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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.

[04 June 2020]

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

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE ATROCITIES BEING CARRIED OUT AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA AND TAKE ACTION TO END THE VIOLENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is home to over 206 million people, and is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south: approximately 50 percent of Nigeria's population practices Islam, and 40 percent practice Christianity. Nigeria is experiencing a humanitarian crisis and a rapidly deteriorating situation for Christians who are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence.

The ECLJ submits this report to highlight that crisis and to 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"¹ 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*."²

In December 2019, the United States government added Nigeria to a "Special Watch list" for countries that have "engaged in or tolerated 'systematic, ongoing, [and] egregious violations of religious freedom.'"³

And according to reports:

The Nigerian government at the national and state levels continued to tolerate violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and suppressed the freedom to manifest religion or belief. Religious sectarian violence increased during the year, with Muslims and Christians attacked based on their religious and ethnic identity. The Nigerian federal government failed to implement effective strategies to prevent or stop such violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. Boko Haram and [ISIS-WA] continued to perpetrate attacks against civilians and the military throughout the year despite the government's claims of the progress in defeating them.⁴

As it is clear that Boko Haram and the Fulani Herdsmen pose a grave, continued, and growing threat to Christians and others, and as it is also clear the Nigerian government is incapable of or unwilling to act to end the violence and atrocities that are creating this humanitarian crisis, we

1 U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1 (emphasis added).

2 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. VIII, 9 Dec. 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

3 Press Release, UNITED STATES TAKES ACTION AGAINST VIOLATORS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, MICHAEL R. POMPEO, SECRETARY OF STATE, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (20 Dec. 2019), <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom/>.

4 *USCIRF-Recommended Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Nigeria*, USCIRF.GOV, available at https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_NIGERIA_2019.pdf (last visited 26 May 2020).

respectfully call on this Council to act *now*. This Council must mobilise in order to prevent these atrocities from escalating further and claiming the lives of thousands of more innocent children, women, and men.

2. BACKGROUND

The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that Boko Haram's terrorist activities have internally displaced over 2 million Nigerians and created 244,000 refugees.⁵ In February 2019 alone, "35,000 women, children and men . . . fled a surge of attacked by Boko Haram . . ."⁶ In addition, it is estimated that Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people.⁷ Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS 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 predominantly Muslim Fulani herdsmen and the predominately Christian farmers. The Fulani herdsmen are continuing to attack Christian farmers, destroying homes, churches, and even kidnapping Christian school girls in order to marry them to Muslims.⁸

In 2019 alone, "[m]ore than 1000 Christians [were] murdered by Islamic militants."⁹ And according to a NGO report issued in March 2020, "between 11,500 and 12,000 Christian deaths were recorded in the past 57 months or so since June 2015 when the present central Government of Nigeria came on board."¹⁰

3. ATROCITIES

The atrocities committed against Christians in Nigeria have no limit. Horrific examples of its cruelty include executing 59 boys in their sleep and burning down their school,¹¹ utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshippers.¹²

In January 2020, Boko Haram kidnapped Rev. Lawan Andimi when it attacked the Michika local government area. Boko Haram released a video of the pastor pleading for the Nigerian government to act to secure his release. Only a few days later he was beheaded by his captors. On the same day

5 *Nigeria Emergency*, UNHCR: THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 26 May 2020).

6 *Nigerian Refugees Struggle in Aftermath of Boko Haram Attacks*, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/2/5c6139e74/nigerian-refugees-struggle-aftermath-boko-haram-attacks.html> (last visited 31 Jan. 2020).

7 *Boko Haram in Nigeria*, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker?marker=19#!/conflict/boko-haram-in-nigeria>, (last visited 30 Jan. 2020).

8 Ewelina U. Ochab, *Trump may not be Wrong on the Fulani Herdsmen Crisis in Nigeria*, FORBES (4 May 2018, 10:16 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/05/04/trump-may-not-be-wrong-on-the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria/#6b34945555ef>.

9 Danielle Wallace, *More than 1,000 Christians Killed by Islamic Militants in Nigeria in 2019: Report*, FOX NEWS (24 Dec. 2019), <https://www.foxnews.com/world/nigeria-1000-christians-killed-islamic-militants-fulani-boko-haram>.

10 *A Special Report*, INTERNAT'L SOC. FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES & THE RULE OF LAW, <http://www.intersociety-ng.org/component/k2/item/522-nigeria> (last visited 26 May 2020).

11 *Nigerian Boarding School Attack by Boko Haram Gunmen Leaves 59 Pupils Dead, Officials Say*, ABC NEWS (25 Feb. 2014, 9:49 PM), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-26/scores-dead-in-boko-haram-nigerian-school-attack/5284250>.

12 Jessica Chasmar, *Boko Haram 'Fake Preachers' Slaughter 45 Worshippers*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES (5 June 2014), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/5/boko-haram-islamists-pose-preachers-slaughter-45-w/>.

that Rev. Adimi was murdered, Boko Haram proceeded to carry out an attack on his hometown of Chibok.¹³

Also in January 2020, two Christian girls were killed in the southern Kaduna State by Fulani herdsmen.¹⁴ Around 5 p.m. on 17 January 2020, Fulani herdsmen were seen riding on motorbikes when they began to fire indiscriminately on the villagers. As a result of the attack, two girls died and three boys were injured.¹⁵

In March 2020, a report was released that claimed as many as 350 Christians were murdered throughout Nigeria in just the first few months of 2020.¹⁶ In May 2020, another report was released stating “no fewer than 620 defenseless Christians and wanton burning or destruction of their centers of worship and learning” in 2020.

According to the report,

Fulani radicals are responsible for killing over 470 people in the first four-and-a-half months of 2020. The group reports that Fulani killed 140 Christians from the beginning of April until May 14.

Meanwhile, Boko Haram is believed to have killed 150 Christians since January.¹⁷

Some of these Christians have been beaten, some shot, others even beheaded. In at least once horrific instance, innocent children, ages 4 – 13, were reportedly hacked to death with machetes. Christian houses and churches are ransacked and burned to the ground.

At the current rate, nearly 1,500 innocent Christian men, women, and even children could be needlessly slaughtered this year just because of their Christian faith.

4. Request

Clearly, horrific acts of aggression are violating the peaceful lives of Christians in Nigeria. In order to prevent further loss of life, to end increasingly religiously motivated violence, and to address this massive humanitarian crisis, 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 them. We have seen in Iraq and Syria – and are now seeing in Nigeria – what happens when the U.N. fails to take preventative measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people.

It is imperative that the U.N. take swift action and work with the government of Nigeria to ensure that Leah and all others who remain captured are returned home safely and to put an end to the atrocities being carried out in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen. No one should have to live under the fear of being abducted, enslaved, or killed.

13 Sam Olukoya, *Islamic Extremists Kill Nigerian Pastor, Attack His Hometown*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (22 Jan. 2020), <https://apnews.com/422c1b97aee55b0a750efac653da19cc>.

14 *Two Young Christian Women Killed in Kaduna State, Nigeria*, MORNING STAR NEWS (20, Jan. 2020), <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/01/two-young-christian-women-killed-in-kaduna-state-nigeria/>.

15 *Id.*

16 *A Special Report*, *supra* note 11.

17 *Id.*

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 neighboring Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

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.
