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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2021]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

## **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA AND TAKE ACTION TO END THE VIOLENCE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since 2013, 18 separate times, the ECLJ has brought to the U.N. Human Rights Council's attention the genocidal situation Christians in Nigeria have been facing. But still, neither Nigeria nor the U.N. have acted to mitigate the violence and the situation has only worsened. Nigeria's devastating humanitarian crisis is escalating, and has already resulted in the deaths and kidnapping of thousands of Christians who are continually the targets of religiously motivated violence.

Yet again, the ECLJ calls to this Council's attention, that pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, the very purpose of the United Nations is to "maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression . . ."[1]. In addition, under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ('Genocide Convention'), "[a]ny Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide . . ."[2]. Nigeria continues to show that it cannot protect Christians within its borders from these horrific genocidal acts, and the U.N. must act now.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

Christians in Nigeria are under threat of extinction by Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen. Due to the extremist violence, the U.N. Refugee Agency (UNRA) estimates that over 2.7 million people have been displaced in north-eastern Nigeria[3]. In fact, according to a recent NGO report, during the first four months of 2021 Islamic extremist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen, were responsible for the deaths of 1,470 Nigerian Christians and have abducted approximately 3,200 Nigerians with 2,200 of those abducted being Christians[4].

Violence targeting children in Nigeria has also been increasing, and according to a July 2021 statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore:

Meanwhile in Nigeria, the UN estimates that at least 950 students have been abducted from their schools by armed men since December. Over the past six weeks alone, nearly 500 children were abducted in four separate incidents across the central and northwest parts of the country. Many of these children have not yet been returned. It is hard to fathom the pain and fear that their families and loved ones are suffering in their absence[5].

### **3. ATROCITIES**

On 21 May 2021, a Christian pastor who had established a Christian school in the Kamberi village was killed along with his three-year-old son by a group of Fulani herdsmen[6]. His wife and daughter were fortunate enough to escape the slaughter[7].

Also in May of 2021, gunmen attacked a predominately Christian farming village killing fifteen people[8]. According to a state police spokesman, "The attackers started shooting sporadically, attacking villagers and in the process killed 15 people and injured five others"[9].

In June of 2021, a group of Fulani herdsmen are suspected of carrying out an attack killing twelve people in Kuru village of Jos South Local Council of Plateau State[10]. According to eyewitness reports, late on a Sunday evening, gunmen raided the community and began

firing their guns indiscriminately. As a result, twelve individuals were killed and five were taken to the hospital with injuries[11].

In July of 2021, it was estimated that more than 120 students at a Baptist boarding school in the northern state of Kaduna were kidnapped by armed assailants[12]. Around 2 a.m. on 5 July 2021, armed assailants began firing their weapons indiscriminately and breached the walls of Bethel Baptist High[13]. According to a police statement the assailants “overpowered the school’s security guards and made their way into the students’ hostel where they abducted an unspecified number of students into the forest”[14]. Since the raid approximately 56 of the students have been released[15]. Now, it is reported that the assailants are demanding one million Naira (\$2,400) for the release of each of the remaining 80 students[16].

Just days after the kidnapping of the students at the Baptist boarding school, Fulani herdsmen carried out an attack in the northwestern state of Kaduna that resulted in the deaths of thirty-three Nigerians, four churches being burned to the ground, and hundreds of homes being destroyed[17]. Over a six-day period, the Fulani herdsmen raided homes, stole food and valuables before torching the houses. Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria’s Kaduna chapter, Rev. John Joseph Hayab, stated “I am angry. I am worried. Someone is sleeping in their job while thousands of innocent people are being massacred. What’s more worrying is that those who are carrying out the attacks are not being arrested”[18].

During a two-week period from 23 July to 2 August, Fulani herdsmen carried out a series of attacks that resulted in the deaths of at least seventy people[19]. In addition to these killings more than 400 houses, churches, and orphanages were burnt down and at least 20,000 people were displaced[20]. During that same time period, on 2 August 2021, Fulani herdsmen attacked and destroyed a Christian orphanage in the Plateau state[21]. Thankfully, all 147 children were able to safely escape and have since dispersed[22].

Additionally, as we have stated in numerous previous reports, Leah Sharibu remains to be held captive by Boko Haram because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith[23]. On 14 May 2021, Leah turned 18, marking the fourth year she has spent her birthday imprisoned. Moreover, during her captivity, Leah has been raped and impregnated, and given birth to two of her captors’ children[24]. Immediate action needs to be taken to secure Leah’s rescue and safe return to her family. Furthermore, unless this situation is addressed immediately, similar oppression will continue to be a tragic reality for other vulnerable, innocent, Nigerian women and children.

#### 4. REQUEST

The U.N.’s lack of action and Nigeria’s “problematic level of apathy” have resulted in extreme injustice for Nigerian citizens[25]. The U.N. Charter calls on the U.N. to remove threats to peace, not merely to feign a response. It is of utmost importance that meaningful action be taken immediately to put an end to the daily violence that Christians in Nigeria are facing. Repeatedly they cry out to their government and the international community for help, but no one responds.

To mitigate greater future harm, we respectfully urge this council to work closely with the government of Nigeria to immediately secure the release of Leah Sharibu, prosecute those who are responsible, protect those most vulnerable to future attacks, and provide aid and assistance to the victims. Until real action is taken against Boko Haram and other extremist groups, those who live under the daily fear of being abducted, raped, enslaved, or killed will continue to be deprived of their fundamental human rights.

- [1] U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1 (emphasis added).
- [2] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, art. VIII, 9 Dec. 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277 (emphasis added).
- [3] Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 16 Aug. 2021).
- [4] Nigerian Islamic Jihadists Massacred 1,470 Christians in First Four Months of 2021 and Abducted over 2,200, INTERSOCIETY RULE OF LAW (11 May. 2021), <https://intersociety-ng.org/nigerian-islamic-jihadists-massacred-1-370-christians-in-first-four-months-of-2021-and-abducted-over-2500/>.
- [5] Statement by UNICEF Director Henrietta Fore, Concerns Deepen Over Attacks Against Children and Child Abductions in Parts of West and Central Africa, UNICEF (7 Jul. 2021), available at <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/concerns-deepen-over-attacks-against-children-and-child-abductions-parts-west-and>.
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- [7] Id.
- [8] Gunmen Kill 15 Villagers in Northern Nigeria, ARAB NEWS (13 May 2021), <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1674161/world>.
- [9] Id.
- [10] 12 Killed in Yet Another Attack by Suspected Fulani Herdsmen, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (14 Jun. 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/06/14/12-killed-yet-another-attack-suspected-fulani-herdsmen/>.
- [11] Id.
- [12] 140 Nigerian Baptist Students Kidnapped in Kaduna, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (5 Jul. 2021, 1:52 PM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/nigeria-baptist-students-kidnapped-bethel-school-kaduna.html>.
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- [14] Miriam Berger, About 140 Students Missing and Presumed Kidnapped After Gunmen Storm Another School in Northwest Nigeria, THE WASHINGTON POST (5 Jul. 2021, 12:23 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/05/nigeria-students-kidnap/>.
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- [16] Id.
- [17] Fredrick Nzwili, Nigerian Herders Kill 33, Burn 4 Churches Days After Kidnapping Schoolchildren, RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE (16 Jul. 2021), <https://religionnews.com/2021/07/16/nigerian-herders-kill-33-burn-four-churches-days-after-kidnapping-schoolchildren/>.
- [18] Id.
- [19] Church Calls for Intervention to Stem Killings in Plateau and Kaduna States, CSW (7 Aug. 2021), <https://www.csw.org.uk/2021/08/07/press/5365/article.htm>.
- [20] Id.
- [21] Karen Faulkner, Fulani Jihadists Destroy Christian Orphanage in Nigeria; ‘Please Pray’, WORTHY NEWS (12 Aug. 2021), <https://www.worthynews.com/60697-fulani-jihadists-destroy-christian-orphanage-in-nigeria-please-pray>.
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- [23] Leah Sharibu Gives Birth to Her Second Child While in Captivity, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (24 Mar. 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/24/leah-sharibu-gives-birth-second-child-captivity/>.
- [24] Id.
- [25] U.S. COMM’N ON INT’L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ANNUAL REPORT 2021: NIGERIA 30 (2021).