



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 16, 2023

Case No. FL-2023-00001

Benjamin Sisney
Senior Litigation Counsel
American Center for Law and Justice



Dear Mr. Sisney:

As we noted in our letter dated April 4, 2023, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State (“Department”) has identified an additional nine responsive records subject to the FOIA. We have determined two records may be released in full and seven records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Bradley Silverman, Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (202) 252-2575 or bradley.silverman@usdoj.gov. Please refer to the case number FL-2023-00001, and the civil action number, 22-cv-02581, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diamonece Hickson', written in a cursive style.

Diamonece Hickson
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| ARMSEXP | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c) |
| CIA PERS/ORG | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g) |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004 |
| INA | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505 |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

From:	"George, Suzy" (b)(6)@state.gov>
To:	Phee, Molly C (b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject:	Re: top lines from HFAC Africa briefing 12/01
Date:	Wed, 1 Dec 2021 19:47:49 +0000

Sounds like a job well done. Hope you are doing ok and fully recovered from our travel adventures.

On Dec 1, 2021, at 1:28 PM, Phee, Molly C (b)(6)@state.gov> wrote:

I briefed the HFAC Africa subcommittee this morning and wanted to (b)(5)
(b)(5)

(b)(5)

Sender:	"George, Suzy" <(b)(6)>@state.gov>
Recipient:	Phee, Molly <(b)(6)>@state.gov>

From:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
To:	(Catalyst) Philip Gilpin, Jr.(b)(6)@catalystories.com>; (b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject:	Re: Nigerian Submission Theme
Date:	Mon, 7 Jun 2021 18:57:38 +0000

Thank you for flagging!

From: (Catalyst) Philip Gilpin, Jr.(b)(6)@catalystories.com>

Sent: Monday, June 7, 2021 2:30 PM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>

Subject: Nigerian Submission Theme

Hi (b)(6) & (b)(6)

As we've briefly discussed before, the themes in the submitted projects can tell us a lot about where a society's mindset is focused.

Here are just a few of the project descriptions from Nigeria. There are dozens more like these that showcase social unrest and generational upheaval...

JANIKA

A lot of African states are controlled by greedy cabals who hover above state governments and structures. They will dispose of anyone who poses a threat to this order. For this story, the cabal must be expelled if the state is ever to develop to its full potential. Set against the backdrop of an African state immersed in economic mess, civil unrest and corruption, two young adults seek to achieve hard-set personal goals. Africa's corrupt leaders are powerful and almost always unquestionable. Going against them is usually to one's own guaranteed peril. For Janika, peril is what she has come to know of late, and going back is nearly no longer an option.

ELECTRIFY

Electrify is an episodic series of films created for Television and digital consumption with a vision to educate, enlighten and sensitize Nigerian youths with less or zero access to positive information and exposure. Young vibrant uneducated and uninformed Nigerians are used as tool for political thuggery pre-during and post election. They are used to carry out violent attacks, steal ballot boxes and obstruct peaceful protests.

BIG LITTLE SIGNS

In a society where women are never to be seen or heard, two spirited ladies choose to fight against the perpetrators of Gender Based Violence who are majorly men.

THE TRINITY

The Trinity is a documentary series that attempts to penetrate and analyze the complex and rather phony religious charade that has come to define a large part of the society. The title of the documentary comes from the three major religions that make up the largest part of the Nigerian society. one must either be a Christian, Muslim or Traditionalist to have a complete Nigerian identity. The rest of the world has long discovered that religion is a fraud and has moved on but Nigerians are still wallowing in misery largely brought on them by religion. A typical Nigerian will face see himself as an adherent of a religion even before he sees himself as a human.

NORTHERN BELLES

The goal is to explore various social aspects of many northern Nigeria woman that are often ignored or treated as myths. Episodes will touch on various social constructs that range from

mental health, gender roles, early marriage, socio-political agendas that are embedded into culture, prejudice, and feminism amongst other topical issues.

Best,

Philip Gilpin, Jr.

Executive Director

Catalyst Story Institute

[Donate to our scholarship fund](#)

PO Box 1

Duluth, MN 55801

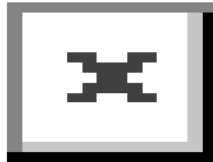
(b)(6)

www.catalyststories.com

Sender:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
Recipient:	(Catalyst) Philip Gilpin, Jr (b)(6)@catalyststories.com>; (b)(6)@state.gov>

From:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
To:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject:	Nigeria Religious Freedom delisting Fall Out
Date:	Wed, 24 Nov 2021 02:18:22 +0000

<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/11/23/christian-groups-blinken-nigeria-religious-violence-list-523258>



Christian groups furious at Blinken for removing Nigeria from religious violence list - POLITICO

Christian groups, a U.S. government panel and former senior U.S. diplomats are furious over Secretary of State Antony Blinken's decision to take Nigeria off a list of countries accused of ...

www.politico.com

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
Recipient:	(b)(6)@state.gov>

From:	Nina Shea (b)(6)@hudson.org>
To:	Nina Shea (b)(6)@hudson.org>
Subject:	Nigeria Church Attack - Shea quoted - CNA
Date:	Mon, 6 Jun 2022 14:44:11 +0000

At least 50 feared dead in attack on Catholic church in Nigeria

June 5, 2022

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251458/nigeria-catholic-church-attack>

Escalating anti-Christian attacks

Nina Shea, a human rights lawyer and expert in religious freedom at the Hudson Institute, a think tank and research center in Washington, D.C., told CNA Sunday that "war-like" attacks against Catholics and other Christians are escalating in Nigeria. Yet most of this violence, until now, has centered in northern Nigeria, while the southwestern part of the country where Sunday's attack took place has remained relatively peaceful.

"This massacre in a church while filled with Sunday worshippers is an atrocity that we've repeatedly seen in northern Nigeria over the years. Those were the work of Islamist extremists," Shea said.

"While the facts are still emerging about today's massacre, it is clear that large scale, war-like attacks on Catholics and other Christians are spreading in a system of impunity," she continued. "The Buhari government has allowed this continue unabated and fails to protect Nigeria's churches. This governmental passivity is being seen as a green light for extremists to attack Christians.

Shea also criticized the Biden administration and Secretary of State Antony Blinken for being "passive" in response to the increasing attacks targeting Christian villages in the north.

"Kidnappings and murders of priests and pastors, enslavement of Christian girls, and mob lynchings for alleged blasphemy against Islam" have intensified since the Biden administration removed Nigeria from the United States' "Country of Concern" (CPC) list of countries where egregious religious persecution is taking place, Shea said.

"(Blinken) needs to address this crisis, stop making excuses for it based on a climate change narrative and designate Nigeria as a CPC. Anything less is unconscionable," she said.

"Innocent, defenseless religious people are being slaughtered en masse in an aggressive, onslaught even in areas like today's attack where peaceful conditions formerly prevailed," Shea added.

Sender:	Nina Shea (b)(6)@hudson.org>
Recipient:	Nina Shea (b)(6)@hudson.org>

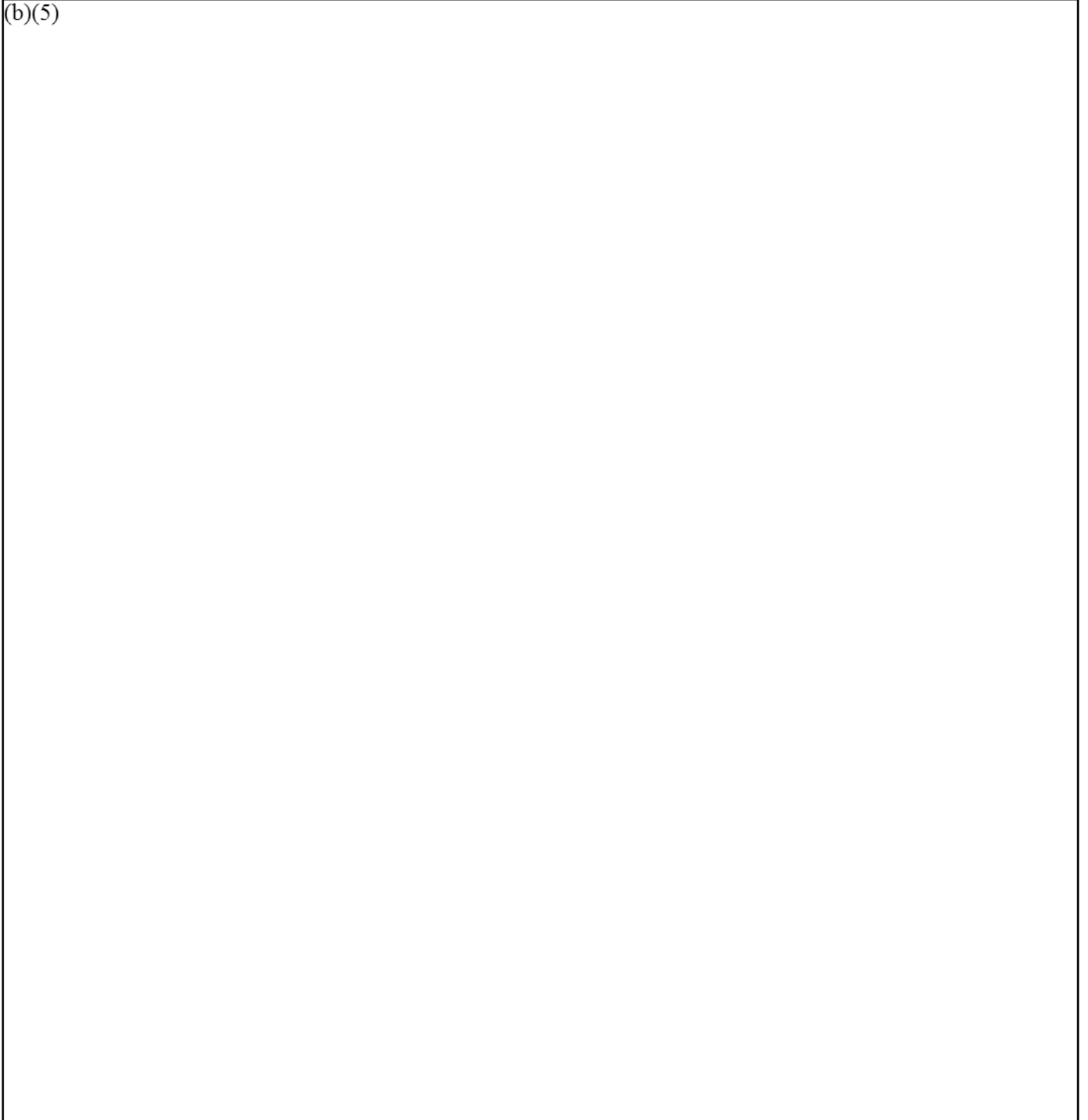


African Affairs

March 28, 2023
Washington, D.C.

Nigeria – Overview

(b)(5)





African Affairs

(b)(5)

**Annex: Nigeria: Civilian Killings in Bassa, Kajuru,
and Shinkafi Local Government Areas**

(b)(5)

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NIGERIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

(b)(5)

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|

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5)

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 29, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As you are well aware, horrific acts of deadly violence have been committed against Nigerian Christians in recent weeks, including the massacre of churchgoers on Pentecost Sunday and the stoning of a Christian college student. Sadly, such violence has become all too familiar for Christians in Africa's most populous country. Last year, however, you inexplicably removed Nigeria's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) despite no demonstrable improvement in the country's religious freedom conditions. On the contrary, the situation in Nigeria has grown worse. We previously urged you to immediately reverse your misguided decision, and we write today to renew our call.

Recent high-profile acts of violence underscore the intense religious persecution that is regularly experienced by Nigerian Christians. On Pentecost Sunday, gunmen attacked St. Francis Catholic Church in Nigeria's Ondo state, reportedly killing at least 50 churchgoers. Last month, a violent mob brutally stoned to death Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu, a student at Shehu Shagari College of Education in northwest Nigeria. According to reports, some Islamist students were enraged by a "blasphemous" message Deborah had posted in a WhatsApp group, in which she said that "Jesus Christ is the greatest. He helped me pass my exams." Merely expressing one's Christian faith has apparently become tantamount to a death sentence in many parts of Nigeria.

Religious violence and intolerance directed toward Nigerian Christians has worsened in recent years. One report documented more than 4,650 cases of Nigerian Christians who were killed for their faith in 2021. Accordingly, Nigeria earns the dubious honor—for the second consecutive year—of being the deadliest country on earth for Christians.

We wrote last year that "[n]ot only has the government of Nigeria failed to take meaningful steps to mitigate such violence, but Nigerian authorities restrict and crack down on religious minorities and detain individuals indefinitely on blasphemy-related charges." We remain concerned that the Nigerian government is failing to protect the religious freedom and basic safety of its Christian citizens. Furthermore, as this year's annual reports from the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and from your own Department make clear, Nigerian government authorities directly participate in the persecution of Christians, Muslims, and even non-theists, most notoriously through arrests and convictions under blasphemy laws. Make no mistake: continued enforcement of state-sanctioned blasphemy laws enables the type of deadly violence that killed Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu and so many others.

When we previously wrote you, we were met with a response which failed to answer our questions about why the State Department views Nigeria as not having engaged in or tolerated “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom” or even “severe violations of religious freedom.” This is unacceptable, especially because you are required by federal law to consider the recommendation of USCIRF—which, since 2009, has been to designate Nigeria as a CPC. In fact, USCIRF reiterated in its 2022 Annual Report that it was “appalled” at the removal of Nigeria’s CPC designation. Despite public statements from you and other State Department officials condemning the recent bloodshed in Nigeria, the fact remains that the Department still does not officially regard Nigeria as a severe violator of religious freedom.

The State Department released its 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom on June 2, which starts the 90-day timeline for the Department to make its religious freedom designations. Given the abysmal state of religious freedom in Nigeria, it is incumbent upon you to reverse last year’s decision and redesignate the country as a CPC. The moment demands that you do so without delay.

We look forward to your swift action on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



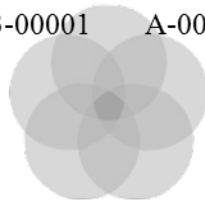
James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Rashad Hussain
Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
United States Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20520



INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
ROUNDTABLE
NIGERIA

April 20, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Co-Chairs of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in Nigeria, we write with urgency regarding the insecurity in Nigeria and the need to appoint the next Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

The situation in Nigeria is not improving and there remains a lack of commitment to pursuing peace, establishing development and ending conflict in our nation. Violent extremism persists, terrorists remain unthwarted, police violence, kidnappings are on the rise and children are regularly being enslaved &/or trafficked. For this reason, we implore you to engage with stakeholders and victims in Nigeria - beyond the standard government protocols.

The decision of the US Department of State to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for the first time was welcomed. Systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom along with violent attacks by Boko Haram and ethno-religious conflicts have become more frequent, and are compromised by the judiciary system. Additionally, the government's reaction to the protests against the impunity for police violence is concerning.

Mr. Secretary, resolving the ongoing conflicts will require prudence and wisdom. we urge you to speak with those affected individuals and organizations in order to advance a diplomatic solution that respects the legitimate aspirations of both Muslims and Christians by promoting a just peace. Finally, we reiterate the call to appoint the next Ambassador-at-Large for IRF.

Sincerely yours,

Professor Yusufu Turaki
Co-Chair, International Religious Freedom
Roundtable in Nigeria

Sheik Haliru Abdullahi Maraya
Co-Chair, International Religious Freedom
Roundtable in Nigeria

CC: Mary Beth Leonard, USA Ambassador to Nigeria
Nathan Wineinger, Office of International Religious Freedom
Greg Mitchell, IRF Roundtable (USA)

The following organizations have participated in our various in-person and virtual IRF Nigeria Roundtables since the beginning (January 2019):

Organizations

1. International Organisation for Peacebuilding and Social Justice
2. Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
3. International Religious Freedom Roundtable (USA)
4. Jos ECWA Theological Seminary
5. Democracy, Governance & Migration of the EU (Abuja)
6. International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFORB)
7. Search For Common Ground (SFCG)
8. US Department of State
9. International Committee On Nigeria (ICON)
10. Global Peace Foundation
11. Nigerian Army (Rtd)
12. French Embassy
13. Peace & Security of the EU (Abuja)
14. Plateau State Government
15. Polish Embassy
16. US Embassy (Abuja)
17. Political Section at the EU delegation (Abuja)
18. Islamic Movement Nigeria (IMN)
19. Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI)
20. University of Zaria (History Dept)
21. University of Jos (Social Science)
22. Benue State Government
23. Church of the Brethren
24. 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative
25. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
26. Jubilee Campaign
27. Southern Kaduna Peoples Union (SOKAPU)
28. Kaduna State Government
29. Institute of Cause Rights Protection
30. International Society for Liberty and Rule of Law (InterSociety)
31. LEAH Foundation
32. Rural Watch
33. Resilient Aid and Dialogue Initiative (RADi)