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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.

[6 February 2023]

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

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. CONDEMN THE DAILY ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO END THE VIOLENCE AND HELP VICTIMS

1. INTRODUCTION

Twenty-two separate times, the ECLJ has detailed to the U.N. Human Rights Council the atrocities being perpetrated against Christians on a daily basis in Nigeria. Christians make up approximately half of the population in Nigeria. Despite this, they are not strong enough to defend themselves from Islamic extremist groups. Open Doors, an organization working to help persecuted Christians around the world, has listed Nigeria as the 6th worst country for Christians to live in.(1) This ranking primarily stems from the violence being perpetrated against Christians by Islamic extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen.(2) These groups have a documented history of killing Christians, burning down villages, and kidnapping people to be held for ransom.(3)

2. BACKGROUND

Christians face extreme persecution every day in Nigeria. In 2022 alone, Islamic extremist groups were responsible for killing at least 4,020 Christians and abducting 2,300 Christians.(4) Of those killed, the Fulani herdsmen were responsible for 2,650 murders.(5) The violence that these groups carry out on a daily basis includes “massacres, killings, mutilations, torture, maiming, abductions, hostage-taking, rape, girl-child defilements, forced marriages, disappearances, extortions, forceful conversions and destruction or burning of homes and sacred worship and learning centers.”(6) According to Voice of the Martyrs, an organization working to defend the human rights of persecuted Christians, “[p]ersecution is a daily reality for many Christians in Nigeria. Fulani Islamic militants routinely target Christian communities in the central region of the country, burning homes, destroying churches, displacing families, and leaving many Christians without spouses, parents and children.”(7)

3. VIOLATIONS

On January 22, 2023, Fulani herdsmen killed five Christians and kidnapped another.(8) According to a local resident, “Fulani herdsmen at about 3 a.m. this Sunday, 22 January, invaded my community of Gambar Sabon Layi. . . . The Fulani herdsmen killed five members of our Christian community and a sixth Christian, Mr. Daniel Dabwa, was captured and is being held captive in an unknown place.”(9)

On January 20, 2023, Fulani herdsmen attacked a predominately Christian community and killed twelve Christians.(10) Of those killed, four were children.(11)

On January 15, 2023, a Catholic priest was burned alive after militants set his house on fire as they were unable to break into his house.(12) The militants also shot and wounded another priest as he was escaping the house.(13) In response to this attack, the governor of Niger State stated that “[t]hese terrorists have lost it and drastic action is needed to end this ongoing carnage.”(14)

At 10:00 am on Christmas morning in 2022, Fulani herdsmen attacked a village in Kaduna.(15) According to a local resident, “[t]he church worship service was about to commence when the attackers arrived at the village riding on motorbikes and shooting sporadically.”(16) As a result of the attack, one Christian was killed and fifty-three were kidnapped.(17)

On December 23, 2022, Fulani herdsmen killed three Christians in Kagoro.(18) A resident of the village explained the violence they continue to face at the hands of Fulani militants:

Family life has been disrupted; the lucky survivors have become refugees in their land waiting for palliatives in an endless genocide they can't understand. Mass graves litter the community and the countryside. Our people can no longer go to their farms for fear of being gunned down or macheted.

Lamentably, the Fulani terrorist attacks have continued unabated as they are heard chanting, "Allah Akbar [God is greater]" during the killing and destructive expeditions.(19)

That attack came just five days after Fulani herdsmen killed forty Christians and burned down 102 homes in Mallagum.(20) According to a spokesman for the Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), "[m]embers of six families who totaled 40 were killed by the herdsmen and bandits, while 102 houses were burned down. . . . Their homes were also looted as food stuffs and other household valuables were carted away by the terrorists."(21)

On November 23, 2022, 200 Fulani herdsmen killed nine Christians and injured twenty.(22) In addition, the militants burned down thirty homes.(23) According to a local resident, this was the third attack within the week.(24) Just the previous day, militants killed eleven Christians and burned down dozens of houses.(25)

From November 16-17, 2022, 300 Fulani herdsmen attacked two predominately Christian villages.(26) These attacks resulted in the deaths of eleven Christians and twenty homes and one church were burned down.(27)

In October 2022, a Christian was abducted. He was later killed on November 17, 2022, and the kidnappers demanded a ransom for the release of the corpse.(28) The brother of the deceased Christian stated:

My brother, a father of two children, was kidnapped in early October by bandits while he was out in the field checking on installations of the company he was working for. . . . The bandits contacted us and demanded that we pay a ransom of the amount of 200 million naira (\$450,418), but after a long process of negotiations, they reduced the ransom to 10 million naira (\$22,520). We were able to raise 3 million naira, but unfortunately after collecting the money from us, they still killed my brother on Nov. 17.(29)

Even after the ransom was paid and the victim was killed, the kidnappers demanded an additional ransom of 10 million naira (\$22,520) for the release of the body.(30)

On September 17, 2022, militants attacked the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Niger State and abducted dozens of Christians who were gathered for an all-night vigil.(31) Just days before this attack, Fulani militants kidnapped fifty-seven Christians who were also gathered for an all-night vigil at a church in Kaduna State.(32)

Finally, we would like to once again bring to the attention of this Council the story of Leah Sharibu who remains a prisoner of Boko Haram. Leah Sharibu was kidnaped by Boko Haram in February 2018 at the age of fourteen. February 2023 will mark five years that she's been held captive. That means that for five years, she has been forced to experience unconscionable abuse at the hands of Boko Haram all because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith.

4. REQUEST

We would like to remind this Council that the purpose of the United Nations, inter alia, 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" (33) Clearly, the international community and the Nigerian government have failed to protect the lives of Christians in Nigeria. A continued lack of

meaningful action will only result in more destruction and loss of life. It is clear that the people of Nigeria are suffering daily and are in desperate need of protection and aid.

Therefore, we respectfully request that this Council work with Nigeria to provide immediate aid and protection to its civilians. In order to ensure that Christians can freely live their lives and practice their faith, immediate and meaningful action must be taken now to stop the senseless violence.

We also respectfully request that this Council work with Nigeria to ensure the immediate and safe release of Leah Sharibu. This innocent young girl should not have to spend one more day experiencing horrific abuse by Boko Haram.

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 5. Id.
 6. Id.
 7. Anthony Akaeze, Is Nigeria Really the World's Most Dangerous Place for Christians, BAPTIST NEWS GLOBAL (Aug. 23, 2022).
 8. Jesse Jackson, Five Christians Killed in NE Nigeria, 12 in Middle Belt, CHURCH LEADERS (Jan. 24, 2023).
 9. Id.
 10. Id.
 11. Id.
 12. Catholic Priest Burned Alive in Nigeria's Hard-Hit North, NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER (Jan. 17, 2023).
 13. Id.
 14. Id.
 15. Dozens of Christians Killed or Abducted by Extremists in Nigeria, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Jan. 1, 2023).
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 20. Over 40 Christians Killed in Nigeria on Christmas Week, EVANGELICAL FOCUS (Jan. 5, 2023, 1:20 PM).
 21. Id.
 22. Dozens of Nigerian Christians Killed in the Past Month; Terrorists Demand Ransom for Corpse, THE CHRISTIAN POST (Dec. 3, 2022).
 23. Id.
 24. Id.
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 26. Id.
 27. Id.
 28. Id.
 29. Id.
 30. Id.
 31. Zelda Caldwell, Pastor and More Than 80 Others Kidnapped in Attacks on Two Nigerian Churches, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Sep. 23, 2022).
 32. Id.
 33. U.N. Charter art. 1, ¶ 1.