



October 24, 2025

VIA OVERNIGHT DELIVERY SERVICE

The Honorable Marco Rubio
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 Rubio:

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.

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.

Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places for Christians.¹ In 2025, there were, on average, thirty-two Christians killed each day in Nigeria.² A 2025 report from the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law ("Intersociety") detailed how in the first seven months of this year Islamist groups have killed 7,087 Christians and abducted 7,800 others for their faith.³ Additionally, 12 million Christians have been displaced since 2009. If the trend of violence towards Christians in Nigeria continues, it is projected that "Christianity could be wiped out from Nigeria by 2075[.]"⁴

¹ Tonny Onyulo, *Nigerian Christians Afraid to Gather as Attacks by Islamist Herders Mount*, NAT'L CATH. REP. (Sept. 24, 2025), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/nigerian-christians-afraid-gather-attacks-islamist-herders-mount>.

² Ngala Killian Chimtom, *Report States an Average of 30 Christians Murdered Each day in Nigeria in 2025*, THE CATH. WORLD REP. (Aug. 12, 2025), <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2025/08/12/report-states-an-average-of-30-christians-murdered-each-day-in-nigeria-in-2025/>.

³ Onyulo, *supra* note 1.

⁴ Ngala Killian Chimtom, *Christian Genocide Feared in Nigeria*, THE CATH. REG. (Sept. 24, 2025), <https://www.catholicregister.org/item/2822-christian-genocide-feared-in-nigeria>.

As you know, due to the continuing concern over horrific violations of religious freedom in Nigeria, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during the first Trump administration, designated Nigeria for the first time as a CPC on December 7, 2020.⁵ Regrettably, in November 2021, the State Department under President Biden's administration chose to remove Nigeria from the CPC list.⁶

The decision to remove Nigeria from the CPC list was troubling because religious freedom problems had not improved in the country. Before being designated a CPC in 2020, Nigeria was placed on the Special Watch List (SWL) in 2019.⁷ However, in 2021, not only did the State Department remove it from the CPC list, but it also completely bypassed downgrading Nigeria to the SWL.⁸

In light of those poor decisions and the continuing violence in Nigeria, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has also recommended that Nigeria be placed on the CPC list in its 2025 annual report, stating that "religious freedom conditions in Nigeria remained poor. Federal and state governments continued to tolerate attacks or fail to respond to violent actions by nonstate actors who justify their violence on religious grounds."⁹

Truthfully, the religious freedom violations are too numerous to account for in this letter, but we highlight the following examples for your convenience.

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. Fulani jihadists are now most responsible for religious violence, with at least 60% of attacks on Christians either attributed to jihadist Fulani bandits or extremist Fulani herdsmen.¹⁰ This is fueled by a steady influx of Fulani militants from neighboring countries.¹¹ Tragically, less than one percent of Fulani

⁵ 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>.

⁶ *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 Oct. 21, 2025); Press Release, USCIRF Appalled at Administration's Removal of Nigeria from List of Violators of Religious Freedom, U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom (Nov. 17, 2021), <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscifr-appalled-administrations-removal-nigeria-list-violators>.

⁷ *Nigeria Added to "Special Watch List" Due to Tolerance of Religious Persecution*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Dec. 22, 2019), <https://persecution.org/2019/12/22/nigeria-added-to-special-watch-list-due-to-tolerance-of-religious-persecution/>.

⁸ U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom, *supra* note 6.

⁹ *2025 Annual Report*, U.S. COMM'N ON INT'L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 28 (Mar. 2025), <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁰ *All By Design: How Nigeria's Islamic Extremists Get Away with Killing So Many Christians*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (June 3, 2025), <https://persecution.org/2025/06/03/all-by-design-how-nigerias-islamic-extremists-get-away-with-killing-so-many-christians/>.

¹¹ *World Watch List 2025: Nigeria*, OPEN DOORS INT'L I (2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Nigeria-Media_Advocacy_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

jihadists have been arrested, with much fewer convicted.¹² Other new terror groups include Lakurawa in the northwest, which is affiliated with Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), and a unified Boko Haram-ISWAP front.¹³

Intersociety reported that Nigeria headquarters and provides safe haven for at least twenty-two “embryonic and full grown Islamic Terror Groups in Africa with links or potential links to ISIS, ISIL and World Jihad Fund.”¹⁴ Violence has spilled into southern Nigerian states in recent years, heightening the level of impunity.¹⁵ Though current President Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu has partially reversed a trend of positioning Muslims in the most important roles in government, Christian communities that are attacked still face abandonment from security forces under federal command.¹⁶

There can be no doubt that the Nigerian government has tolerated systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. A Catholic priest responded to horrific attacks in June saying, “I feel disillusioned in my country. I’m disappointed with the leadership in my country and I feel so helpless.”¹⁷ Lagos security analyst Peter Akachukwu also commented on the attacks: “The attacks are strategic . . . Targeting Christians sows fear, displaces communities and opens up land for occupation. It destabilizes the state and undermines faith in government protection.”¹⁸

On September 19, 2025, Father Matthew Eya was killed returning to his parish in Enugu state in what appeared to be an execution-style murder at close range.¹⁹ One week prior to Father Eya’s death, Father Wilfred Ezeamba was kidnapped with two other parishioners.²⁰ Fortunately, all three were eventually released.²¹ In August, suspected Fulani herdsmen stormed an Aye-Twar compound of a Catholic church and set it on fire.²² In July, Fulani herdsmen killed two Christians in Bokkos, fourteen Christians in Mangor, and twenty-seven Christians in Jebbu Bindi.²³

In June 2025, Islamic Fulani militants are suspected to have killed at least 218 people in the attacks in Benue State in mostly Christian villages.²⁴ In April 2025, gunmen attacked a north-central

¹² INT’L CHRISTIAN CONCERN, *supra* note 10.

¹³ OPEN DOORS INT’L, *supra* note 11, at 2.

¹⁴ Jordan King, *7,000 Christians Have Been Killed in Nigeria This Year, Group Says*, NEWSWEEK (Aug. 20, 2025, 1:06 PM EDT), <https://www.newsweek.com/christians-killed-nigeria-religion-2116416>.

¹⁵ OPEN DOORS INT’L, *supra* note 11, at 2.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Quinton Amundson, *Nigeria’s Government Complicit in Christian Slaughter, Priest Says*, THE CATH. REG. (June 27, 2025), <https://www.catholicregister.org/item/2396-nigerias-government-complicit-in-christian-slaughter-priest-says>.

¹⁸ Onyulo, *supra* note 1.

¹⁹ Chinton, *supra* note 4.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² Onyulo, *supra* note 1.

²³ *Onslaught Against Christians in Nigeria Continues to Claim More Lives*, THE ALA. BAPTIST (Aug. 16, 2025), <https://thealabamabaptist.org/onslaught-against-christians-in-nigeria-continues-to-claim-more-lives/>.

²⁴ *New Attacks in Nigeria Leave 200+ Dead*, OPEN DOORS INT’L (June 22, 2025), <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/stories/new-attacks-in-nigeria-leave-200-dead/>.

Christian farming community, killing at least forty people²⁵ and, in a prior separate attack, at least five Christian women were killed when they gathered for fellowship.²⁶ In March 2025, three Christian farmers were killed while they were cultivating their land and eleven Christians, “including a pregnant woman and ten-year-old girl,” were killed while they were attending a funeral.²⁷ On February 9, Evangelical Church Winning All Pastor Bala Galadima was shot at point-blank range in bed at his home in Gombe.²⁸ On February 2, Fulani militants had reportedly stormed an Ebonyi state village and killed sixteen members of the Lord Chosen Charismatic Revival Ministry.²⁹ On February 3 and 5 in Benue, Fulani militants killed six Christians and kidnapped eight.³⁰ Between January and February in a five-day attack, eleven Christians were killed and four kidnapped by Fulani militants in Plateau.³¹ In January 2025, Boko Haram displaced over 4,000 Christians and burned homes and churches, also killing five people.³²

There were numerous horrific attacks on Nigerian Christians in 2024 as well. In September 2024, Islamic extremists attacked a healthcare center in the Birnin-Gwari area, injuring many and abducting two nurses and several patients.³³ Nearly seventy people were killed in two Benue state Christian village attacks in July and August 2024, both attacks by Muslim Fulani herdsmen.³⁴ Though according to news services, thirty bodies were recovered from the August attack, officials think others might have been taken to be killed elsewhere.³⁵ On May 24, 2024, eight people were killed and about 160 predominately-Christian people were kidnapped after an attack by Islamic militants in the Niger state.³⁶ In February, Fulani militants ambushed six people, killing one and injuring others, including raping a woman.³⁷ One week prior, militants used guns and machetes to attack a Christian village, killing ten people and injuring dozens of others.³⁸ This was preceded by

²⁵ *Attack Leaves At Least 40 People Dead in Nigeria, the Country's President Says*, NPR (Apr. 15, 2025, 3:46 AM ET), <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/15/nx-s1-5365450/nigeria-40-dead-gunmen-bola-tinubu>.

²⁶ Tim, *Christians Among 113 Killed in Latest Spate of Attacks in Nigeria*, OPEN DOORS INT'L (Apr. 14, 2025), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/nigeria-christians-attacks/>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Diana Chandler, *50 Christians Killed, Dozens Kidnapped in Nigeria Since Late January*, BAPTIST PRESS (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/50-christians-killed-dozens-kidnapped-in-nigeria-since-late-january/>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Boko Haram's Latest Attacks Displace Thousands of Christians in Nigeria*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Jan. 24, 2025), <https://persecution.org/2025/01/24/boko-harams-latest-attacks-displace-thousands-of-christians-in-nigeria/>.

³³ *Fresh Wave of Extremist Attacks Hit Nigeria's Christian Communities*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Sept. 16, 2024), <https://persecution.org/2024/09/16/fresh-wave-of-extremist-attacks-hit-nigerias-christian-communities/>.

³⁴ Leigh Pritchett, *Nearly 70 Christians Slain in Nigeria*, THE ALA. BAPTIST (Aug. 15, 2024), <https://thealababaptist.org/nearly-70-christians-slain-in-nigeria/>.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Simon, *160 People, Mostly Christians, Kidnapped in Nigeria*, OPEN DOORS INT'L (May 29, 2024), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/nigeria-kidnap-christians/>.

³⁷ Tonny Onyulo, *Islamist Nigerian Militants Press Attacks Against Christians to Foment Religious War*, WORD & WAY (Feb. 26, 2024), <https://wordandway.org/2024/02/26/islamist-nigerian-militants-press-attacks-against-christians-to-foment-religious-war/>.

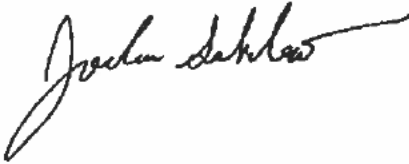
³⁸ *Id.*

the suspected Fulani militias' 2023 Christmas Eve attacks that resulted in 195 reported deaths in Plateau state.³⁹

The persecution occurs on other levels as well. In most of the attacks, Christians are identified based on their names.⁴⁰ If they have Biblical or English names, they are more easily targeted for discrimination in hospitals, schools, and the workplace.⁴¹ Christians are also sometimes swept into Sharia courts, and even though the courts do not have jurisdiction to hear cases involving Christians, Christians are sometimes charged in these Sharia courts.⁴² Furthermore, no one is permitted to bring Arabic Christian literature or Bibles into the country.⁴³ Despite these clear religious freedom violations and horrific targeting and slaughtering of Christians, Nigeria's government insists "ethnic and land-use conflicts" drive the violence instead of solely religion.⁴⁴ The religious freedom violations continue, but the Nigerian government has failed to protect these vulnerable citizens or punish the perpetrators.

Mr. Secretary, Nigeria should not be allowed a pass. 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,



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³⁹ *Nearly 200 Nigerians Killed in Christmas Eve Massacre*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Dec. 28, 2023), <https://persecution.org/2023/12/28/nearly-200-nigerians-killed-in-christmas-eve-massacre/>.

⁴⁰ OPEN DOORS INT'L, *supra* note 11, at 6.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.* at 7.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Onyulo, *supra* note 1.