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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.

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Requesting that the UN recognise the atrocities being carried out against Christians in Nigeria and take action to put an end to it

Introduction

Within Nigeria, Christians are facing a rapidly deteriorating situation where they are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence. Immediate action must be taken to ensure that their plight does not continue to rise to the level of their fellow Christians who have suffered so greatly in Iraq and Syria.

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 Herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders.¹

The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that since 2014 Boko Haram's terrorist activities have, internally displaced nearly 2 million Nigerians, and created 240,000 refugees.² In addition, it is estimated that Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people.³ Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnappings to instil 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 herdsmen and the predominantly Christian farmers. The Fulani herdsmen have begun attacking Christian farmers, destroying homes, churches, and even kidnapping Christian school girls in order to marry them to Muslims.⁴

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'⁵. 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'.⁶

It is clear that Boko Haram and groups such as the Fulani Herdsmen 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.

¹ Nigeria, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

² Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 21 Aug. 2019).

³ *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 16 Nov. 2018).

⁴ 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>.

⁵ U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1 (emphasis added).

⁶ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, art. VIII, Dec. 9, 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

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 herders.⁷

Boko Haram's atrocities have no limit. Horrific examples of its cruelty include: executing 59 boys in their sleep and burning down their school,⁸ utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshippers.⁹ 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 16-year-old Leah Sharibu prisoner because she refuses to bend to Boko Haram's demands that she renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam¹⁰ or be killed.

Time is of the utmost importance for addressing Leah Sharibu's case as she is in serious danger and immediate action must be taken to free her before it is too late. In a recent video released by Boko Haram, aid workers who had been abducted by Boko Haram pleaded for their lives as well as Leah's. In the video one of the aid workers states, "Because Nigeria cannot do anything about them, [Boko Haram] will not release but also kill".¹¹

Reports from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project show that in 2018 Fulani Herdsmen were responsible for killing more than 1,000 civilians, surpassing the killings of Boko Haram. In 2019 alone, Fulani Herdsmen are responsible for attacking 20 villages, targeting mainly Christian villages, killing civilians, and burning homes.¹²

In April of 2018, Fulani Herdsmen 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.¹³ Community resident, Terhemem 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

⁷ *Nigeria*, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 23 May 2018).

⁸ 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>.

⁹ 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/>.

¹⁰ Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home, BBC NEWS (25 Mar. 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4355872>.

¹¹ Leah MarieAnn Klett, Nigeria: Terrorists Release Video of 6 Kidnapped Christian Aid Workers Begging for Their Lives, Christian Post (25 July 2019), <https://www.christianpost.com/world/nigeria-terrorists-release-video-of-6-kidnapped-christian-aid-workers-begging-for-lives.html>

¹² Samuel Smith, Fulani Killings of Nigerian Christians Meets Standard for 'Genocide', Jubilee Campaign Says, Christian Post Reporter (22, Jul. 2019), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/fulani-killings-of-nigerianchristians-meets-standard-for-genocide-jubilee-campaign-says.html>.

¹³ Kate Sheelnutt & World Watch Monitor, Nigerian Mass Becomes a Massacre: Herdsmen Kill 18 Worshipers, Adding to Hundreds of Victims, Christianity Today (25 Apr. 2018, 12:34 PM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/nigeria-fulani-attack-catholic-church-benue-boko-haram.html>.

community and razed over 60 houses, farmland, food barns, after carting away what people had in their barns.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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.’¹⁶

But in August of 2019, suspected Fulani militants killed one priest while abducting five more from another church. A local bishop stated, “We should not continue to pretend about it while our people are killed every day. Enugu State is not secure again. Criminals have shifted to Enugu State from Anambra”.¹⁷ The spread of violence by the Fulani Herdsmen across the entire country is of grave importance and it must be stopped now.

The government of Nigeria, as well as the International Community, must do more than just condemn these horrific actions they must take action now to ensure that no more innocent lives are lost. All of Nigeria’s citizens must be protected.

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 them. We have seen in Iraq and Syria what happens when the U.N. fails to take preventive measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people. This is only the beginning, if meaningful action is not taken now the problem in Nigeria will worsen. ISIS and ISIS 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.¹⁸

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.

¹⁴ Bukola Adebayo, Nigeria Church Attack Leaves 19 Dead, Including Two Priests, CNN (25 Apr. 2018), <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/24/africa/nigeria-church-attack/index.html>.

¹⁵ Stoyan Zaimov, Some 39 Nigerian Christians Massacred, Houses Burned Down in Violent Rampage, Christian Post Reporter (27 Apr. 2018, 7:06 AM), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/some-39-nigerian-christians-massacred-houses-burned-down-in-violent-rampage-223425/>.

¹⁶ Nigeria’s President Decries ‘Satanic’ Massacre of 18, Including Two Priests, in Catholic Church, South China Morning Post, (25 Apr. 2018, 2:20 PM), <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2143261/nigerias-president-decries-satanic-massacre-18-including-two>.

¹⁷ Samuel Smith, Nigerian priest killed by suspected Fulani gunmen; clergy march to protest killings, CHRISTIANPOST REPORTER (03 Aug. 2019), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nigerian-priest-killed-suspected-fulanigunmen-clergy-march-protest-killings.html>

¹⁸ Tyler Hicks, Resilience of ISIS and Its Branches, New York Times (27 Oct. 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/world/africa/boko-haram-isis-nigeria-niger.html>.

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 Chad¹⁹ and Cameroon.²⁰

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.

¹⁹ Nigeria's Boko Haram Militants Attack Chad for the First Time, BBC NEWS (13 Feb. 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31453951>.

²⁰ Suspected Boko Haram Fighters Kill 11 in Cameroon, Aljazeera (25 Aug. 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/suspected-boko-haram-fighters-kill-11-cameroon-170825145004120.html>.