



June 8, 2022

**VIA OVERNIGHT DELIVERY SERVICE**

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

**RE: Request to Redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern**

Dear Secretary Blinken:

By way of introduction, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) is an organization dedicated to the defense of constitutional liberties secured by law. ACLJ attorneys have successfully argued numerous cases before the Supreme Court of the United States, other federal appellate and trial courts, as well as various state courts throughout the United States. The ACLJ is further dedicated, *inter alia*, to the promotion and protection of human rights and to the furtherance of the rule of law in global affairs.

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“In Nigeria, a Christian is killed for [his or her] faith every two hours.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, from October 2020 to September 2021, **“more Christians were murdered for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country.”**<sup>2</sup> With more than 4,650 Christians killed during that time period, **“Nigeria accounted for nearly 80% of Christian deaths worldwide.”**<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we write this letter to urge you to redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

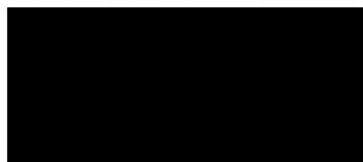
As you know, due to the continuing concern over horrific violations of religious freedom in Nigeria, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during the Trump administration, designated

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Dustin, *Where Every 2 Hours, a Christian is Killed for Their Faith*, OPEN DOORS (Mar. 3, 2022), <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/every-two-hours-a-christian-in-nigeria-is-killed-for-their-faith/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*



Nigeria for the first time as a CPC on December 7, 2020.<sup>4</sup> Regrettably, in November 2021, the State Department chose to remove Nigeria from the CPC list.<sup>5</sup>

The decision to remove Nigeria from the CPC list is troubling, not only because it happened right before your visit to Nigeria,<sup>6</sup> but because the conditions regarding religious freedom had not improved in the country. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recently reiterated this fact in its 2022 report, stating that “religious freedom conditions in Nigeria remained poor as both state and nonstate actors continued to commit widespread and egregious religious freedom violations.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is worth noting that, before being designated a CPC in 2020, Nigeria was placed on the Special Watch List (SWL) in 2019. However, in 2021, not only did the State Department remove it from the CPC list, it completely bypassed downgrading Nigeria to the SWL.<sup>8</sup>

It is well-known that Nigeria is a dangerous place for Christians and other religious minorities. The terrorist organizations Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) operate with impunity in Nigeria, controlling large swaths of territory throughout the country where they deny religious freedom and carry out violence against religious minorities. Sadly, Boko Haram and other organizations have only continued to expand the reach of their atrocities in recent years and maintain a robust hold over the area they control.

Nonstate actors such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, and the Fulani militants are more egregious examples of the problem just as visible in the government itself. There can be no doubt that the Nigerian government has tolerated systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom. As Pastor Jeremiah, whose church and village in northern Nigeria was attacked by Fulani militants, said: “We have cried to the government to intervene, but they have done nothing.”<sup>9</sup> Pastor Jeremiah’s sentiment can also be seen from a statement from Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins when he commented on the brutal attack days ago on St. Francis Xavier Church stating:

Nigerians are living in a time of fear and anxiety and that their concerns were not being addressed by the government, he said, while calling on Nigerian leaders to step up effort to prevent similar attacks. “This only points to a failing state that has

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<sup>4</sup> Press Statement, Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, United States Takes Action Against Violators of Religious Freedom (Dec. 7, 2020), <https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom-2/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> *Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries, Entities of Particular Concern*, U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, <https://www.state.gov/countries-of-particular-concern-special-watch-list-countries-entities-of-particular-concern/> (last visited June 6, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* See also Press Release, U.S. Dept. of State, Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Nigerian President Buhari (Nov. 18, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> *Nigeria: 2022 Report*, USCIRF, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Nigeria.pdf> (last visited May 4, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> *Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries, Entities of Particular Concern*, *supra* note 5.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Summers, *16 Christians Murdered for Following Jesus—Every Day*, OPEN DOORS (Jan. 21, 2022), <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/16-christians-murdered-for-following-jesus-every-day/>.

abdicated all its statutory responsibilities such that nonstate actors operate freely and with impunity,” the archbishop said.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, the situation of violence and extremism did not get better in 2021. As previously stated, from October 2020 to September 2021, “more Christians were murdered for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country.”<sup>11</sup> With more than 4,650 Christians killed during that time period, “Nigeria accounted for nearly 80% of Christian deaths worldwide.”<sup>12</sup> Religious minorities continue to face a true threat from Boko Haram, ISWAP, and the Fulani militants, and the government has failed to protect minorities from their violence. These groups continue to persecute religious minorities. Muslim mobs continue to threaten and attack churches, kidnap and kill pastors,<sup>13</sup> “[a]rmed bandits routinely kidnap religious school children for ransom”,<sup>14</sup> and state authorities continue to charge and convict people for blasphemy.<sup>15</sup> Truthfully, the religious freedom violations are too numerous to account for in this letter, but the following will highlight just a few of the ongoing attacks in the past year.

For instance, in May 2021, armed radicals killed eight Christians and burned down a church and several homes in Kaduna state.<sup>16</sup> In July 2021, terrorists kidnapped “nearly 140 students at a Baptist boarding school.”<sup>17</sup> During the same period, Fulani herders attacked in the same region, killing thirty-three people, and burning down four churches and hundreds of homes.<sup>18</sup> In September 2021, a Muslim extremist mob killed a pastor they suspected had helped a certain Muslim convert to Christianity.<sup>19</sup> The mob also burned down the pastor’s house, church, and

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Ayayi Dada, *Bishops Lament That Nigerians Are Not Safe Anywhere After Church Attack*, CRUX (June 6, 2022), <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2022/06/bishops-lament-that-nigerians-are-not-safe-anywhere-after-church-attack>.

<sup>11</sup> Dustin, *supra* note 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. *Muslim Mob Allegedly Kills Pastor for Converting Man to Christian in Kano, Razes House, Church, Mission School*, SAHARA REPORTERS (Sep. 27, 2021), <http://saharareporters.com/2021/09/27/muslim-mob-allegedly-kills-pastor-converting-man-christian-kano-razes-house-church> (describing how a Muslim mob killed a pastor and burnt down his “house, church, and mission school”); Lindy Lowry, *Urgent Prayer: Nigerian Churches ‘Listed for Attack’*, OPEN DOORS USA (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/urgent-prayer-nigerian-churches-listed-for-attack/> (discussing an incident where churches received threatening letters); *Two Christians Killed, Dozens Abducted in Attack on Church in Nigeria*, CNHV (Nov. 5, 2021), <https://chvnradio.com/articles/two-christians-killed-dozens-abducted-in-attack-on-church-in-nigeria> (describing a deadly attack by Fulani herdsmen on a church during a Sunday morning worship service); Jos Kim Masara, *Brave Nigerian Pastor Preaches the Gospel in Muslim Kidnappers’ Den*, NIGERIA REP. (May 3, 2022), <https://www.nigeria-report.org/brave-nigerian-pastor-preaches-the-gospel-in-muslim-kidnappers-den/> (describing how a Christian pastor was abducted by Muslims in Nigeria).

<sup>14</sup> Randal Everett, *State Department Must Return CPC Designation to Nigeria*, WASH. EXAMINER (Jan. 6, 2022, 12:00 A.M.), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/state-department-must-return-cpc-designation-to-nigeria>.

<sup>15</sup> *Nigeria: 2022 Report*, *supra* note 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Gunmen Burn Down Church, Kill Eight Christians in Kaduna State*, INT’L CHR. CONCERN (May 23, 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/05/23/gunmen-burn-church-kill-eight-christians-kaduna-state/>.

<sup>17</sup> Fredrick Nzwilli, *Nigerian Herders Kill 33, Burn 4 Churches Days after Kidnapping Schoolchildren*, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE (July 16, 2021), <https://religionnews.com/2021/07/16/nigerian-herders-kill-33-burn-four-churches-days-after-kidnapping-schoolchildren/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Muslim Mob Allegedly Kills Pastor for Converting Man to Christian in Kano, Razes House, Church, Mission School*, *supra* note 13.

mission school.<sup>20</sup> In October 2021, Fulani militants attacked a Baptist church, killed two Christians, and abducted dozens at gunpoint.<sup>21</sup> In September 2021, armed bandits abducted seventy-three students from a school.<sup>22</sup> In another instance, “gunmen attacked two majority Christian villages in . . . Kaduna, killing [forty] people.”<sup>23</sup>

More recently, in January 2022, Fulani militants murdered eighteen Christians.<sup>24</sup> Armed soldiers were stationed in the community but stood by as people were killed.<sup>25</sup> In February 2022, ISWAP terrorists killed three people in a Christian village and destroyed a church there.<sup>26</sup> In March 2022, at least twenty-five Christians were killed by Fulani militants and Islamic terrorists, who raided the predominantly Christian town and destroyed around 200 homes.<sup>27</sup> Four days later, Fulani militants attacked ten predominantly Christian communities.<sup>28</sup> They and others abducted 100 people, killed fifty Christians, and burned down a church.<sup>29</sup>

According to Open Doors, a watchdog organization that monitors global Christian persecution, “[i]n the first three months of 2022, almost 900 Nigerian civilians were killed in violent attacks – including hundreds of Christians who were murdered because of their faith.”<sup>30</sup> The attacks continued. In April 2022, Fulani herdsmen killed eleven people in Jato-Aka.<sup>31</sup> Also in April, Fulani herdsmen and others in Kaduna state killed eighteen Christians and burned down ninety-two houses.<sup>32</sup> In May 2022, Fulani militants attacked a Christian community; destroyed houses, barns, and food; looted domestic animals and other valuable goods; and murdered at least three Christians and a Nigerian soldier.<sup>33</sup> They called back on a victim’s phone to promise more attacks.<sup>34</sup> Also in May, ISWAP terrorists killed eight Christians in Chibok County, less than a month after the

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<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Two Christians Killed, Dozens Abducted in Attack on Church in Nigeria*, *supra* note 13.

<sup>22</sup> Everett, *supra* note 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Nigerian Militants Kill Christians in a Spate of Recent Attacks*, PERSECUTION.ORG (Jan. 28, 2022), <https://www.persecution.org/2022/01/28/nigerian-militants-kill-christians-spate-recent-attacks/>.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Nigeria Jihadists Kill 27 People in Four Attacks*, GUARDIAN: NIGERIA (Feb. 27, 2022, 3:03 PM), <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria-jihadists-kill-27-people-in-four-attacks/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Suspected Fulani Herdsmen Kill 32 Christians in Northern Nigeria*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Mar. 23, 2022), <https://morningstarnews.org/2022/03/suspected-fulani-herdsmen-kill-32-christians-in-northern-nigeria/>.

<sup>28</sup> *Terrorists Kill 50 Christians and Abduct 100, Including Priest*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Mar. 28, 2022), <https://morningstarnews.org/2022/03/terrorists-kill-50-christians-and-abduct-100-including-priest/>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *896 Nigerians Killed in Violent Attacks in 2022*, OPEN DOORS (May 10, 2022), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/nigeria-attacks/>.

<sup>31</sup> Rose Ejembi Makurdi, *11 Killed, Many Missing as Suspected Herders Attack Another Benue Community*, THE SUN (Apr. 22, 2022), <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/11-killed-many-missing-as-suspected-herders-attack-another-benue-community/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Herdsmen and Others Kill 18 Christians in Northern Nigeria*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Apr. 28, 2022), <https://morningstarnews.org/2022/04/herdsmen-and-others-kill-18-christians-in-northern-nigeria/>.

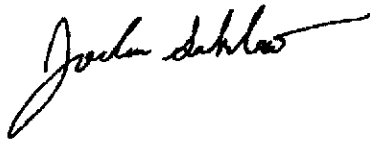
<sup>33</sup> *Nigerian Militants Displace, Kill Christian Villagers and Soldier in Brazen Attack*, PERSECUTION.ORG (May 3, 2022), <https://www.persecution.org/2022/05/03/nigerian-militants-displace-kill-christian-villagers-soldier-brazen-attack/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

ISWAP killed one Christian and abducted six Christian girls in Yimirmugza village.<sup>35</sup> Two days later in May, Fulani herdsmen in Bassa County killed eight Christians—including two children—looted valuables, and destroyed Christian homes.<sup>36</sup> One week later, a Christian college student was stoned to death and then set on fire by her classmates; they accused her of “posting ‘blasphemous’ statements in a WhatsApp group.”<sup>37</sup> In May 2022, ISIS extremists ruthlessly executed twenty Christians to avenge the deaths of ISIS leaders in the Middle East.<sup>38</sup> And just this past weekend, over fifty Christians were massacred while attending a Pentecost service, as stated above.<sup>39</sup> The religious freedom violations continue, but the Nigerian government has failed to protect these vulnerable citizens or punish the perpetrators.

Mr. Secretary, in light of Nigeria’s ongoing abysmal religious persecution record, we urge you to redesignate Nigeria as a CPC so that you can use all available tools to prevent further bloodshed. Quite simply, by doing so, you will be saving lives.

Respectfully,



Jordan Sekulow  
Executive Director

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<sup>35</sup> *At Least Eight Slain in Attack on Christian Area of Nigeria*, ETERNITY NEWS (May 9, 2022, 10:27 A.M.), <https://www.eternews.com.au/world/at-least-eight-slain-in-attack-on-christian-area-of-nigeria/>.

<sup>36</sup> *Children Among 29 Christians Killed in Plateau State, Nigeria*, CHRISTIAN NEWS (May 9, 2022), <https://christiannews.net/2022/05/09/children-among-29-christians-killed-in-plateau-state-nigeria/>.

<sup>37</sup> *Nigerian Christian Student Murdered for ‘Blasphemy’ on WhatsApp*, OPEN DOORS (May 16, 2022), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/nigerian-student-killed/>; *Female Student in Nigeria Beaten to Death over ‘Blasphemy’*, GUARDIAN (May 12, 2022, 3:53 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/12/female-student-nigeria-beaten-to-death-sokoto>.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Newman, *Knife-Wielding ISIS Fanatics Execute 20 Christians in Nigeria ‘to Avenge the Killing of the Group’s Leaders in the Middle East’*, DAILY MAIL, (May 11, 2022), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10805093/Knife-wielding-ISIS-fanatics-execute-20-Christians-Nigeria-avenge-killings-Middle-East.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Shannon Mullen, *At Least 50 Feared Dead in Attack on Catholic Church in Nigeria*, CAN (June 5, 2022), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251458/nigeria-catholic-church-attack>.