and have no ability to engage economically with the United States in any way, shape, or form.

My hope is that we—and I invite you and I invite anyone who has pertinent information of any particular persons that need to be on that list so that we can individually sanction them. We have done it in other countries all over the world. Started with Belarus, with Lukashenko, but others have been targeted as well. In DR Congo, a lot of Kabila’s people were targeted. It is a very effective mechanism to isolate them while we are working on the country itself. So I invite you, any individuals that you think should be on there.

I do think that the Fulani ought to be an FTO as well. Not only should they be designated an Entity of Particular Concern, but they need to go onto the Foreign Terrorist Organization list because of what they are doing.

Let me also get your thoughts on this and remind everybody that “Country of Particular Concern” requires an annual designation of countries where governments engage in or tolerate—that is the language of the statute, “or tolerate”—particularly severe violations of religious freedom during the reporting year.

During the Obama years—again, I had hearings on this again—they wouldn’t even name countries. I asked him, where are the countries? You know, it says in the statute you “shall”; it doesn’t say you “may.” And we didn’t even get a country or a list of those countries.

So we need to up our game, if you will, on promoting religious freedom everywhere. And Nigeria, in my opinion, it just stands out as an area that we need to do so much more on.

So if you want to speak to any of those thoughts about Entities of Particular Concern. My hope is that the President—and I think, Mr. Perkins, you put it well—that a very robust effort will be coming soon with regards to religious freedom everywhere, including in Nigeria, I mean, the suffering brethren of all kinds.

And I met with—every time I go, I meet with imams. If they speak out, they have got a mark on their back, and they will be killed by the weekend. And I am not exaggerating. I heard it from so many, I began to say, “OK, they are not going to speak out.”

And I remember one particular imam telling me how “Boko Haram, they are not us.” And I said, “I know that.” You know, they are a radicalized group of people who kill and maim and slaughter and rape in order to get their way.

So law enforcement, if any of you want to speak to that. It seems to me that is so basic. If you don’t have a government that responds to a request—if you had a fire going, would the firefighters show up? I hope so. Well, law enforcement needs to show up.

And when they start prosecuting people, you will see a different situation in Nigeria, I believe.

Ms. SHEA. Well, if I may, Mr. Chairman, yes, I would like to respond to that.

I think you are right, and everyone on this witness table has said the same thing, that there has been this failure to hold accountable the perpetrators of these atrocities.

And it is actually worse than someone robbing your home. It is a systematic, coordinated attack that cleanses entire villages and farming areas of the population who have a certain religious profile that they don't like, I guess. But we don't know, we really don't know, what the motives or intents are, because the government doesn't investigate or bring to trial anyone for these horrible attacks.

And as the Bishop pointed out—and he is incredibly courageous to come forward today. As he said, he doesn't want to die twice. I hope not even once.

But once this process happens of clearing an entire village, burning the property and taking control of it, the IDPs are then sent to temporary camps, where the churches help or others help and feed them and sustain them, until they are permanently relocated somewhere else—maybe a bigger camp, maybe to other parts of the country, maybe outside the country.

This is not making any sense. It is not sustainable. And I think there has to be personal pressure, because the government has no political will. So no amount of programs are going to help this unless there is—help resolve this situation if there is no political will to do anything.

And that is what we are seeing over and over, year after year, 20 years of the Fulani herdsmen armed to their teeth with AKs. According to scholars who have written about this, Nigerians, these guns are given to them, these weapons are given to them by the breeders, the cattle breeders, the cattle oligarchs, as the Bishop called them. And they have to be held accountable.

Also, the top people in the government have to be held accountable on a personal level. They want their visas; they want their bank accounts in the United States. I think this would have teeth. And——

Mr. SMITH. It is already law. It is already law. We just need to——

Ms. SHEA. It is already law.

And we should be getting the names of the criminal justice people who are failing who are in the leadership of the government.

And you are right, Nigeria is America's most important partner in Africa, and it is a land of the future, and there is a lot of promise there. And we need to help them get control of the out-of-control terror and particularly this Fulani problem, whatever you want to call it, terror or criminality.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Jacobs?

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Onubogu, I want to start with you. I really appreciated what you said in your testimony about the need to understand the drivers of violence in Nigeria, which extend beyond religious and ethnic

overtones. So I want to start off with a conversation talking about what these drivers are.

What do you see as the primary drivers of conflict and violence across the Middle Belt? And what are the political and economic, social, or historical factors that exacerbate the conflict in that region?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you, Representative Jacobs.

And, if I may, before I respond to that, just to touch on the point about police reform, as was mentioned, Nigeria is significantly underpoliced. And as I had mentioned in my remarks, there have been attempts at police reform. At least we have actually seen three, in 2006, in 2009, and 2012.

So the government has been engaging in trying to address the system with the way Nigeria is structured, Nigeria's security architecture, where the police is centered in the center of the country. As I mentioned, in December of last year, Nigerian State Governors have started looking at decentralizing the police.

A lot needs to be done to actually operationalize that, since these are conversations that have been happening over 20 years. So actually trying to move that aspiration to reality is something, as I had mentioned in recommendations, that the U.S. could support the administration in looking at.

In terms of the questions on the drivers of violence, as I had mentioned in my remarks, where Nigeria's identity—the government has failed on really crafting an understanding of identity, one that is based on basic freedoms and dignity for the people. People still identify based on their ethnicity, religion, and language.

And many politicians, political actors, across the board, across the Middle Belt and in different parts of the country, too, as well, have tapped into this and used this to instigate violence or instigate conflict, mostly for the purposes of acquiring power, acquiring resources, and acquiring position.

So this is at the root of Nigeria's—is at the root of the conflict that we see.

Taking it back to the question of governance and really understanding the history of violence and understanding the history of political participation in Nigeria is key and important if we are to really tackle these conflicts. If not, we end up only—the conflict that we see today is only a symptom of much larger problems.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you.

Which types of U.S. Government investments have been most effective in addressing some of these drivers of conflict?

Ms. ONUBOGU. In my opinion, programs that have been most effective are programs that really work in partnership with the government, in partnership with communities, programs that are able to inform and shape—programs that are able to inform and design interventions that are able to effectively tackle concerns that are identified by communities.

It is important that communities are part and parcel of identifying the problem. And, again, in terms of programs that we have also seen that have been successful, in complex environments like Nigeria, involving nuanced views, involving diverse voices in these conversations have often led to progress.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you.

Mr. Perkins, I have a question for you. Last year, the State Department hired a seasoned expert to conduct an analysis of conflict and religious-freedom dynamics in northern Nigeria. This expert was originally recommended by USCIRF Commissioner Frank Wolf to gain a better understanding of these issues and advise the Department on the exact topic of this hearing today.

Unfortunately, due to the Trump administration's aid freeze and cuts, this project is paused.

Can you discuss the benefits of this kind of research project, what information it would help provide the U.S. Government, and how this research could help us effectively address religious-freedom challenges in Nigeria?

Mr. PERKINS. Certainly.

I do think there are valuable projects in which the Federal Government, State Department, does fund. But I think we have an overwhelming amount of evidence to suggest that we have a problem, and I think everyone agrees, that whether religion—and I agree with the comments that have been made by everybody on both this panel as well as the members of the subcommittee. This is a complex issue.

But to deny the fact that—and I am not suggesting anyone is denying this. But to say that religion is not a part of the mix would be to deny reality, because it is. It has been weaponized by some, as testimony has given light to today. So we have the evidence there.

I think that by moving forward with the designation we get the attention of the country of Nigeria and then, hopefully, the will of the Nigerian Government to partner in legitimate programs—because there are many. You are absolutely correct; there are many legitimate programs that can help advance democracy and security in Nigeria. I worked with the State Department on part of those in developing the security of the local law enforcement. So there are legitimate ones.

But I think it—I agree with the administration in pausing until we do an analysis of what is working and what is not.

Ms. JACOBS. OK.

Ms. Onubogu, do you think additional research on the conflict dynamics in northern Nigeria would be beneficial for the U.S. Government's response?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Yes, I do.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you. So do I. And I implore the Trump administration to allow this project to continue and make sure our embassy is adequately staffed.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

I would like to recognize Mr. Huizenga.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate you holding this very important hearing.

This is actually something that we had done previously, or you had led, and good to see some of you folks again here.

Specifically, I have a quick question at the front end of both the Bishop and Ms. Onubogu—bogu, correct?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Yes.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Has Nigeria always been this violent?

Bishop Anagbe. Yes. Not this level of violence. Because this is almost like an open war declared on some parts of Nigeria.

And then it is multidimensional, from Boko Haram to bandits. Boko Haram is the northeast; the bandits are in the northwest. And then the Fulani terrorists are in the north-central, which is Middle Belt.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Yes.

Bishop Anagbe. And these attacks are simultaneously carried out in places where

[inaudible] of violence is being experienced. And the worsening part of it, the government is very, very inactive.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Ms. Onubogu, yes, you were talking about the history of violence. Has it always been as violent as we are seeing today?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Yes, as I say, it is important to understand the nature of violence. As I have mentioned in my remarks, this year basically marks 26 years of uninterrupted civilian rule, which means there was a transition in 1999 from military rule.

Going back all the way to Nigeria's independence, every republic, dating back to the first republic, we have always seen some forms of violence that have often been shaped around identity lines, religion, or background. And as time has gone on, it has often taken on a different shape or form of its own.

So it is important to understand that the violence is interconnected.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Yes.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Things may look different, but they are connected by the same underlying issues.

Mr. HUIZENGA. What I'm trying to understand, though, is, has Nigeria always been this violent, and maybe a slightly different form, in your opinion?

Ms. ONUBOGU. There has always been an element of violence.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Sure. There has been an element.

Well, you are from Jos. And I am familiar with Jos. I have had family members who have traveled to Jos and Lagos, because the church denomination I happen to be a member of I am sure you are familiar with, which is the Christian Reform Church. The Christian Reform Church, based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, actually has more members in Nigeria than they do in all of North America. It is basically an African church headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, of all things.

I will tell you that the people that I have talked to who have been either on the mission field there or who have lived there or who have been a part of that, they believe that there has been an up-tick in violence and that the country wasn't—it may have been percolating in a different way, but there was not this outright violence.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Uh-huh.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Many of them tell me that they believe that it has been the rise of radical Islam and jihadism that has really brought that to the surface.

Whether you are saying that is a cultural thing or whether it is a religious thing, I think we can't ignore the fact that radical

jihadists have taken on a very, very different tactic. Let's put it that way, if you want to call violence a tactic.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Uh-huh.

Mr. HUIZENGA. But that is why, I think, this drives many of us to say, OK, what is happening here? What has changed?

We know that there is violence throughout Africa, you know, whether it is in South Sudan, whether it is in other places that we are seeing, oftentimes—right now in Rwanda and in the Congo, that conflict that is there right now. There is a lot of mix to it, but I think, specifically, when it comes to Nigeria, that there has been some sort of change.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Yes. And if I may just respond very quickly to that.

While my family is from the southern part of Nigeria, I grew up in the Middle Belt of Nigeria and, obviously, understand the dynamics of the Middle Belt, indigent versus non-indigent. I was also part and parcel, faced, looking at how things have evolved over time.

So, even while we talk about Boko Haram today or the recently identified new terror group Lakurawa that was just mentioned in November, it also dates all the way back to the 1980's where there were groups like the Maitatsine movement and others.

So the point that I am—

Mr. HUIZENGA. And oftentimes that was regarding moving of energy and those kinds of things, correct?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Yes.

So the point I was making—or the point that I am making is that the environment, the weakness of governance—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Sure.

Ms. ONUBOGU [continuing]. allows groups like these, allows ideologies like these to thrive, and the weakness of governance is at the root of these concerns.

Because data shows us that Nigerians value their unity, Nigerians value their diversity. Very recent data shows us that it is not about religion our ethnicity but the weaknesses in government.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I think we are on parallel tracks. We may not have our tracks cross exactly, but we are on parallel tracks. I think there is a weakness of government that is clear on that.

But I do want to move on.

Mr. Chairman, we talked about and, in fact, Ms. Onubogu referenced the December 2023 Christmas Eve killings. I led a letter to the State Department, Mr. Chairman, that included some folks who were on the committee, expressing concern to Secretary Blinken and their decision in 2023 to not designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern.

May 1, of 2024, I received a three-page letter back from the Assistant Secretary where the word "Christian" appeared once. It was alongside "Islam" in the response. I would like to submit that for the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

[Please refer to the Appendix for this information]

Mr. HUIZENGA. So, basically, my calls to the State Department went really unanswered. And, frankly, I think the State Department employed, shall we say, active avoidance on the issue, and I

was given inadequate responses that failed to address the concerns that many of us had.

I think, is part of the problem with the last administration and among their staff, was an overt refusal to acknowledge that Christians specifically were being targeted. They would have no problem identifying others who had been targeted, rightfully so, other ethnic minorities, but when it specifically came to Christians, it wasn't politically a good time for them to talk about it. And that is a huge problem.

The fact remains that 90 percent of global total Christian deaths occur on the African continent. And that is according to Open Doors, somebody that you had referenced earlier.

I want to ask all the witnesses: Do you believe that the Tinubu administration has intentionally not taken the required actions to ensure the safety and security of—we can broaden it out for all ethnic minorities, but let's specifically address Christians, as well, throughout the country.

Ms. Shea?

Ms. SHEA. Yes. Thank you, Congressman, for your questions and your comments.

Just to address the terror issue or the violence issue that you raised, Nigeria did get worse on the Global Terrorism Index over the past year. So it is quantitative that it is intensifying.

The Fulani, for the last 20 years, have been being armed with automatic weapons by, according to scholars, Nigerians scholars, by cattle breeders who hire them. And so this is contributing to the up-tick in violence as well.

I have forgotten your question now.

Mr. HUIZENG. Oh, just whether the Tinubu administration—

Ms. SHEA. Oh. Yes.

Mr. HUIZENG [continuing]. has sort of intentionally—are they doing what is really required to ensure safety of their citizens?

Ms. SHEA. Yes. You know, on intent and what they intend to do, I have tried to bring out prominent voices in my testimony, in my written testimony, who believe that this is deliberate on the part of the government. There are others who feel that the government is just lax, but some feel that the government is complicit.

I saw that, frankly, in the Catholic Bishops' letter that was released recently that was referred to by me and the Bishop, about the fact that Islamic law of closing down—or at least somebody's interpretation of Islamic law of closing down all schools in some of the 12 northern states to observe, forcibly observe, Ramadan is—part of the Bishops' alarm at this is a sort of creeping introduction of Islam as the law of the land, not only in those 12 northern states but throughout the country.

I have heard that from a number of prominent voices, whether Catholic Bishops or others—civic leaders and even Governors of some of the southern states, central states.

Mr. HUIZENG. I am going to skip over, if you don't mind, Mr. Perkins, to the Bishop.

What is your take on the Tinubu administration? Are they actively trying to protect that, or are they allowing it and turning a blind eye?

Bishop Anagbe. I think, to my own opinion, the government certainly has good intention, but there is no implementation. And I think it is simply because they want to be politically correct, not to offend any particular group of persons. And so that is why the inactivity is taking place, and people are feeling emboldened to continue to do what is going on.

And the failure of the security, further, to apprehend those who are involved is a clear sign that they don't—they just—everybody—people are dying.

So, if the government wants to take action, they will do.

Mr. HUIZENG. You have been very generous, Mr. Chairman. I do also want to hit on one other thing. You know, this hearing is specifically about Nigeria, but given the expertise and the people that we have, I would love to hear a little broader view.

I had the opportunity to recently sit down with Bishop Dennis Nthumbi, who is the African director of Israel Allies Foundation. We talked at length about the systematic persecutions of Christians and Jews that are happening throughout the continent and the rise in antisemitism there.

Mr. Chairman, for the record, I would also like to post the Bishop's report on accounts of widespread violence and destruction of churches and other religious sites that have been happening. So I would like to submit that for the record here.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

[Please refer to the Appendix for this information:]

Mr. HUIZENG. In fact, the Bishop is here with us today, in the back. And I applaud him and his work as well.

But getting back to specifically Nigeria, you know, we have seen a rise throughout the African continent. We are talking specifically, though, about the tools that we have in Congress.

I am curious, from each one of the witnesses: Is the CPC, this destination, is that necessary, and is it warranted for Nigeria right now, or is this some sort of knee-jerk reaction?

Ms. SHEA. Well, I think it is warranted. We can't fudge the facts. We need the truth to come out. This is one of the worst situations in the world, as you know, for Christians. And the law is clear. If the government engages in or tolerates egregious violations of religious freedom, which the government certainly is, regardless of whether it is deliberate or not on their part, I think that we must do that.

It does put pressure. Governments do not like to be on the short list of the world's worst persecutors. It is a platform for beginning to reassess American policy on how we deal with this partnership that is increasingly uncomfortable and untenable as they become more terror-ridden and their religious communities are attacked relentlessly with impunity.

So, yes.

Mr. HUIZENG. I will put you down as a "yes"?

Ms. SHEA. Put me down as a "yes."

Mr. HUIZENG. Yes, Okay.

And I don't want to necessarily have to go back over as to why it was removed. Our job here today is as to does this administration need to reapply the CPC.

Mr. Perkins?

Mr. PERKINS. I would say yes.

If I could provide some context, during my time as Chairman of USCIRF, we didn't randomly give out CPC as, you know, labels, that we just wanted to go after a particular country. In fact, during my time, we worked to take countries off our watchlist——

Mr. HUIZENGA. That is the goal, right?

Mr. PERKINS. That is the goal. This is a tool.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I mean, we want to improve those relations.

Mr. PERKINS. This is a tool.

We used it—we actually took Sudan off the list. I traveled to Sudan. Unfortunately, things have changed there in the last few years, but we were very hopeful. And this CPC status was a tool. They wanted to get it off so that they could have access to international banking. They didn't want to be on that list. It worked.

We worked to get Egypt—I met with President El-Sisi multiple times—to get them off the watchlist. And they were making great progress.

Mr. HUIZENGA. It is kind of amazing when you look at some of the list of countries, like Egypt, that have been on this, and the fact that Nigeria and its current situation isn't seems a little stunning to me.

Mr. PERKINS. It does. That is why I do think it needs to be on the list and utilized as a tool to address both the religious-freedom issue and the underlying issues.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I have taken way too much time, but, Bishop, quickly, and then Ms. Onubogu. Do you believe Nigeria should be on this designation?

Bishop ANAGBE. My response would be—thank you very much. My response would be yes. One, because CPC designation is not punitive. That is one. It is corrective so that you will be able to see what——

Mr. HUIZENGA. Not punitive to the citizens, specifically——

Bishop ANAGBE. Exactly.

Mr. HUIZENGA [continuing]. unlike a lot of other sanctions.

Bishop ANAGBE. Exactly. It is not punitive.

It is also corrective so that you will be able to realign yourself with the global practices of, like, human-rights violations. We need to—you need to know.

And you have to, because Nigeria is not a—you can't say it's just because it is a kind of domestic affair. Domestic affair involves people's lives. And they are going. So the world cannot watch while countries are just—citizens are just being killed.

I would think, if we do this, that helps to bring the financiers of these programs—or, these violations to book first. The ammunition these terrorists, Fulanis or whoever, carry along is not manufactured in Nigeria. It is bought somewhere. Those local boys in the bush don't have money to buy those ammunition. Who supplies them? Who equips them? So, if this is done, certainly you have a searchlight on who is involved.

So, for me, yes.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Okay.

Ms. Onubogu?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you for that question.

Making a designation as what you said is beyond my institutional purview. What I provide is more policy-focused, nonpartisan, unbiased research, ensuring that the facts speak for itself. I will leave that to the committee to make the designation.

But as we look at the research in Nigeria and on Nigeria, it is important that we understand that Nigeria is not your typical nation-State. This is a State where identities are formed along lines of ethnicity, religion. And so, at the end of the day, those that may be—maybe try to hold accountable may not actually see themselves as accountable to the citizens.

So this is why I say it is important for us to take a look at the research, take a look at the data, to make informed decisions.

Thank you.

Mr. HUIZENG. So is that an official pass, not an opinion as to whether we ought to have the CPC?

Ms. ONUBOGU. As I said, it is beyond my institutional purview.

Mr. HUIZENG. I would argue, Mr. Chairman, it is a policy debate and discussion that we are having.

But, with that, I have taken a lot of time, and I appreciate that, to my colleagues as well. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

I would like to now recognize Ms. Jayapal.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Having lived and worked all over the world, including across the African continent, on international health and development, I think it is very important that we think about how we use all the tools in the toolbox. And I have appreciated USCIRF's work on protecting all religious freedom and calling out countries, including my birth country of India, for issues around persecution of Christians and Muslims. But I think the central question here goes to Ms. Onubogu's point about weakness of government.

I think that is the phrase you used. And I think it really is critical. Because—it is not that I don't agree with Mr. Perkins that we should address religious freedom. I do think we should. But I think, at the core, when you look at this issue, it is the weakness of government that allows extremism of any religion to thrive.

That is why I think that the way in which USAID has now been stripped and paused, all of the funding has been paused—83 percent of funding for USAID has currently been stopped—is a problem. Because many of those projects were actually trying to address the underlying root causes that I think, perhaps, there is some agreement on the panel that we should be addressing.

And so The New York Times recently reported a list of words and terms that the Trump administration has banned or restricted from government communications. And those included things like “cultural differences,” “community diversity,” “discrimination,” “prejudice,” “victim,” and even “women.” It makes it very hard to think about nuanced programs that address those underlying causes.

And so, Ms. Onubogu, I want to ask you, how would banning projects that utilize those terms affect the U.S.'s ability to accurately describe and respond to violence in Nigeria?

Ms. ONUBOGU. So thank you for the question.

Working in complex environments like Nigeria and elsewhere requires being able to take into account the total picture of occurrences in different parts of the country. The way we define issues as peace and violence may seem different in different communities and different—across different communities in Nigeria.

So it would be necessary to take into account the complexity and diversity of Nigeria toward trying to ensure we can devise sustainable solutions to addressing root causes of violence there.

Ms. JAYAPAL. In fact, I used “diversity” in my opening statement, but that, I guess, would tag it as a project that is not worthwhile.

I want to specifically focus on a State Department project in northeastern Nigeria called Nigerian Youth CARE. This program has been suspended by the Trump administration. It provided Nigerian youth with mentorship and training on how to bridge religious divides, and it launched initiatives that were meant to reduce hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric on social media.

Could you explain, Ms. Onubogu, how programs that focus on inter-religious dialog can actually assist in reducing the occurrence of religious violence and extremism?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you.

So points about youth, youth making up—70 percent of the population in Nigeria is below the age of 35. I think it has been referenced by others on this panel, too, as well, the importance of engaging youth.

I think in complex environments like Nigeria where identities are formed or identities are formed around ethnicity or religion, and especially in communities where we have seen protracted conflicts that have taken on a different life of their own, time after time—again, as I mentioned, in the case of Plateau State, we have seen conflicts going on for over 20 years—it is important to bring voices together, to bring people together, to bring communities together to be able to identify what the problems are and find ways to work through them together.

So being able to push inter-religious dialog or interfaith dialog—and some of them we have witnessed on the ground—is a good example of work that could be done to bridge divides, bridge gaps in Nigeria.

In fact, data actually shows that, in Nigeria, as in some other countries, too, as well, on the continent, but in Nigeria specifically, religious leaders actually are really trusted by their communities. And we have seen several examples of interfaith mediation efforts across Nigeria that have been really successful.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Well, that leads me to another project around good governance. The International Republican Institute formerly funded a project in Nigeria to educate political party leaders on good governance strategies and bringing traditionally politically marginalized groups in Nigeria, including women, young people, religious minorities, into the political process. That is another project that this administration has ended.

What is the importance of representative democracy in Nigeria and the value of representation for traditionally marginalized groups, including religious minorities?

I will start with you.

But I am interested in your perspective on this as well, Mr. Perkins.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you.

So, as I mentioned in my remarks, elections and political appointments are two important areas where we see the interplay between religion and politics, where we have seen time and time again that politicians romanticize Nigeria's unity, but, basically, when it comes to elections, they just use it to instigate and galvanize votes.

As I mentioned, this year, 2025, is a critical year for elections in Nigeria. The chair of Nigeria's Independent National Election Commission, his term runs out in December of this year.

If we go back to 2023 and we see how divisive those elections were, it is important to start laying the groundwork now to ensure that political actors are not in a position to utilize religion or utilize ethnicity to foment violence and to garner votes. We are already seeing examples of what is happening with the by-elections that happened in 2024.

So it is really important to start, as the country, as Nigeria starts thinking about sort of the makeup of the leadership, what the new leadership of Nigeria's Independent Election Commission could look like. This is an opportunity to start engaging and identifying key stakeholders in the political space and in civil society, as well, to work together toward ensuring that citizens—that, basically, the faith of citizens is restored in the electoral process.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you.

Mr. Perkins, as I said, I have utilized some of your work and USCIRF's work in other regions, because I think it is important for us to be consistent in allowing for all religious freedom, not just for some.

Your views on how religious freedom and governance, good governance, and democracy interact and why it is important to ensure that we really are protecting it in a place like Nigeria, where you have a very divided population religiously and you need to pay attention to all religious freedom—how would you speak to the importance of that?

Mr. PERKINS. Well, thank you for that question. And I appreciate your interest in this. And you have correctly analyzed it.

I did a lot of interfaith work in the Middle East, sitting down with imams, sitting down with evangelicals in places where they were a very extreme minority. Here in Nigeria, it is a pretty much divided country, equally.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Yes.

Mr. PERKINS. I think it goes back to what has been identified here, is the governance of the country and the will of the current administration.

Now, we could point to a lot of programs—I bet if you and I sat down and had a cup of coffee, we would identify probably a number of programs that we would agree with. Probably wouldn't agree on everything, but we would agree on some things. We have been doing those programs for decades in Nigeria, and we have not seen the positive outcomes.

And so, when we move to see the State Department designate in 2020 this country as a Country of Particular Concern, it was to get

the attention of the government of the country so that we might get them to be willfully engaged, like we have seen in other countries.

So I think this is really not a question about, are some of these projects viable and should they be in place? I think we would all agree that, yes, there are some. But——

Ms. JAYAPAL. Well, not everyone agrees, unfortunately. I mean, 83 percent of these projects have been cut.

Mr. PERKINS. I understand that.

Ms. JAYAPAL. And the question is, do you take a hatchet to something, or do you take a scalpel to something?

Mr. PERKINS. Well, I think we are in a situation where we have to do something different, because the outcomes have not changed. And I think taking this approach, as we are focused on today, declaring this designation as a Country of Particular Concern, hopefully would get the government's attention so that we can have this collaboration to address the underlying issues that have allowed religion to be utilized as a weapon of division.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Well, I agree with you that religion is utilized as a weapon too often. And there are extremists in all religions. I have seen that—you know, my birth country of India has—I am proud that we have had so many religions living side-by-side. And my home State of Kerala is the place where we have the most Christians in the country. And so I understand the importance of that.

But I again go back to your very important point about all of the pieces that are essential here. And I hope that, as we continue this dialog, we think about what it does when you just destroy everything all at once. The hole that is left in the countries that we have been providing critical aid to is enormous, and we know that extremists go to fill any hole that is there.

And so I would just argue that actually it is a very important part of how the United States should be engaging with Nigeria and with countries around the world, to not eliminate and create huge holes in humanitarian assistance and in governance and democracy projects and all of these things. Because, when you do, you are creating another opportunity for chaos to be exploited.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

I recognize Mr. Baird.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for holding this very informative meeting.

I really appreciate the witnesses being here.

But I want to do this. During the Trump administration, Nigeria was rightfully placed on a special watchlist and eventually was designated as a Country of Particular Concern, CPC, we have been talking about.

I was disappointed by the Biden administration's decision to not designate Nigeria as a CPC in the period of 2020 through 2024 with no real reason. And that was despite consistent recommendations from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to maintain that designation.

So, as the second Trump administration continues its work, the committee has a unique opportunity to reevaluate the United

States' policy toward Nigeria in a manner that bolsters stability and religious freedom.

My question goes to Ms. Shea and Mr. Perkins.

A country that is designated and cited as a CPC carries with it a suite of varying sanctions that the President can levy on those countries. So how would these potential punishments, which the President can waive for national-security reasons, how would that prepare the Nigerian Government to make more systematic action to prevent religious-activated violence?

Ms. SHEA. Thank you for your question. I will just give one quick answer, and then I will turn it over to Mr. Perkins, who has a whole roster of recommendations that they developed during his term on USCIRF.

You know, Nigeria is a rich country. It is one of the largest economies, if not the largest economy, in Africa. So it is rich in natural resources, it is rich in human resources. And when Nigerians come to our country, they do extremely well. In fact, they are one of the most successful immigrant groups in the United States.

They need law and order. They need a government with the political will to apply the law and to hold people accountable, as we all acknowledged today. And to do that, I think that they are going to need some pressure, some sanctions on particular officials to deny them visas and bank accounts and financial opportunities here.

I recommend—and Chairman Smith was the pioneer of this in his legislation that he got through. So I think we have to make good use of that and the Magnitsky sanctions, the Global Magnitsky.

I will stop there and let Mr. Perkins—

Mr. PERKINS. Well, as has been discussed already, it allows for both surgical—going after certain individuals, as Nina was just talking about, with sanctions.

It would also affect foreign aid, which I believe will be coming back in different forms and fashions. It will get their attention and put them on a particular path of having to give an account.

It will affect programs. We have been talking about programs, how necessary those programs are, but it affects that. It affects businesses. It depends on how far the President or the administration would want to go.

Unfortunately, what we have seen in the past is that these sanctions, when we have a CPC status, they have been waived, as you made reference to in your comments. I would encourage the administration not to waive these sanctions but to apply them until Nigeria wants to come to terms to address the underlying issues that led to the CPC status.

Mr. BAIRD. One other question in that regard. You know, sometimes we send this assistance, but it ends up being diverted off because of the situation in the country. And so I think it is important that we have governance, as we have been talking about, in this session in order. And you mentioned that about governance in order to make sure that the programs are administered properly. So I agree with that. So I thank both of you.

So, Ms. Onubogu, do you have any questions or any concerns?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Nothing, sir. Thank you.

Mr. BAIRD. Bishop?

Bishop ANAGBE. No.

Mr. BAIRD. I thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. Mr. Jackson?

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Thank you much, Chairman. I am honored to be with you. I thank each and every one of you for participating today and your outstanding comments.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge, are there—or question in general—are in any Muslims in the panel present today?

Mr. SMITH. Will the gentleman yield? I will tell you why I didn't do it.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Yes, sir.

Mr. SMITH. If we had a Muslim here, when he or she went back, they might be killed. I met with many Muslim Imams in Nigeria on several trips, every time I was told that if they speak out, they are marked, and they will be visited.

Now the Christians are in a similar, but not exactly quid pro quo it is going to happen. That is why we are very worried about the bishop, but that is why there is nobody here.

But, you know, just so you know, I speak out for the Muslims as well. But here we did not want to have that situation because we thought of it, and we thought of it very seriously.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Okay. Thank you so much, Chairman. I just wanted the record to reflect that.

The question probably is in the dismantling of the USAID, the Trump administration recently terminated a USAID program called Partner that supported peace-building efforts in northern and north central Nigeria. The \$2 million project helped to strengthen the country's early warning and security response systems and provide training for local leaders, including religious leaders on conflict mitigation and conflict resolution. This project and others like it helped provide local leaders with the mechanisms to alert law enforcement to possible conflicts before they happen.

Partner also helped to facilitate communications between farmer and herder community leaders, often individuals from different religious backgrounds in an attempt to bridge the gap between the two groups.

Ms. Onubogu, what are some of these early warning signs of conflict that you have experienced?

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you for your question. I think going back to my initial remarks, security is at the center of addressing a lot of these concerns that we see in Nigeria. While several communities have been able to put in place early warning signals based on how they communicate in their communities; being able to know who is a new person that comes into the community; or if they see things changing, they are able to track changes in their communities as well. The concern has often been that sometimes response is lacking. And response is lacking because of the way Nigeria security's structure, Nigeria security architecture is set up.

As I mentioned, there have been several attempts at police reform in Nigeria. This is an area where the government needs to strengthen its approach. We have seen even from Open Doors themselves have also mentioned that the Nigerian Government under Tinubu has been making some attempts to address the secu-

rity concerns; to ensure that they are able to bolster the response mechanisms.

As I mentioned, securities are pretty strong at identifying where the problem areas are, where the gaps are. Then should continue to be supported to ensure they build resilience structures in their communities to withstand any sort of violence or intrusion that might come in.

But on the security side, on bolstering and strengthening the security architecture, these are areas where we need to focus on to ensure that any response also matches the early warning signals that are coming from communities.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Thank you so much. And this is a question open to all. When we talk about security and security drivers, what would you say is the leading cause of the security or the insecurity drivers?

Ms. ONUBOGU. So Nigeria is really faced—across every region of the country is facing some form of insecurity or the other. There are different forms of conflict. All of them overlapping in some ways or the other and all protracted over time. So they all take on a different shape or form of their own.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Is there a commonality.

Ms. ONUBOGU. The underlying issue there is a lack of governance and also just the weaknesses in holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. That is the underlying issue there.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. OK. Would you like to add to that, Mr. Perkins?

Mr. PERKINS. I agree. And when we are talking about the issue of governance, it is really kind of the hub which despoles of the programs. And without the hub, the programs don't really work. They will collapse. And I am familiar with some of those programs—one that you actually mentioned. There is also a lot of non-governmental organizations that are working to facilitate communication between various faith groups, not just in Nigeria, but around the world.

But when you have a lack of response—as the Bishop testified—there was a 2-week notice given, but no response from the government.

And so until we get the attention of the hub, and we get Nigeria's government agreeing that they have got to reform and provide protection and rights for all their people, I don't think our programs work.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Well, let me ask you one other question generally to the panel. Will the CPC increase or decrease food security amongst the Nigerians?

Mr. PERKINS. Well, I will say from history what we have found is that the CPC status gets the attention of the government and—

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. The question is will it increase or decrease?

Mr. PERKINS. Well, I think long-term it will increase because it will deal with the underlying issues which have created instability, insecurity in the country.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. How about in the short-term?

Mr. PERKINS. We have a real risk in the short-term just because of present circumstances. As we have talked about, the bread belt or the bread basket of the country is being—the farmers are being displaced. So we have a real issue. And this is why this is urgent is because if we don't address it now—and you see the migration coming out of Nigeria as has been testified to today—the surrounding countries can't handle it. You will have a serious shortage of food, shelter, and security.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. OK. Thank you. I am very familiar with the region and the insecurity on the northern borders. Probably the last part I will leave to that is we first start with the demographics. And I would assume most of us are Christians that are in here. And when you have children, even scripturally, the Bible has a mandate on us feeding the children. I don't think many of the children in Nigeria that ideologically are drawn—if you look at more than half the population, the 110 million people that are under the age of 18 years of age are not that ideologically driven. And I looked up a number that yesterday I found probably pretty astounding, that 41 percent of the population of Nigerians are under the age of 15. Forty-one percent of the population is under the age of 15.

I think that the CPC would enhance more insecurity for food. I think it is very important that you feed children, and out of that you can gain their attention. Even we know the scriptures of Jesus having had the lunch and fed the multitude. And he brought those children in. He fed them and asked them to come forth. Ms. Shea?

Ms. SHEA. Yes, thank you. Yes, I agree that food and medicine need to continue in our foreign assistance programs for Nigeria. I think that we also need to tackle the underlying issues of terror and violence so that people can go back to farming. Because there is a dearth of arable farmland.

So I do think that giving hope, giving—sustaining the people during this period is important, but it is also important to correct the problem. Because this is a man-made problem of extremism, of violence, of AKs being handed out. And it is outrageous that the government doesn't take back the land that has been taken and give it back to their proper owners. That is no way to run a country.

So the beauty of CPC is that it has sanctions that are surgical that can target particular people, not the entire country. I wouldn't recommend CPC to have a sanction that would cutoff food or medical aid.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Are there any dangers to using CPC? Any downside?

Ms. SHEA. I don't see any downside. I see—you know, it is like a terrorism index. You need to have a factual analysis on what are the problems of the country to solve them. And if we only see climate change, which is a problem, but if that is the sole rationale—and that is what the UNHCR seems to think based on its writings on its website.

The Mimi case that I gave in my testimony, they concluded was the result of climate change, only. They ignored the religious identities involved, and the intense and motives of the people who were attacking Mimi and her family.

So climate change is a problem. There are no short-term solutions to that. There is a short-term solution to radicalization and violence and criminality. It is police work.

Mr. Jackson of Illinois. OK. Mr. Chairman, in closing, a population that is under 30 that is 70 percent, I think that our Nation will be best served in trying to get this young nation that is now showing its maturity in forming a democracy, that is still extremely fragile, that has a lot of conflict borders on the north that I think are creating more hardship on such a young population, and particularly on children that are under the age of 15, I like food as a tool more than sanctions and punitive measures. I think it is theologically sound, and I have not heard that being expressed. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. I want to just yield myself a couple of minutes, and then I will go to my colleague.

Just for the record, and I thank you for your concern for food. I have written two laws, Global Food Security Act, which is our law. The IRFA bill when we did it back in 1998, we made sure that humanitarian assistance was exempted. The idea of taking away food security—and your point was well taken—would be counter-productive.

I think one of the hallmarks of the legislation on Global Food Security Act was to emphasize the first thousand days of life from conception to the second birthday. That if mother and baby get the food, folic acid, all kinds of supplementation,—and we do have a very good program, as you know, as does the U.N. on those things, food security—you get healthier kids.

And one of the focuses that we have had in Nigeria and elsewhere, but especially in Nigeria is stunting. And when you have that first thousand days fully—and the women get the supplementation, good solid nutrition, baby and mother thrive.

So great point. But the good news is that in writing the legislation, we want to make sure that that was not mal-affected in any country, including Nigeria. And I would just add that where all of these supplementations have happened, including places like Honduras, which has another problem with stunting, it doesn't go away, but it greatly mitigates it. So thank you for your point.

I mean, food is just so essential. And the beauty of the IRFA bill is that it does provide—you know, it is a two-step process. I think you all know this. But the first one is the designation; getting it right and calling out an egregious violator in terms of what they are doing or what they are tolerating by not answering the call, and the Bishop and anyone else says to the police, please come. We have got a, you know, motorcyclist here, and they are killing people. And they don't show up. And they never show up. And then there is no accountability. There is no investigation. There is no prosecution. I mean, that is just absolutely egregious.

So designating the country as a CPC gets them on the record that we have taken note, you have violated our law, and we are going to take action.

Now the next point is the action phase, and that is purely up to the administration no matter who is in the White House. And as Mr. Perkins indicated, there has been a lack of part 2 since 1998.

We find the exact same thing on trafficking. I wrote our trafficking laws, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. I am the prime author of it. It has the same double edge. You start off by designating a country. Be honest and accurate if they have a problem with sex and labor trafficking. And that part 2 is the enforcement of sanctions that are prescribed in the law.

So I am all, you know, with you on the same page. We have got to make sure that food security is available and people are helped by it. So thank you for that. I appreciate that very much.

I would like to now recognize Mr. Olszewski for such time as he may consume.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. Thank you all very much. Representative Olszewski from Baltimore. I really appreciate you, Chairman Smith, our ranking member. And I want to thank all of our witnesses, who I know many of whom have traveled a great distance. I really appreciate you being here. Thanks to modern technology. I am glad that I was able to listen in through the entirety of today's hearing, even as I dealt with traffic myself in my travels today.

I want to start my saying, as someone of deep faith like many of my colleagues here, I am deeply concerned about both religious freedoms and violence, religious violence, but also violence of all types. What we know that what is happening in Nigeria demands that we all work together. In response, I think we can agree that given the scale and the duration of the violence, given the importance of Nigeria as a country both to Africa, but also to the world, I think it really demands that we are open to thinking differently about our historical responses. But I think that we need to think holistically about that. And maybe that means not just looking at what our traditional tools have been.

I think we can start. And I would encourage this administration, the Trump administration, to openly call out the actions of the government and their failure to take action. I saw all of the heads nodding around the conversation around accountability across the board to a person. I think we could send our Secretary of State to go talk to the government to raise these concerns to lift up these American voices. And I think that we can then indicate that additional action might be forthcoming.

I think what is troubling as some of my colleagues have raised, however, though, is that event as we are contemplating sanctions and actions, we are seeing a retreat of our investment and our involvement in the country. A lot of conversations already happened around USAID, so I won't retread those, Mr. Chairman. But I do want to dig in a little bit around the issue of education, which is one of those issues that is deeply personal to me as a former educators. And it is also one of those places that have not been exempted from the funding freeze and the retraction that we are seeing. And I see the Bishop nodding. And I actually wanted to direct one of my questions to you, Bishop. Because as my colleague, Representative Jackson, mentioned there are so many young people in this country. They are the future of the country. And education, I think, is so foundational to the success of Nigeria, but also to combatting this religious persecution, the religious violence that we are seeing.

And so, you know, we know, for example, that Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations have targeted schools to undermine education across the country.

An estimated 2,000 Christian schools were attacked in Nigeria between 2009 and 2021. Hundreds of teachers have been deliberately killed with thousands more forced to flee. We know that also since 2014, the U.S. has invested in our primary education system in Nigeria, helping 2.9 million students improve their literacy and training. In 21,595 teachers and out-of-school youth programs, we have reached more than half a million children in effective conflict regions. Again, we know that proper education and effective education is a key to drive out violent extremism.

Again, the Trump administration canceled our education programs in Nigeria. So I would say, Bishop, if you could just speak a little bit about how we can keep our children safe and our educators safe and the impact of these programs. And I would just also open it up to anyone else on the panel who might want to talk a little bit about the importance of investing in education to tackle some of these issues as well.

Bishop ANAGBE. Thank you very much for these but I think also just like you State, education is the key to the human development. And education for us is not just academic excellence or pursuance. But the holistic approach affects the person's life and is actually what this crisis of violence have continued for the past two decades is what we can't quantify.

In villages, we have schools that have been closed down, bombed, and people have left. These children are in the camps, and actually they don't have any basic form of training or formation. And, of course, some of them survived looking at their parents being killed. Maybe they are able to run, young children, the age of 12, 13. And there is some seriously and of serious concern, women are still giving birth in these camps, and without education. I am not talking about health or dignity for the women and all of that. But this basically means you have some people who are about 18 years who have not really had any basic education in some of these camps and this space. And, of course, it is difficult to change their orientation or mentality. Some of them are already because the need to de-radicalize them from some of these things that is going on in their minds. And this is close I tell you. That is like we are breeding another group of terrorists. And at the age of 25 they become enough to handle whatever they want to, and then nobody will stay.

And what we do maybe on my local level as a Bishop who had education in a major which actually working with the State government of my own, there are about 200 and something of these children, though, not as small, not a primary school, but secondary school in all my schools, 250 something in my schools, because this you can give them burden of education.

But I know what it means. What about the younger ones who can't leave their families or leave their mothers? We have talked similarly with the government to establish the schools in these camps. Whereby some of this is we have displaced our degree holders who can also take care of—and the government paid them the stipends for them to keep, and the government is not interested in

it. But I tell you this is going to spare doom for a nation in this present age, whereby we are that education, I will say, is the key.

It is becoming so difficult. We are getting back to the barbaric stage. And that is what I think what these perpetrators want to be. And like you said, if they are able to handle this because bring them to go through this designation of CPC, many people will be held accountable for what is going on. Thereby, there was some fear instilled in them. If we do this, the government will come after you.

And the government is seriously minded and concerned. I tell you this is within. And it is not just immediately, yes, not just because of a short term. But I tell you, if the IDPs return to the ancestral homes, to be honest with you, in three or 4 years, they wouldn't ask anybody for feeding. Five years ago, they don't ask enough to feed them. Ten years ago, they don't get food from anybody because there are substantive farmers taking care of their needs. Twenty are children. Because a victim of that come from such a background.

My father, my parents, we are farmers, and that way he trained us. And I went to boarding school in the eighties. So I see no reason why we should not in this age. This is happening, and the government is keeping quiet.

That is where we are at, line for this because if this is not done we are going to breed hooligans as a Nation.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. With that, Mr. Chairman, I will recommit to work with you and this subcommittee on any other actions we can work together on to look at this differently. I appreciate the answer. And I just will, I think, reinforce my earlier point that I hope to see this administration act in the meantime and also hope to work to find ways to not just reinstitute our funding for education. But also, I think this reenforces the point we should be doing more to help, especially our young people, whether it is vocational training so they can become substantive farmers, or to do more to ensure that we have this lack of radicalization among our young people. I think it is so important that we catch people young.

Mr. Perkins, it looks like you wanted to mention something.

Mr. PERKINS. You are absolutely right. Education is a key element. And that is why the radical Islamists have been targeting the schools. There has been 17 mass abductions in the last 6 years from schools. Over 1,700 kids have been snatched out. And the reason for that, No. 1, is targeting girls to keep them from getting the education. So, again, it is the underlying issue of security of the government performing its role.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. I know that that is true for Christians and Islam. Those are—and the schools alike, and I agree. But it is not an either/or, right? We can do both. We can both hold governments accountable for taking action for perpetrators. But, also, I think—I just wanted to reinforce the point, I think we also need to do the other piece of this work as well. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. Just to conclude—and anything you would like to add as we close—I would like to recognize Pastor Emmanuel Ogabi, who is a good friend. We traveled together a few times to Nigeria. He introduced me to the CAN, the Association of Christian Leaders. And he also was able to arrange

for me to meet with several of the parents of Chibok girls. And that was moving beyond words to see how much suffering they were enduring. So thank you, Pastor, for your insights over many, many years.

We are also joined by Pastor Akila Yusef, who is the regional overseer of the All House On the Rock Churches in northeast Nigeria. He is the president of Cutting-Edge Ministries Network about 200 pastors in the Middle Belt region. So thank you to him for being here today. I deeply appreciate that.

And just to conclude—and again any final comments you might want to make—I would note that the Bishops's village was burnt yesterday. I mean, it is like it is ever present the violence that is being endured by the Christians, and to a lesser extent, but no less significant by the Muslims who are pious and want to live out their faith.

I remember meeting with one Imam in Nawho who told me—and he spoke very highly of Christians. And he said, Boko Haram is not us. It is not us, but we can't speak out. If we do, we are targeted. And so I—another reason why we do not have a Muslim cleric from Nigeria here today.

But if you wanted to—let me just also point out, the letter that came to Mr. Huizenga, you know, part of our frustration has been that the Nigerian Government has not been successful. And they even acknowledge it in a letter explaining why they did not redesignate a country of particular concern to Nigeria. And they said the government has been working to find solutions to the problems, but it has been largely unsuccessful in addressing these threats.

How hard have they really worked? I mean, you know, law enforcement is so basic to any functioning society. And if it is the killers and the murderers and the rapists can operate with impunity, that democracy is a dire threat, and individual lives of believers are then put in grave risk as well.

Bishop, your point today and your testimony where you said, Militant Fulani herdsmen are terrorists. They steal and vandalize. They kill and boast about it. They kidnap and rape. And they enjoy total impunity from the elected officials. None of them have been arrested and brought to justice.

That is the message we are bringing to the government that we are aware of it, and we are going to do everything we can to try to get a CPC designation immediately from this administration.

What they do in terms of sanctioning is purely up to them. But hopefully there won't be a need because there will be a movement toward trying to address these unaddressed needs. And it is not like a lot of us haven't been raising it for decades—I have, you guys have, and many of you have been doing it forever. So we just—and, Tony, you as well. You know, we were not impatient. It just has to happen. So any final remarks before we conclude?

Bishop ANAGBE. Thank you very much once again for this. My simple request, which I don't know how best it is going to go, but all the witnesses have been able to make it somehow to work with the community and the religious leaders.

For instance, I will say in case of assistance, in terms of funding, if it is possible for the religious leaders in those places be able to put them—I mean, come to know what exactly is coming to the

area. Because we as religious leaders go to where government cannot go. And most of these people who are displaced eventually run back to the churches where everybody relies on a place that have safety. Humanity is speaking. Not just it is guaranteed. But then same that they look after their needs and the basic things we can.

And we know if the government works, the Army will take people back to their homes and in a very short, why, five, 10 years, reasonably, Nigeria will bounce back to its status.

Ms. ONUBOGU. Thank you, Chairman Smith, again, for convening this hearing. And I hope that there will be future opportunities for hearings on Nigeria and other countries across the African continent to be able to discuss U.S.-Africa relations.

Just to restate a few points that I made about the importance of Nigeria, which is one that several U.S. administrations have often highlighted. What happens in Nigeria also impacts the broader West African region, and we are aware of the issues that are happening across West Africa.

On the question on security, Nigeria security challenges are also impacted by what happens outside of the country as well. In 2018, 2017, there was data that basically showed that a lot of the small arms that are present in Nigeria that there are about 50 percent of the small arms in West African region are in Nigeria. Obviously, that might not have grown as well. So there are overlapping security challenges and significant help that is needed to restructure and reform Nigeria's security architecture.

I think at the end of the day, we have to examine and ask, you know, how labels and designations could work, and if those actually address the root causes of the issues that we are trying to tackle in Nigeria. And I think the need leaving it on that point is the root causes of the conflicts that we see are complex, and it is important that there is holistic efforts on the part of the U.S. in partnership with Nigerian Government and civil society actors to address the cause of these conflicts.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, again, to our distinguished witnesses. I do want to note that Samson Adejorin who is here who is the charge for the Nigerian Embassy, thank you for joining us today.

I will also point out, you know, in terms of capability, I remember being in Bosnia during the war there, I was in Darfur years later, and I ran into a peacekeeper who was at both cases. Where was he from? Nigeria. Totally committed to securing the peace. Major Ajumbo was his name. And I was so moved by him. You know, he was so committed to peace. So there is a capability there that needs to be recognized, realized, and really led by those in authority. And that has what is been lacking, you know, failure to govern to quote one of our witnesses today.

So thank you so much. I want to thank our witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. And we will ask that you respond to them in writing pursuant to the committee rules. All members have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitations. Without objection, the committee stands adjourned. And thank you so very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Chairman Brian Mast

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Africa
Chris Smith (R-NJ), Chairman**

March 5, 2025

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Africa at 9:00 a.m. in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, March 12, 2025

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

LOCATION: 2200 RHOB

SUBJECT: Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a
CPC Designation

WITNESSES: Ms. Nina Shea
Senior Fellow and Director
Center for Religious Freedom
Hudson Institute

Mr. Tony Perkins
Former Chair
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Bishop Wilfred Anagbe
Bishop of Makurdi Diocese, Nigeria
Roman Catholic Church

Ms. Oge Onubogu
Director, Africa Program
The Wilson Center

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202 -226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date March 12, 2025 Room 2200 RHOB

Starting Time 9:07 Ending Time 11:37

Recesses ☐ (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Smith

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 11:37

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa
119th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation
Date: March 12, 2025

[illegible]

Paused/Terminated Nigeria Programs

1. Mercy Corps Feed the Future Rural Resilience: The Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity (RRA) is a five-year, USAID-funded program which seeks to facilitate economic recovery and growth in vulnerable, conflict-affected areas by promoting systemic change in market systems. The Activity empowers vulnerable households, communities, and systems to cope with current shocks and stresses and to be prepared to withstand future ones.
2. Mercy Corps Small Town WASH program in Nigeria is a five-year, \$13mn program to facilitate the economic recovery of select crisis-affected communities, including through rehabilitation/creation of new WASH infrastructure and building the capacity of local institutions to sustainably manage and govern new WASH infrastructure.
3. Catholic Relief Services THRIVE program: THRIVE is a two-year project, supported by USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), to deliver humanitarian aid to individuals impacted by conflict in Jere local government area (LGA) of Borno State, Nigeria. For four to seven months, the project participants are provided time-limited, unconditional food assistance using electronic vouchers, which are then used to purchase food from their local market. These community members are then transitioned to activities that build their livelihoods and reduce their reliance on humanitarian assistance.
 - a. Suspending this project will impact 32,000 participants currently enrolled in the graduation program, meaning they will not receive holistic livelihoods support to “graduate” from extreme poverty. It will also impede the 32,000 people’s ability to recover from a recent, catastrophic flood in the Jere LGA.
4. Catholic Relief Services CORE group polio project: The project targets 175,209 children under 5 in Nigeria’s northern region with early childhood vaccines for polio and other zoonotic diseases. Suspension and possible termination would result in a resurgence of polio and other vaccine preventable diseases among this highly vulnerable group. Polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases can have lifelong impacts such as paralysis, disability, increased mortality, as well as secondary effects such as lack of educational opportunity (e.g. lack of infrastructure for children with disabilities).
5. Catholic Relief Service Disaster Risk Reduction & Recovery In Vulnerable Environments (DRIVE): \$5,500,000, 2024-2026
 - a. 2-year BHA-funded program that provides humanitarian assistance and initiates early recovery in two local government areas of Borno State, an area of protracted conflict with high humanitarian needs. Targeting 132,000 unique participants across sectors including disaster risk reduction to strengthen communities’ ability to manage risks, improving income and livelihoods opportunities (“economic recovery and market systems”) by supporting participants to either engage in new or old livelihoods, and improving agricultural production by supporting farmers with high quality crop seeds, training on improved agricultural techniques and

collaborating with Ministry of Agriculture and private sector for demonstrations and advisory services.

6. Save the Children Integrated Child Health and Social Services: Operating in Kano, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno, and Niger States, the project was designed to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Activities focused on enhancing household economic resilience through savings support, vocational training and seed distribution as well as improving access to essential services for OVC and their caregivers. This approach emphasized pediatric and adolescent case screening for HIV, linkage to treatment and viral suppression with ARVs and nutrition support, while also providing broader child protection, education and family strengthening initiatives.
7. FHI 360 Strengthening Humanitarian Response and Building Community Resilience in NE Nigeria: NE Core aims to provide and ensure access to primary and reproductive healthcare, strengthen healthcare delivery systems, and offer nutrition support for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under five. It aims to enhance access to immediate basic needs such as food needs, health, nutrition, protection services, shelter, clean water, and sanitation for Internally Displaced Persons in camps and host communities in Borno State. This endeavor takes place against the backdrop of a staggering humanitarian crisis, with an estimated 8.3 million people (about half the population of New York) in Northeast Nigeria needing urgent assistance in 2023.
8. FHI 360 Using Machine Learning to Reduce HIV Treatment Interruptions: A study in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria found the treatment retention rate for people living with HIV/AIDS to be just 68 percent after one year, significantly lower than the benchmark of 98 percent set by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Nigeria. To increase the treatment retention rate, FHI 360 developed and piloted a machine learning algorithm to identify people likely to interrupt treatment using patient data available through HIV/AIDS programs. Once the algorithm identifies people likely to interrupt treatment, providers can offer tailored care to address barriers that may prevent them from adhering to treatment. With support from Development Innovation Ventures and PEPFAR, FHI 360 will scale its program to 16,000 people across two Nigerian states and will conduct a randomized controlled trial to rigorously evaluate the effect of the program on measures of treatment interruption (e.g. missed appointments), patient viral loads, and patient satisfaction.
9. Global Health Council Nutrition Program: A nutrition program in Nigeria, requiring 77 health facilities across three states to completely stop treating children with severe acute malnutrition. This puts 60,000 children under 5 at immediate risk of death from preventable causes. In another state in Nigeria, around 140,000 children under 5, and more than 430,000 women and their families, will no longer be supported with nutrition, agriculture, and livelihood support to prevent malnutrition and provide healthier lives. Training for 10,000 health workers who were set to provide nutrition services to more than 5.6 million children and 1.7 million women in Nigeria will also not move forward.

10. Nigeria Youth CARE Program - Search for Common Ground: The project seeks to empower and promote collaboration among diverse youths in Nigeria, particularly in Bauchi, Plateau, and Gombe states to advance inter-religious tolerance and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The project will foster youth leadership to influence the state-level policy environment to be more inclusive and conducive for inter-religious tolerance and religious freedom. The project's overall goal is to empower diverse youth in Bauchi, Plateau, and Gombe States to advance inter-religious tolerance and FoRB, and the activities are specifically designed to strengthen relationships amongst youths in the target states to collaboratively work against violations of religious freedom and improve their capacities to utilize digital skills to promote FoRB.
11. Accountability Lab Nigeria (Freedom of Expression): \$74,500 for 13 months
 - a. *Advancing Democratic Norms in the Digital Arena*: To advocate for human rights online and frameworks to strengthen freedom of expression. The organization will cultivate an ecosystem of advocates working on human rights online that can positively shape a free and open internet. It will educate the public on the importance of human rights in their everyday lives. The organization will also advocate for the government to enshrine policies and legislation that uphold human rights online.
12. Citizens Common Advocacy International (Citizen Education/Mobilization): \$50,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Activating Youth Voice to Deepen Democracy*: To advance democracy by amplifying youth voices. The organization will host a fellowship program to train youth in social change, advocacy, and community engagement. Through the fellowship and other engagements, the organization will build a community of young leaders and mentor them as they seek opportunities to play constructive roles in civic life.
13. Dataphyte Foundation for Research and Development (Media, Accountability, Resilience to Authoritarianism): \$270,000 for 24 months
 - a. *Policy Insights and Democratic Resilience*: To promote open government data and data journalism to advance accountability. The organization will conduct analysis of government data and policy research focused on fiscal transparency and threats to democratic norms. It will produce its own analysis and reporting to explain the data to the public. The organization will train journalists and activists to use its data and analysis, empowering civil society to promote democratic discourse and launch informed advocacy campaigns.
14. Gatefield Impact Foundation (Freedom of Expression, Citizen Education/Mobilization): \$275,000 for 24 months
 - a. *Promoting Democratic Norms and Youth Political Participation*: To strengthen youth commitment to democratic norms and sustain youth participation in democratic structures and processes. The organization will foster public discourse and debate about democratic norms to prevent youth political apathy and disillusionment, and to counter growing democratic backsliding in the region. It will mentor democratic activists and support them in launching advocacy campaigns.

15. HumAngle Media Foundation (Media, Conflict Resolution – Northern Nigeria)*: \$70,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Advancing Peace and Security through Journalism:* To promote peacebuilding, accountability, and good governance in conflict affected areas. The organization will conduct capacity-building workshops for journalists, providing participants with new technology skills, and explore avenues for incorporating artificial intelligence into journalism. It will support collaborations between community-based organizations and journalists to highlight local solutions to peace and governance challenges.
16. Initiative for Leadership Development and Youth Empowerment (Young Leaders Network) (Civic Education/Mobilization – Northern Nigeria): \$70,000 for 13 months
 - a. *Enhancing Participatory Democracy at the State and Local Level:* To strengthen the capacity of youth to participate in politics. The organization will convene citizen accountability workshops to build the capacity of youth to promote good governance and hold the government accountable. It will host forums with newly elected legislators and undertake advocacy visits to legislators, local area councils, and traditional authorities to advance accountability and good governance.
17. International Centre for Investigative Reporting (Media, Accountability): \$131,250
 - a. *Fostering a Culture of Investigative and Data-Driven Journalism:* To foster a media environment that advances democratic discourse and promotes government transparency and accountability. The organization will conduct investigative reporting on government policies and programs to educate civil society and the public on governance challenges and mobilize a constituency for reform. The organization will also collaborate with other media entities to strengthen democratic discourse.
18. Joy Incredible Limited (Media, Accountability, Human Rights): \$100,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Documentaries for Democracy:* To foster citizen discourse on democratic reform. The organization will produce media products that explore the impact of democratic deficiencies on the lives of average citizens, inform policy discourse, and build public pressure for improved government accountability and action. The organization will develop content related to access to justice, freedom of expression, and political participation.
19. Kirwa Foundation (Media, Accountability, Human Rights): \$80,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Promoting Democratic Ideas and Values:* To engage the public in conversations on government accountability and transparency across Africa. The organization will produce a weekly online political satire show highlighting trending stories on government performance, corruption, human rights abuses, and insecurity. The show will seek to mobilize the public to challenge these shortcomings and demand reform.
20. Leadots and Human Development Services LTD (Civic Education/Mobilization – Northern Nigeria): \$72,057 for 12 months
 - a. *Strengthening Youth and Women's Political Participation:* To strengthen youth and women's political participation. The organization will launch a podcast to empower youth to discuss their governance priorities and advance their political participation. It will sustain a women's political party forum which fosters

collaboration and advocates for improved representation of women in political parties. The organization will continue its mentorship program which will equip young women aspiring to run in the 2027 election with essential political engagement and leadership skills.

21. Organization for Community Civic Engagement (Civic Education/Mobilization – Northern Nigeria): \$66,000 for 12 month cost extension
 - a. *Strengthening Youth Civic Activism*: To strengthen the capacity of youth to participate in politics and advance democratic and accountable governance. The organization will host civic activism skills workshops for youth leaders. It will mentor these leaders as they conduct civic education and voter mobilization events in their communities, launch advocacy campaigns to promote political participation, and host town hall and policy events to advance government accountability.
22. Sahara Reporters Media Foundation (Media, Accountability): \$180,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Promoting Local Journalism and Media*: To strengthen local journalism and advance government accountability. The organization will enhance the capacity of journalists and newsrooms at the state and local government level to produce and publish news stories on government transparency, accountability, and performance. It will foster a journalist network for peer mentorship, editorial support, and learning.
23. Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (Freedom of Expression): \$120,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Advancing Freedom of Expression*: To protect and advance freedom of expression. The organization will monitor, document, and respond to violations of civic activists' and journalists' right to freedom of expression. It will provide legal services to those under threat for freely expressing themselves, especially those promoting democratic governance, and pursue public interest litigation to promote these freedoms. The organization will also conduct public education campaigns on civic and political rights.
24. TELA Consulting (Civic Education/Mobilization): \$29,468 for 12 months
 - a. *Enhancing Political Education and Participation*: To enhance youth political participation and government accountability. The organization will host a virtual civic education program for youth. The program will focus on the country's governance structure, constitution, functions of political parties, and advocacy for accountability. Through this initiative, the organization will empower the participants to become informed, skilled, and ethical participants in the country's civic life.
25. Unchained Vibes Africa (Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Religion – Northern Nigeria): \$160,000 for 24 months
 - a. *Advancing Freedom of Expression in the Arts*: To strengthen the capacity of artists to advance freedom of expression. The organization will monitor and respond to attacks on artistic expression and advocate for policy reforms that strengthen freedom of expression. The organization will provide training and mentoring to artists on their rights, mobilize them to become active citizens, and hold public education activities that foster broader citizen support for freedom of expression.

26. Women in Leadership Advancement Network (Political Participation): \$80,000 for 12 months
 - a. *Strengthening Women's Political Engagement through Public Discourse*: To promote public discourse on the benefits of women's political participation. The organization will design, produce, and air a television program featuring civic, political, and social leaders discussing the adverse consequences of policies preventing women's political participation. The organization will complement the program with social media advocacy campaigns.
27. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) (Electoral Reform): \$900,000 for 7 months (large back-to-back short term grants as they repositioned)
 - a. *Supporting Youth to Lead Electoral Reform Efforts*: To strengthen civil society's ability to collaborate with electoral stakeholders and ensure youth have a voice in electoral reform efforts. The Institute will support civil society partners to advocate for electoral reform priorities identified by youth across the country. The Institute and its partners will engage with key electoral stakeholders to inform the electoral reform process at the national and state level. Partners will create awareness amongst youth about voting rights, the electoral process, and the importance of electoral participation.
28. BudgIT Foundation for Promotion of Information Technology in Nigeria (Civic Education/Mobilization, Human Rights): \$150,000 for 12 months
 - a. *The Civic-Tech Incubation Project*: To enhance civil society's understanding and application of technology to advance citizen participation in democratic processes. The organization will reinforce the role of civic tech actors in democratic consolidation across the region by fostering the emergence of new civic tech leaders through a fellowship program and efforts to advance civic tech networking and collaboration. The organization will conduct research and publish and disseminate articles on civic tech.
29. Yiaga Africa (Civic Education/Mobilization, Electoral Reform): \$375,000 for 24 months
 - a. *Turn up Democracy*: To mobilize youth to promote participatory democracy, defend freedom, and advance democratic reforms within regional, national, and local governance structures. The organization will host a civic organizing school for youth activists to mentor and support these activists as they launch campaigns to engage citizens to address democratic challenges. The organization will host regional civil society convenings to discuss responses to democratic backsliding across the region.
30. Solidarity Center (Worker Rights, Human Rights): \$1,006,893 for 12 months
 - a. *Promoting Worker Rights, Agency, and Voice*: To strengthen collaboration between unions and civil society to improve worker rights, civic participation, and accountable governance. The Center will support labor unions and civil society initiatives through coalition building, organizing, awareness raising, and advocacy activities that focus on improving social protections, policies against gender-based violence and harassment, political and civic participation, and environmental

governance awareness to enhance workers and citizens' successful participation in political processes and accountable governance.

31. Center for International Private Enterprise (Multifaceted): \$3,684,100 for 1 year
 - a. *Strengthening the Private Sector's Ability to Fight Corruption*: To strengthen independent business leadership in building the capacity of the private sector to fight kleptocracy and reduce corruption, create economic opportunities and policy reform that defend the digital space, mobilize the private sector to increase security and build peace, and create more inclusive economies and free markets. The Center will collaborate with partners to democratize opportunity and address threats of authoritarianism and cultivate networks of change agents able to participate in democratic development and promote democratic unity.
32. International Republican Institute: \$2,200,000 for 2 years
 - a. *Strengthening Political Party Development*: To improve political party leadership and the participation and leadership of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in political parties. The Institute will support pro-democracy parties to enhance leadership development and policy formulation. It will work with parties to promote regional networking and share best practices to enhance political competition. The Institute will also conduct skills-building activities to increase the visibility and participation of women, youth, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities in political processes and candidacies.
33. Department of State/INL - "Farmer-Herder Conflict Mitigation Program": \$1 million program focused on enhancing community policing and conflict resolution skills within the Nigerian National Police Force (NPF) to reduce tensions. This program is implemented through the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
34. Department of State/INL - Criminal Justice Database Program: \$289,000 program aimed at mapping and assessing criminal justice databases to assist the Nigerian Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in developing a consolidated database for improved criminal justice in Nigeria. This program is implemented through the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
35. Department of State/DRL - United in Security: Program to support civil society organizations in Nigeria in building the necessary skills to monitor and report on human rights abuses committed by Nigerian security forces.
36. USAID - Peace Action for Rapid and Transformative Nigerian Early Response (PARTNER): \$2 million award focused on strengthening Nigeria's security response system to detect early warning signs of conflict, while simultaneously empowering local leaders in conflict mitigation skills. The program directly supports the Early Warning and Response function of the Institute for Peace and Conflict resolution. The program focused its efforts throughout Nigeria's northern and north-central regions.

37. USAID “Justice Beyond Border” and “Peace Pathways” programs: \$1.75 million over three years to support people-centered justice as an approach to end cyclical trends in violence. These programs focused on improving accountability and transparency in Nigerian legal institutions by increasing Nigerian citizens’ access to data.
38. State/DRL - Strengthening Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Nigeria Through Legal Support: This program was building a diverse legal community of practitioners, law students, and FoRB advocates across several Nigerian states, strengthening the capacity of this cohort to support victims of FoRB violations. The project also sought to identify FoRB pioneers in law schools for mentorship, guiding them towards becoming future leaders in the advocacy space.
39. USAID - President’s Malaria Initiative Program – 5-year, \$40 million program to implement the PMI program in Nigeria’s Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Namfara states. Through the U.S. President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI) has distributed 90.6 million insecticide-treated bed nets and reduced malaria prevalence among children under five from 42% in 2010 to 22% in 2021.

Nigeria contributes more than a third of the global burden of all malaria cases yet the bilateral malaria service delivery award that provides lifesaving, safe, and cost-effective malaria diagnosis and treatment in seven states was terminated. These states account for 24% of Nigeria's malaria burden, USAID has been intentional about investing in states with the highest burden. With the termination of this award, access to quality malaria services for at least 1.7 million children under five and 420,000 pregnant women is now impacted.

40. USAID - Small Town WASH Program - 5-year, \$14 million program focused on water and hygiene programming in small towns throughout Nigeria.
41. USAID - HIV/AIDS/TB Program - a \$15 million HIV/AIDS/TB award to implement the Integrated Child Health and Social Services Activity (ICHSSA-3) in Kano state.
42. USAID - Tuberculosis Program - 5-year, \$29 million Cooperative Agreement to implement comprehensive TB Case finding, care and treatment. USAID’s tuberculosis (TB) programs increased case detection rates from 30% in 2019 to 70% in 2023, contributing to a 90% treatment success rate.
43. USAID - Health Workforce Management - 5-year, \$18 million Health Workforce Management Activity in 4 States & FCT.
44. USAID - Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning - \$19 million MEL Support activity that will provide data quality assessment (DQA), monitoring, evaluations, and support for learning events, enhanced data analytics, and improve the utilization of Global Information Systems (GIS) and mapping, in addition to providing expanding FBM capacity.

45. USAID - Strengthening Education - \$3.5 million program, USAID/Nigeria E3 Activity Strengthening Education Systems and Local Capacity to Reduce Educational Disparities faced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Nigeria. This paves the way for sustainable development of the GAIN concept in Nigeria and serve as a model for inclusive tertiary education across Africa. Award termination has impacted the opportunity for improved education for over 1,600 deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing children and youth across 16 states in Nigeria. An additional 1,200 parents, teachers, school administrators and deaf-led organizations providing support to these persons with disability have also been impacted by the termination.
46. USAID - Intermediate Education - \$25 million activity that will directly contribute to USAID/Nigeria's Development Objective to develop a healthier, better educated population via improved learning outcomes in targeted states. The primary beneficiaries for this activity are children and youth ages 9 to 15 years, particularly displaced and host community children in conflict-affected communities where education has been disrupted or is otherwise not accessible.
47. USAID - Supporting Electoral Accountability - \$19.8 million project to Fund a New Associate Cooperative Agreement - Supporting Electoral Accountability & Transparency (SEAT) Project.
48. USAID - State2State Award - Under the State2State award, the USG and the Nigerian Government developed, tested and refined manuals, guides, and other standard operating procedures to improve public financial management (PFM) in seven states in Nigeria (Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Ebonyi, Gombe, Kebbi and Sokoto). These tools were meant to be rolled out across 36 states to improve state budgeting and internal revenue generation processes. Termination of the activity will erode current improvements across seven implementing states. Tools developed will not be rolled out to scale and up to 2,134 state officials will not have the requisite PFM skills to promote budget accountability and transparency. 124 staff will lose their jobs and an estimated \$27,758,854.16 in revenue generation that was meant to deliver services in the health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene services across seven states.
49. USAID - LEARN to Read - LEARN to read is a \$48 million project to support sustainable improvements in reading outcomes for pupils in grades 1 and 2 in select Nigerian States. Award termination has impacted the basic education ecosystem where over 1,800,000 students across Nigeria will not have access to quality basic education teaching and learning support. The termination impacted over 8,300 teachers and education managers in over 12,777 schools across the country.
50. USAID - Sustainable Water Supply - \$10 million project for watershed protection and for Safe and Sustainable Water Supply
51. USAID - HIV Epidemic Control - \$26 million project for accelerating Control of the HIV Epidemic in Nigeria - ACE 3 - Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara. Comprehensive HIV and TB care and treatment award working in three states of Bayelsa, Edo and Lagos. The activity

delivers lifesaving treatment services for over 80,200 adults and children living with HIV and over 4,500 HIV positive pregnant women. This activity worked under the limited PEPFAR waiver prior to the termination letter received. Three states are already experiencing negative impacts due to this termination. One of the affected facilities is a national PCR (polymerase chain reaction) lab at the Nigeria Institute for Medical Research, which processes over 72,000 viral load samples each month.

52. USAID - Clean Water in Lagos - \$38.9 million project to implement USAID/Nigeria Lagos Urban Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Activity (LUWASH). Over 60 percent of Lagos households lack access to sanitation services while only 6 percent use pipeborne water as their primary source. The Lagos Urban WASH (LUWASH) activity aimed to provide water and sanitation services to over four million residents in Lagos' most vulnerable and underserved communities. MOU with Government of Lagos had been signed and equipment delivered to site when stop work order came in. The termination of the award will counter the catalytic effect USAID funding has on private and public investments in Lagos' WASH sector.
53. USAID - Nutrition in Nigeria - \$6.3 million project with the purpose to provide technical support, implement innovative nutrition interventions, and generate evidence to enhance nutrition programming toward achieving the overall goal of improving nutrition for a healthy, productive, and resilient Nigeria
54. USAID - TechnoServe - \$2 million project supporting a New Cooperative Agreement with TechnoServe. (The Nigeria Plastic Solutions Alliance)

**The US House Foreign Affairs,
Africa sub-Committee Hearing on Nigeria,
12th March, 2025.**

SUBMISSION OF BRIEF

Case of Sunday Jackson: A Gross Miscarriage of Justice in Nigeria

Dear Chairman,

It is an honor to be able to submit a brief testimony on the burning issue of Nigeria's ever worsening religious freedom situation and America's perennially failed recognition of the genocide in the most deadly country for Christians on the planet.

I am currently returning from Nigeria where the bizarre case of Sunday Jackson illustrates how state action and terrorist non-state actors all combine to make Christians an endangered specie in northern Nigeria.

A. Case of Sunday Jackson: A Gross Miscarriage of Justice in Nigeria

Honorable Chairperson and esteemed members of the Subcommittee,

In the light of the hearing of this honorable Sub-committee titled
"Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation"

We respectfully submit this brief in connection with the hearing on Nigeria, highlighting the urgent case of Sunday Jackson, a Nigerian citizen unjustly sentenced to death. This brief provides an overview of the circumstances surrounding Sunday Jackson's conviction and sentence, and urges the Subcommittee to take notice of this gross miscarriage of justice.

In 2014, while farming in, Numan Local Government Area, of Adamawa State, northeast Nigeria, 20 year old student Sunday Jackson encountered a Fulani herdsman who trespassed upon Jackson's farm, and allowed his cattle to graze on Jackson's crops. When Jackson confronted the herdsman, he was met with resistance leading to the herdsman attacking Jackson with a knife.

Despite sustaining injuries, Jackson managed to disarm his assailant and in the heat of the ensuing struggle, struck back, fatally stabbing the herdsman, who had stabbed Jackson, on his head, and legs.

Jackson was arrested in prison for seven years later when we visited him on Deathrow in Nigeria. In a shocking betrayal of justice, after already spending seven years in detention, he was convicted and sentenced to death by hanging by the High Court of Yola just the week before. The court opined that Jackson should have fled after disarming his attacker instead of fighting. Regrettably, the Supreme Court of Nigeria upheld his unjust death sentence on Friday when we were in court expecting his freedom.

Jackson's case has spotlighted the ambiguity in Nigeria's self-defense laws, and begs the question of whether or not, every citizen, is equal before the law. Jackson is Christian and his assailant was a Muslim.

The expectation that an individual under attack should retreat rather than defend themselves raises concerns about the rights of citizens to protect their lives and property, as guaranteed by the Nigerian constitution.

This incident, also underscores the persistent tensions between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Nomadic grazing on farm lands have frequently escalated into violent massacres resulting in loss of lives and property.

We maintain that Jackson's case, is an ideal candidate for the exercise of prerogative of mercy, as provided for in Nigeria's Constitution. The grant of clemency, would not only bring justice and relief to Jackson and his family but also serve as a beacon of hope for others who have been failed by the justice system.

We therefore ask for clemency by President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Governor of Adamawa State, for a state pardon for Jackson.

B. ROLLING BACK THE ROLLBACK OF NIGERIA'S CPC DESIGNATIONS

Extraordinarily bloody Christmas massacres began with letters to Christians of impending attack and well-coordinated 48-hr carnage that killed hundreds, displacing thousands in 30 communities in 2023 while I was in Nigeria.

Yet as US Secretary of State Blinken visited Nigeria weeks after, when Amnesty International reported the death toll quadrupled to 1300, he was culpably indifferent again, as his last visit, to the martyrs in the deadliest nation on earth for Christians.

Just before, Blinken's legally-required annual religious persecution ranking glaringly omitted Nigeria again - the same day a pastor related to my staff was killed with a dozen congregants in church by a different Jihadists group.

But Open Doors' World Watchlist's data showed Nigeria had 82% of all Christian deaths in 2023 (these fatalities did not include the Christmas massacres in Plateau state.) It's the 12th out of 13 years that more Christians died in Nigeria than the rest of the world combined.

But what could possibly cause the US to overlook the horrendous slaughter of women and children in their homes in a grotesque 7th October-like terrorist remake?

The simplistic answer would be - because Blinken was coming. In November 2021, days before his first visit to Nigeria, Blinken omitted Nigeria. It was so shocking, I hurriedly departed back to the US.

The Religious Freedom rankings usually emerge in December like in 2020 when Secretary Pompeo designated Nigeria a country of particular concern (CPC.) Blinken's November release while already in Africa seemed especially convenient and self serving.

Then 2023's came in January just weeks before Blinken returned to the scene of the crime. Anyone would be forgiven for thinking Blinken is sacrificing Nigeria's Christians on the altar of his Africa jamboree. Nero did that to the Christians too!

Sadly, however, Blinken is just the latest poster child of a callous Frankenstein that masquerades as US human rights policy - though worse. Much worse.

Secretary Clinton rebuffed multiple entreaties from the human rights community (including my 75-page legal brief) and even US agencies to designate top global terror group Boko Haram a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” - now recognized as one of her signal failings in office. Under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General, is authorized to designate an organization as an FTO but is generally a discretionary action and not a mandated one. Secretary Kerry finally did the FTO designation in the Obama second term after we worked with congress to introduce a bill to that effect.

As for Blinken, Sec. 102 of International Religious Freedom Act “Directs the Secretary of State to submit to the Congress... an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom describing: (1) the status of religious freedom in each foreign country, including trends toward improvement in the respect and protection of the right to religious freedom and trends toward deterioration of such right.” This an obligatory annual requirement which Blinken has violated by rigging the report and ridding it of Nigeria contrary to IRFA (Frank Wolf’s Law) for three years straight.

Then there’s the false State Dept narrative that these massacres are a “clash”, “competition over resources” and consequence of “climate change.”

Not only does the Denial State of the State Department exacerbate the deaths but rather than help victims in Nigeria’s middlebelt, the US has misspent countless taxpayer monies on nebulous conferences and projects re-educating Nigerian journalists not to report religious conflict while actively denigrating religious freedom advocates for advocacy. Let’s be clear, USAID does NOT fund Boko Haram terrorism as some have alleged for political grandstanding but USAID does not fund effective means of ending the terrorism or helping middlebelt victims of Fulani terrorism. [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://lawandsocietymagazine.com/rights-lawyer-ogebe-to-congressman-perry-your-lies-are-endangering-your-people-in-nigeria-for-petty-propaganda/?amp=1__!!Bg5easoyC-OII2vIEqY8mTBrtW-N4OJKAQ!LRPacnnjNj_8unWyaqNT0NUj5bgZrh0H1cQAzwz2RnBoEiKgzb9RNHeWE-j-utAectInqWfjo-e2y0GAPyaP4zE909qhafs3xw\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://lawandsocietymagazine.com/rights-lawyer-ogebe-to-congressman-perry-your-lies-are-endangering-your-people-in-nigeria-for-petty-propaganda/?amp=1__!!Bg5easoyC-OII2vIEqY8mTBrtW-N4OJKAQ!LRPacnnjNj_8unWyaqNT0NUj5bgZrh0H1cQAzwz2RnBoEiKgzb9RNHeWE-j-utAectInqWfjo-e2y0GAPyaP4zE909qhafs3xw$)

https://youtu.be/LqUcJ_MBtMI

Such baseless rhetoric endangers Americans, born-Muslims and aid workers in the region.

The dubious disappearance of Nigeria from the IRF review after 20years is not the only erasure of current history by the US government. The US Global Terrorism Index which previously ranked the Fulani Militia (responsible for the Christmas massacres) as the 4th deadliest terrorists in the world after Boko Haram and ISIS has since muted reports on Fulani terrorism.

This is apart from the failed attempt by 20 American academics led by former U.S. ambassador John Campbell to stop the US designation of Boko Haram as terrorists at the instigation of the state

department over 12 years ago!

Recently a U.S. diplomat who also served in Nigeria when I was there working for the US government 20 years ago, as Boko Haram launched its first Christmas attack, reminisced how, like me, we raised concerns with our respective agencies which were shoved aside. Look what has happened since.

It has not been a failure of intelligence but willful blindness that has cost America dearly.

In October 2022, the US embassy was on lockdown - not because an American female missionary had been abducted by Fulani kidnappers but because of a terrorist explosive device implanted at a U.S. embassy compound.

Blinken ordered the first terror-related mass evacuation in history of hundreds of US embassy Abuja diplomats and families. Weeks later he omitted Nigeria again from the religious persecution list even though American officials and private citizens had themselves become victims like Nigerians.

Finally, we have a great opportunity for a quick win here. Blinken left office by throwing out the entire rule book. He didn't issue any designations within 90 days as statutorily required. Since Blinken failed to comply with IRF before he left, why not have SOS Rubio to do it?

This is working smarter rather than harder. We literally don't even need to go through the trouble of another resolution if direct outreach to Rubio could get this done pronto. He doesn't even have to wait till a year to get his first IRF designations done. This is a no brainer low-hanging fruit!

This resolution like Congress' bill on Boko Haram FTO designation could be the requisite catalyst for the USG to do the right thing again.

C. THE "DU MERCI SIXTEEN" KANO KIDS

Also last week we were unsuccessful in getting a court to move forward in the case to free 16 Christian orphans held for six years by a Muslim govt in Kano. They were abducted on Christmas Day from Christian orphanages and been held for six years now despite the court's acquitting the imprisoned missionary Prof Solomon Tarfa and freeing him from prison some years ago.

However we held a cordial mediation with the new Kano state government which isn't the administration that persecuted the Du Merci orphanage which has existed for 32 years.

There is light at the end of the tunnel and the trial judge continued the case to this week for the parties to sign a settlement to release the kids one of whom was horribly disfigured in a fire at the government orphanage where they were kept since December 2019.

- Emmanuel Ogebe, Esq. is a prominent international human rights lawyer based in Washington D. C. who has played a role shaping US Congressional and foreign policy on Nigeria. Mr. Ogebe has been a guest speaker at university campuses across the US and radio and TV programs around the world, including CNN, Fox, Al Jazeera, BBC, the Geneva Summit, United Nations, World Bank, the Canadian Parliament etc. His decades of advocacy led to the US designations of Boko Haram as

a foreign terrorist organization (2013), Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (2020) and International Criminal Court Prosecutor's determination of crimes against humanity in Nigeria (2020) to mention a few achievements. He was consulted by Presidents Clinton (2000) and Bush's Administrations (2003) on their visits to Nigeria. He currently serves as Special Counsel for the "Justice for Jos" Project, advocating for and assisting survivors/victims of terror. Mr Ogebe is a recipient of several awards including President Obama (2009), the Darfur Women Action Group (2016), Diaspora groups in the US as well as US States and local authorities citations and recognitions in Florida, Arkansas and New Jersey amongst others.

Annex

Some basic facts on Death Penalty in Nigeria-

Nigeria, through its Penal and Criminal law, as well as under Sharia law, continues to retain the death penalty for certain types of criminal offences, including kidnapping, murder, sedition, fabricating false evidence leading to the conviction to death of an innocent person, aiding a child or a 'lunatic' to commit suicide, armed robbery, and 'zina', a broad term encompassing illicit sexual acts, such as adultery.

Although the Government has not carried out an execution since 2016, courts continue to sentence people to death. In 2022, 77+ death sentences were recorded in Nigeria, representing a significant increase from 56+ in 2021 with a significant portion being persons from socio-economically disadvantaged & marginalized background.

According to the Nigerian Correctional Service, as at 20 April 2024, there were 3,504 inmates on death row (an increase from 1,325 as at December 2022).

E. Ogebe
Special Counsel
Justice for Jos Project

Seeking to end impunity in the Nigerian Genocide

Attached to this brief, are relevant documents detailing our efforts, to secure clemency for Jackson.

1. First Interview Transcript with ARISE Television

Sunday Jackson's Death Sentence Confirmation for Self Defense from Fulani Attacker Failure of Nigeria -Devlin, Ogebe

[00:00:00] Charles Aniagolu:

Now, you may not have heard of him, but Sunday Jackson, a former student in his early 30s, is

facing death by hanging after Nigeria's Supreme Court today upheld the judgment of a lower court in Adamawa State. Mr. Jackson was a student turned farmer who says he was violently attacked on his farm in Codonti Forest in the Numan local government area in Adamawa State, by a Fulani herdsman known as Buba Bawuro.

The herdsman had strayed into Mr. Jackson's farm with his animals, and after Mr. Jackson challenged him, he apparently pulled a knife and a fight ensued. He stabbed Mr. Jackson a couple of times, but he managed to retrieve the knife and to stab his attacker in the neck, whereupon he died. Mr. Jackson was arrested and charged with murder.

He's consistently argued that it was self defense. In 2021 he was found guilty by a court in Yola and condemned to death by hanging. And today, the Supreme Court in Abuja upheld that judgment. So he's now in a race for his life and the only option left is to appeal for clemency from the governor of Adamawa State.

So what hope does he now have of a reprieve? for more on this case, I'm joined now in the studio by a member of his defense team, the U.S based human rights lawyer, Emmanuel Ogebe, and by Dr. William Terence Devlin, an American human rights leader who has been supporting Mr. Jackson. Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for coming in.

Let me start with you, Emmanuel, just briefly. Give us the background to this case and what led to Sunday Jackson ending up on death row.

Ogebe: Yes. So this is really a sad day, I think, for Nigerians and their rights to self defense. Nigerians already have to provide their own security, electricity, infrastructure, and now they can't even defend themselves without being sentenced to death.

And I think all of us should be very alarmed by this very unfortunate precedent.

In February of 2021, We read in the news about Jackson's death sentence just as we're coming into Nigeria. So we flew to Yola and I met with his counsel. He was so poor that it was legal aid counsel that helped him. And so I looked through a copy of the judgment and on the spot, in that initial review, I saw that there was a 167 day lapse between the close of arguments and the judgment.

Now our constitution specifically says it has to be within 90 days. Now the legal aid council hadn't even found it. That shows you the quality of representation that he had or lack thereof. So Mr. Jackson has been failed at every possible level by the system.

Charles: And, but couldn't you adduce that argument at the Supreme Court?

Ogebe: Here's the thing. I was initially working with the Legal Aid Council, to prepare an appeal. I traveled back to the US. When I came back, his counsel had changed. And a group that I'm affiliated with, had taken over. And I knew the chap in charge. I reached out to him and drew his attention to this fact.

And he also had marshaled all the facts and threw them all in but the sad thing is despite everything and the case is so clear because this man retrieved the knife of his attacker so it wasn't his own knife... but one thing that really stands out to me is I was talking to my dentist today about this and a dentist said to me, "what happened to the charge of manslaughter?"

Because at the very worst, if he had to be charged with something, it would be manslaughter.

He did not know that chap before that day. He couldn't have premeditated this. And, I believe that

this is one of those cases that when it was brought by the police to the DPP, the Director of Public Prosecution, the DPP's advice should have killed this case. This man has no case to answer. And now he's sentenced to death.

He's exhausted all legal channels, and is awaiting execution.

Charles: How did you get involved in this case?

Devlin: Yeah, Barrister Emmanuel and I have been working for a number of years here in Nigeria on human rights issues. And this is a sad day, Charles, for human rights in Nigeria. Sunday Jackson, and I'm not a lawyer, I'm a human rights advocate.

Sunday Jackson. By anyone's estimation is totally innocent and the issue where this man was out farming minding his own business and then the attacker came and a struggle ensued and of course this man is going to defend himself- that's why we call it self defense. And yet today, we were at the Nigerian Supreme Court And it was very brief.

It was only about maybe two minutes long. And we just wept at the failure of the Nigerian Supreme Court to say that this man, and they had the opportunity to say this man was totally innocent. We haven't seen all the ins and outs of the decision, but we had the opportunity to meet this humble farmer. this young man who unfortunately his wife abandoned him, been in, on death row for 10 years.

Sunday Jackson has now become an international case for human rights. And so we're going to continue to advocate for it.

Charles: I was going to ask you what the, what are the international dimensions of this case?

Devlin: the international dimensions are Open Doors, which is a human rights organization, has recounted that there have been thousands of killings.

of Christians by Fulanis. And so as a human rights advocate and as a pastor, I'm here to advocate for this man who was totally innocent. So it has international implications. The eyes of human rights advocates are now on Nigeria. Like how could this happen? How could this possibly happen by anyone's estimation, as Barrister said earlier, manslaughter at least because Murder one that he's being convicted of and may face hanging if we can't get clemency for him.

It has to be premeditated. So what justice on the Nigerian Supreme Court that didn't pop up and say to, to him or her, this is a case of self defense and this man is totally innocent. we encourage people to commit. Continue to pray for Sunday Jackson and his innocence.

Charles: Emmanuel, what was the prosecution's argument?

I understand that they urged the court to convict Mr. Jackson solely on his confessional statement and based on the fact that death had occurred.

So basically, no mitigating circumstances and that was pretty much how the judge saw it.

Ogebe: Yes, so part of the problem is they are arguing that Yes He had a responsibility to flee.

Now, in the US, we have stand your ground rules, which means you can defend yourself as much as you want. Now, here, they're arguing that instead of fight, you should have flight, you should flee.

Charles: In other words, after he overpowered...

Ogebe: Yes,

Charles: And retrieved the knife...

Ogebe: Yes.

Charles: there was no further need to stab him.

Ogebe: Yes. But that is not accurate. And I don't think that's fair to make someone who is facing imminent death. Now, just the data alone of all the massacres that have occurred, he couldn't have known if there were more herdsmen on their way to kill him. He has seen reports of what these people do.

This guy just stabbed him. And so to expect him to reasonably assume that to fulfill the conditions of the law he needed to flee made no sense.

Charles: Yeah, but nevertheless, do remember that a lot of Nigerian law is based on English common law. And if you attack, if you go into somebody's house to rob the person, I think it's different in America.

It's that standard ground thing. You can actually shoot the person. If you did that in the UK, you'd be charged with murder.

Ogebe: yeah, but here's the issue. The issue is that the attacker brought the knife. He overpowered him and took the knife after he sustained injuries. And this is where I have a problem.

The evidence shows that he was injured in the leg. And then you say that he should have run. So he was at that moment, momentarily incapacitated to even be able to run.

the facts are not in doubt. This man did not deny that his attacker died as a result of the attack. But the circumstances was "he attacked me, I was in fear for my life, and I fought back."

Charles: Were there any witnesses?

Ogebe: There were no witnesses, but even the prosecution admitted that the weapon belonged to the attacker. The evidence Jackson had scars on his body of the injuries he sustained.

Charles: Okay, let me ask you, William. Yes. are you now in the process of trying to reach out to political leaders in Adamawa State in order to Seek clemency, because that's the only option, really, isn't it?

Devlin: That's the only option. We are bringing out, every possible person, method, ability, to be able to grant clemency to Mr. Sunday Jackson, who was totally innocent. And yes, we are on a fast track to alert people that here's a man that you can stand up for from a human rights perspective. Be a hero today in Nigeria on the issue of human rights and stand up for this nobody.

Sunday Jackson, that's totally innocent in spite of what the Nigerian Supreme Court said today. yeah, we're initiating and, we're going full force on that.

Charles: And how much time has he actually got now?

Ogebe: we're not sure what the timeline is now. And just to illustrate the level of disappointment, we had someone on standby to pick him up from prison today.

And I couldn't make the call to say he's not going home. He's going to be killed. His children are ill.

We've had to take care of them. His wife abandoned him. And so even in this time, he's not surrounded by his family and we're going to put him to death. But I do want to make a quick, point here that we're standing up not just for him, but for all of us.

The Fulani militia have killed thousands of Christians, they've killed, Muslims as well, and many of them are foreigners. So we have a situation where foreigners come and kill Nigerians with impunity and Nigerians can't defend themselves. Yeah.

In, the Northwest right now, Laka Wura is a Fulani terrorist group that was invited to come and help stop the terrorism of Boko Haram and Bandits, and they're now killing the people they came in to protect.

So Nigeria is under siege. And there are more Nigerian citizens on death row in Nigeria now for defending themselves against Fulani herdsmen than there are Fulani herdsmen in Nigerian prisons, on death row. That's just wrong. It's unacceptable.

Devlin: Upside down.

Charles: No idea how much time he's actually got to make a ruling? No, There must be a period that allows for the clemency process to, to

Devlin: The court did not issue their opinion today and they said not till next week. We're on a fast track and we just made an announcement. They made an announcement.

That's why I said two minutes.

Ogebe: They had 30 judgments to deliver today so they said they couldn't read everything and they'll just give the conclusions. So all we heard was "dismissed" and we won't know till next week. But I will contrast this with the death row case in Indonesia that we won.

Charles: I'm going to come to that in a minute because we're fast running out of time.

But yes, he's been in prison for 10 years. What must his mental state be?

Devlin: well, we saw him February 19th 2021. We went to Yola and we actually had access to visit with him and to pray for him. So here's a man that has lost everything, simply because he was trying to defend himself and defend his family and defend his farm is as Barrister said.

How did Sunday Jackson know that there may be 20 other Fulanis that are coming right behind this gentleman who attacked him. his mental state, you can imagine being in prison for 10 years, losing your family, losing your children, losing your wife. the man is crushed and depressed and that's why we are going to continue to advocate for the innocence of Sunday Jackson.

Charles: And Emmanuel, you were talking about Indonesia.

Ogebe: Yes.

Charles: You've done a lot of cases across the world. Tell us about that case in Indonesia where you got a Nigerian off death row and how that contrasts with what happened here in Nigeria.

Ogebe: Yes, so that was a fascinating case. it's definitely one of the most complex cases I've had to deal with.

And the gentleman was convicted under the identity of “Emmanuel Ihejirika” which wasn't his real name. the passport wasn't his own passport so he ended up, by mistaken identity, getting a death sentence for crimes that he did not commit. And we had to prove that he was not a Sierra Leonean but a Nigerian.

And we couldn't get the data from the NIS. And so That's the Nigerian Immigration Services. So we had to conduct a DNA test on his brother from Ebonyi State here in Abuja. And then we had to do a DNA test on him in Indonesian prison to establish nationality. this is one of the most bizarre cases ever.

We had teams of lawyers working in Indonesia, Australia, Pakistan, and Malaysia, and then myself in the U.

S.

And very fortunately for us, the Indonesian Supreme Court granted him a reprieve. And he came home after 20 years from a country that is the biggest Muslim country in the world. there's a bit of racism in that country. And, Nigerians have a terrible reputation. But the Supreme Court set a poor Nigerian free and he came back maybe about a year ago to Nigeria. Yes.

The work that Sunny Akanni , the counsel on Jackson's case did was fascinating. He's won death row cases before but this was a big shocker to me.

And about the timeline quickly, I was going to say, in Indonesia, we came into the case after he had exhausted everything.

He was awaiting execution. But the Indonesian ambassador told me, here in Abuja, he said, “listen, 27 days to his execution, you have a right to file an additional appeal.”

So we went around the world and we gathered our data. We had huge briefs and when he was told he was going to be executed, we submitted our appeal and a couple of years later, the court said, “We're going to overturn his death sentence.” So in our case in Nigeria, we don't know the clock we're working with, but definitely time is of the essence to get him off.

Charles: But on a final word, he now essentially is in a race for his life.

Devlin: He is. He is in a race for his life. And this Indonesian case was a great day of celebration because we brought that gentleman home and landed here in Abuja on Christmas Day of all things.

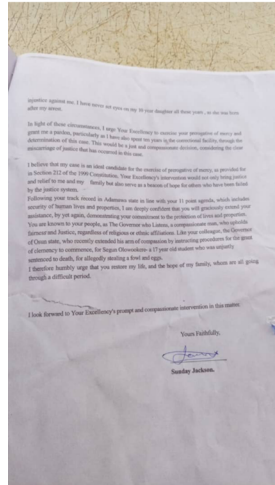
We're going to be with Sunday Jackson until the final lap of this, and we are hoping to God that our prayers will be answered, and we ask others to pray, Charles, and thank you for bringing attention to Sunday Jackson, this innocent man.

Charles: Thank you for bringing that story to us, and we're very encouraged by the work that you do, both of you, and keep doing it.

Charles: Dr. William Terence Devlin is an American human rights leader who's been supporting Mr. Jackson. And of course, Emmanuel Ogebe is a member of his defense team and he's a U. S. based human rights lawyer. Thank you very much indeed to both of you.

Devlin: Thank you, Charles.

2. Copy of Sunday Jackson's Clemency Appeal Letter to the Adamawa State Governor



3. Images of Human Rights Lawyer Emmanuel Ogebe(L) members of Jackson's family (middle) and Human Rights Activist, Dr Williams Devlin(R) with Sunday Jackson's Daughters



2. Copy of Court Judgement

Evidence of Sunday Jackson

On oath the DWI who is the defendant himself informed the court that his name is Sunday Jackson living in dong Demsa local government area Adamawa state. That on 27th January 2015 he was working in his farm, one Fulani man rushing with his cattle, then ask him where are the people that came through his farm, he told him that he don't know, then the Fulani man put his cattle into his farm, he asked him why did he do that, but he did not say anything. He then pursued the cattle out of his farm, the Fulani man brought out a knife advancing towards him with the knife, he had nothing in his hands as he started running and shouting no one came out, as he was running, the Fulani man stabbed him with the knife on the back of his head. He then turn to hit him with his leg, then he stabbed him on his left leg.

At that point he got scared, when the Fulani man(deceased) tried to stab him again, he held his hand and as they were struggling, he collected the knife and stabbed him, at that point he couldn't beat him because he was weak, so he threw away the knife at the scene of the incident and went back home. During cross-examination, he told the court that he didn't thought that the stabbing will lead to the death of the deceased.

**He was sentenced to death by
Supreme Court Mar 7 2025**

US Nigeria law group

(215) 720-0456

4. Petition Link Advocating for Sunday Jackson's Pardon

<https://chng.it/XnQr7DKfvS>

**Emmanuel Ogebe Esq.,
Special Counsel,
Justice for Jos Project.**

RealClear Politics

U.S. Must Acknowledge and Address Religious Persecution in Nigeria

By [David K. Trimble](#)

September 07, 2024



Last month in Nigeria, Christians were confronted with [yet another reminder](#) of the ongoing threats they face in their own communities. In August, “more than 70 Nigerian Christians were killed and another 20 Christian medical students were kidnapped in separate violent attacks in the southeastern Nigerian state of Benue.”

Violent Islamists such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue to terrorize populations in northern Nigeria. According to a [detailed report](#) released just days ago, armed Fulani herdsman and other terrorists and militia groups are responsible for the majority of attacks in Nigeria’s Middle Belt communities, where shocking levels of violence have persisted for years. These Fulani militants account for far more attacks against Christians (and Muslims) than either of the more prominent Boko Haram and ISWAP. Conditions on the ground are admittedly complicated by the range of malicious actors at play.

Further aggravating the situation for Nigerian Christians, there are sharia courts in more than a dozen provinces that oppose equal rights and due process for religious minorities, as well as blasphemy laws enshrined in Nigeria’s criminal and sharia codes.

Over the last decade, Islamist extremists have killed approximately 4,000 Christians annually. The figures for Nigeria in just the last couple of years are staggering. In 2022,

more than 5,000 Nigerian Christians were killed, and more than 3,000 kidnapped. In 2023, as many as 8,000 Nigerian Christians lost their lives to this scourge of violence.

The Trump administration designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for the first time in 2020. A year later, the Biden Administration announced Nigeria's removal from the CPC list and has yet to redesignate it. Congressman Chris Smith, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and others have insisted that Nigeria must again be added to the list.

In a [statement](#) to RealClearPolitics early last year, a State Department spokesperson explained, "After careful review, the secretary has assessed that Nigeria does not meet the legal threshold for designation under the International Religious Freedom Act." According to RCP, the spokesperson also noted that the Department of State had redesignated two terrorist organizations within Nigeria – Boko Haram and ISWAP – as "Entities of Particular Concern" (EPCs). The State Department also declared them foreign terrorist organizations and specially designated global terrorists.

The International Religious Freedom Act (1998) mandates the president (now delegated to the secretary of state), on an annual basis, to designate as CPCs countries with governments that have engaged in or tolerated "particularly severe" religious freedom violations. The [law defines](#) particularly severe religious freedom violations as "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations, including "torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; prolonged detention without charges; causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those persons; or other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons."

The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (2016) [added](#) the Special Watch List (SWL) and EPC categories. Undoubtedly, the State Department has rightly designated violent Islamist groups Boko Haram and ISWAP as EPCs. State's failure for three consecutive years to redesignate Nigeria as a CPC, however, is indefensible. It also misses a critical part of the picture by omitting the armed Fulani groups.

Secretary Antony Blinken last [announced](#) the State Department's CPC list on Dec. 29, 2023. Leaving aside Nigeria's blasphemy laws as well as its sharia courts, it seems impossible to argue that Nigeria has not, at the very least, tolerated "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom within its borders. The Nigerian government has failed to prevent Islamist extremists from killing thousands of Christians each year, going back at least a decade. Such appalling levels of violence against a particular religious community over an extended period of time can only be characterized as "systematic, ongoing, and egregious."

U.S. federal law provides a number of options for the United States to respond to countries designated as a CPC. The secretary of state may negotiate a bilateral agreement intended to bring an end to the offending country's violations; impose various levels of punitive sanctions; take other commensurate actions (e.g., declaring that pre-existing sanctions against a CPC also apply in this context); or issue a waiver.

Note, however, that the Frank Wolf Act of 2016 provides that the ongoing use of waivers fails to fulfill the purpose of the statute.

While the State Department has been reluctant across administrations to use the legal tools at its disposal to induce CPCs to change course, the tools themselves can still be put to effective use. This is why America's failure to redesignate Nigeria as a CPC, thereby restricting access to these additional policy options, is so baffling and troubling. The United States hasn't even been willing to add it to the Special Watch List.

Designating the more notorious of the non-state Islamist groups committing these atrocities as EPCs is important but is woefully inadequate. And not just because the armed Fulani groups are worse offenders numerically. The State Department has named Boko Haram and ISWAP as EPCs going back to 2020. This means that U.S. leaders during both the Trump and Biden administrations have recognized them to be violent actors "engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom." Yet, the Nigerian government has permitted them to continue to perpetrate violent atrocities and killings against Christians and a significant number of Muslims with impunity. That toleration alone means that Nigeria more than meets the CPC criteria. This administration, and the next, must no longer look away.

The United States should exercise strong leadership, restoring Nigeria's CPC designation and investigating the actors responsible for and complicit with these severe violations of religious freedom. Naming Boko Haram and ISWAP as EPCs is a key admission by the United States. Nigeria's neglect of its Christian population in the face of these and other groups that share their malicious ideology constitutes more than sufficient grounds for America to take decisive diplomatic action to confront the Nigerian government.

David Trimble serves as president of the [Religious Freedom Institute](#).