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Agenda item 4
Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Europeen 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.

[11 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.
REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE ATROCITIES BEING CARRIED OUT AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AND TAKE ACTION

Within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Christians are facing a rapidly deteriorating situation where they are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence and immediate action must be taken to ensure that their plight does rise to the level of their fellow Christians who have suffered so greatly in the Republic of Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Nigeria is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south. Within the southern regions, Christians face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram and increasingly from Fulani Herdsman, a group of Islamic nomadic herders. It is estimated that since May of 2011 Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people, displaced 2.4 million, and created 228,000 refugees. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnappings to instill fear and intimidate. They target Christians and anyone else whom they see as a threat to the establishment of an Islamic State.

In addition to the deadly attacks by Boko Haram, there are reports of growing conflict in the central regions of Nigeria between the predominately Muslim Fulani herdsman and the predominantly Christian farmers. The Fulani herdsman have begun attacking Christian farmers, destroying homes, churches, and even kidnapping Christian school girls in order to marry them to Muslim3.

We respectfully call 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 . . . ’. 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’5.

It is clear that Boko Haram and groups such as the Fulani Herdsman pose a growing threat to Christians and others. This Council must swiftly mobilise in order to prevent these atrocities from escalating to the scale of those atrocities that we have seen occur in both Iraq and Syria. The time for action is now.

2. BACKGROUND

Nigeria, which is proving to be increasingly unsafe for Christians, is largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south. Within the southern regions Christians experience religious freedom; however in the northern and central regions Christians face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram and increasingly from Fulani herdsman, a group of Islamic nomadic herders6.

4 U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1 (emphasis added).
Boko Haram’s atrocities have no limit. Horrific examples of its cruelty include: executing 59 boys in their sleep and burning down their school\(^7\), utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshipers\(^8\). These and countless other acts of terror and senseless sectarian violence provide an example of the gruesome and dehumanising atrocities targeting Christians and others who are vulnerable.

In February of 2018, Boko Haram insurgents abducted 110 students from a girls’ boarding school. Of those, five were killed while being held captive. Ultimately, 104 of the schoolgirls were released but Boko Haram still holds 15-year-old Leah Sharibu prisoner because she refuses to bend to Boko Haram’s demands that she renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam\(^9\).

In April of 2018, Fulani herdsman carried out an attack during Mass at a Church located in Central Nigeria. The attacks resulted in the death of 2 priests and 17 parishioners\(^10\). Community resident Terhemen Angor described the horrific scene:

> People started scampering and wailing, 19 persons, including Reverend Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, who were gunned down in cold blood, while many sustained injuries, including bullet wounds. After attacking the church, the invaders descended on the community and razed over 60 houses, farmland, food barns, after carting away what people had in their barns\(^11\).

A few days later, vicious radical Islamists wearing camouflage and carrying AK-47s – described as ‘herdsmen’ – pillaged Christian villages and burned down as many as 160 homes. The terrorists left a trail of at least 39 murdered Christians in their wake\(^12\). These were not random attacks. Scores of innocent people were murdered because of their Christian faith within a couple of days.

The President of Nigeria, Buhari, condemned these attacks stating, ‘Violating a place of worship, killing priests and worshippers is not only vile, evil, and satanic, it is clearly calculated to stoke up religious conflict and plunge our communities into endless bloodletting’\(^13\).

The government of Nigeria as well as the International Community must take action now to ensure that no more innocent lives are lost. All of Nigeria’s citizens must be protected.

### 3. REQUEST

Clearly, horrific acts of aggression are violating the peaceful lives of Christians in Nigeria. In order to prevent further loss of life, a massive humanitarian crisis, and to end increasing religiously motivated violence, we must act now. The U.N. Charter calls on the U.N. to remove threats to peace, and the Genocide Convention calls on the U.N. to prevent acts of genocide not merely to respond to genocide. We have seen in Iraq and Syria what happens when the U.N. fails to

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take preventive measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people. This is the only the beginning, if meaningful action is not taken now the problem in Nigeria will worsen. Islamic State and Islamic State affiliate groups, like Boko Haram, have shown their resiliency time and time again. When they are forced out of one area they flee in order to regroup and fight another day\textsuperscript{14}.

Action must be taken to not only stop the spread of violence within Nigeria but also the spread of violence in west Africa. Boko Haram has in fact already begun carrying out attacks in neighbouring Chad\textsuperscript{15} and Cameroon\textsuperscript{16}.

This is why we respectfully request that this Council work with government of Nigeria in order to protect the people who are vulnerable to attack by preventing further attacks, prosecuting those who are responsible for these brutal atrocities, and providing aid and assistance to the victims.