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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.

[02 February 2021]

* 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 devastating humanitarian crisis and an increasingly genocidal situation for Christians who are continually the targets of religiously motivated violence.

Regrettably, despite the fact 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] no action has been taken to stop this violence and send aid to the victims. Furthermore, 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] It is increasingly clear that Nigeria cannot protect Christians within its borders from these horrific genocidal acts, and the ECLJ asks any one of the Contracting Parties to the Genocide Convention to call upon the U.N. to take the immediate action necessary to prevent further devastation and loss of life.

2. BACKGROUND

Christians in Nigeria are under threat of extinction by Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders^[3] who are often armed with machetes and guns.^[4] Due to extremist violence, the UN Refugee Agency (UNRA) estimates that over 2.7 million people have been displaced in north-eastern Nigeria.^[5]

According to a December 2020 NGO report, approximately 2,200 Nigerian Christians were “hacked to death in 2020 and 34,400 since 2009”.^[6] These Christians were killed by Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and other radical Islamic. The report indicates that no less than 1,300 Christians were killed by Fulani Herdsmen, and 500 killed at the hands of Boko Haram and its splinter groups.

3. ATROCITIES

On the days surrounding Christmas 2020, Boko Haram terrorists carried out attacks in several villages located in northern Nigeria.^[7] These attacks resulted in the deaths of approximately 12 Christians and multiple churches and homes being destroyed. Zakariya Musa, the head of media for EYN, stated “The renewed attacks are coming almost on daily basis in different ways, resulting in killings, kidnapping, destruction of properties”.

In December 2020, “Islamic extremist terrorists who kidnapped 11 Christians in northeast Nigeria on Christmas Day [later] executed five of them, according to a video released . . .”.^[8] The original attack occurred in the early morning hours on 25 December, resulting in the death of six Christians and the kidnapping of eleven other Christians. According to news reports, area residents later reported that the Christians killed in a video dated 29 December “were among the 11 kidnapped”.^[9]

In the video, five armed members of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) [are lined] up behind five men dressed in orange robes who are kneeling with their hands tied

behind them. Ordered in the Hausa language to state their names, each of the kneeling men in turn is heard saying their name and adding, ‘I’m a Christian’.[10]

One of the militants then states: “This is a warning to Christians in all parts of the world and those in Nigeria”, after which the five Christians are shot and killed.

In November 2020, Boko Haram reportedly carried out another deadly attack in Nigeria, brutally executing 12 Christians, including a pastor, and kidnapped women and children:

Islamic extremists believed to be affiliated with Boko Haram reportedly killed several Christians, including a pastor, and kidnapped several others in an attack carried out in Nigeria’s conflict-ridden northeast earlier this week. According to [t]he Associated Press, the insurgents killed at least 12 people in the attack on the Takulashi village near Chibok in Borno state on Sunday morning. The militants are also said to have abducted nine women and young girls.[11]

Also according to reports, all 12 people killed in the attack were Christians.[12] In addition to killing and kidnapping, the Islamic extremists “burned down houses and looted food items . . .” over the course of several hours.[13]

As we have stated in previous written submissions, Leah Sharibu remains to be held captive by Boko Haram. Leah Sharibu is a Christian teen who was kidnapped by Boko Haram in February 2018 along with 110 other girls. Five of those girls are dead and 104 were set free.[14] Leah is the only one who remains in captivity because she refuses to deny her faith in Christ. Time is of the utmost importance for addressing Leah Sharibu’s case as she remains in serious danger and immediate action must be taken to free her before it’s too late.

3. 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. Again, the U.N. Charter calls for the removal of threats to peace, and the Genocide Convention calls on the U.N. to prevent acts of genocide, not merely to respond to them. It is of utmost importance that meaningful action be taken immediately to put an end to the daily violence that Christians in Nigeria are facing. Repeatedly they cry out to their government and the international community for help, but no one responds.

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. Action must be taken to not only stop the spread of violence within Nigeria but also spread of violence in west Africa. Boko Haram has already carried out attacks in neighboring Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The UN Refugee Agency estimates that Boko Haram activity in these three countries has created more than 684,000 IDPs.[15]

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.

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. Nigeria, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 19 Aug. 2020).
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5. Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 27 Jan. 2021).
6. INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES: INTERSOCIETY, SPECIAL REPORT NEW WAVE OF ANTI-CHRISTIAN BUTCHERIES IN AFRICA'S COASTAL CHRISTIANS STATES AND NIGERIA (16 Dec. 2020), <http://intersociety-ng.org/component/k2/item/588-intersociety>.
7. Nigerian Christians Killed in Christmas Eve Attacks, BAPTIST STANDARD (5 Jan. 2021), available at <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/world/nigerian-christians-killed-in-christmas-eve-attacks/>.
8. ISWAP Terrorists Execute Five Christians in Nigeria, Video Shows, MORNING STAR NEWS (31 Dec. 2020), <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/12/iswap-terrorists-execute-five-christians-in-nigeria-video-shows/>.
9. Id.
10. Id.
11. Samuel Smith, 12 Christians, Pastor Killed in Suspected Boko Haram Attack; Others Kidnapped, CHRISTIAN POST (6 Nov. 2020), <https://www.christianpost.com/world/12-christians-pastor-killed-suspected-boko-haram-attack.html>.
12. Islamist Militants Kill, Kidnap Christians in Northeast Nigeria, MORNING STAR NEWS (3 Nov. 2020), <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/11/islamist-militants-kill-kidnap-christians-in-northeast-nigeria/>.
13. Id.
14. Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home, BBC NEWS (25 Mar. 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4355872>.
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