



Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Foreign Secretary
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

21 December 2020

Dear Dominic,

We write following the publication of a new report by Nigerian human rights group Intersociety (14 December), which raises serious concerns about the scale of human rights abuses in Nigeria and the need for an urgent response.

Attacks led by Islamist militia continue in northern states and the Middle Belt, with almost-daily reports of killings, mayhem, rape and sexual abuse, abductions and enslavement, mass forced displacement and land-grabs. According to Intersociety, an estimated 34,400 Christians have been killed in Nigeria since 2009 – including 17,000 by Boko Haram (and its splinter groups) and 15,500 by Fulani militia.

Targeted attacks against Christians

In July 2018, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared killings in predominantly-Christian villages in Plateau State to be a ‘genocide’ and called on the Government of Nigeria to establish orphanages in areas affected by violence. Nigeria’s Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, has since acknowledged that Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa “have started targeting Christians and Christian villages for a specific reason, which is to trigger a religious war and throw the nation into chaos... they seem to now have a deliberate policy of attacking Christians.”

According to the Bishop of Truro’s review, whose recommendations HMG have agreed to implement in full: “Some of the most egregious persecution of Christians has taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa... the most widespread and violent threat came from societal groups, including many with a militant Islamist agenda... Reports consistently showed that in Nigeria, month after month, on average hundreds of Christians were being killed for reasons connected with their faith... Those worst affected included Christian women and girls abducted, and forced to convert, enter forced marriages, sexual abuse and torture.”

The same concerns were raised in two other recent reports: *'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?'* by the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief; and *'Nigeria's Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community'*, by the International Committee on Nigeria and the International Organisation on Peace-building & Social Justice.

Nigerian Government response

There are now widespread concerns that some attacks take place with a degree of official complicity and that the Nigerian Government only occasionally investigate or prosecute those responsible for such crimes.

The ICC's decade-long preliminary investigation (which concluded on 11 December 2020) found that Nigerian security forces have committed crimes against humanity and war crimes, including: murder, rape, torture, and cruel treatment; enforced disappearance; forcible transfer of population; outrages upon personal dignity; intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such and against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities; unlawful imprisonment; conscripting and enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces and using them to participate actively in hostilities; persecution on gender and political grounds; and other inhumane acts.

The ICC confirmed that domestic courts have not responded to atrocities adequately or at all and that the Nigerian Government has failed in its obligations to hold those responsible to account. However, the Office of the Prosecutor faces serious resource constraints to investigating and prosecuting new situations and cases. We therefore urge HMG, as a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to ensure any investigation is adequately resourced.

Intersociety reports that 1,400 Christians have been killed by the Nigerian army, police and air force. The Nigerian army's former Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Theophilus Danjuma, says the armed forces are "not neutral; they collude" in the "ethnic cleansing in... riverine states" by Fulani herders. He insists that villagers must defend themselves because "depending on the armed forces" will result in them dying "one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop".

US Government response

We commend the decision by the US State Department to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern because of FoRB violations and its recognition of escalating "religious-tinged violence".

During a special briefing on 8 December, US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback said: "The world has great concern about

what's taking place in Nigeria at this time, and a number of terrorist groups are organizing and pushing into the country. We're seeing a lot of religious-tinged violence taking place in that country and indeed in West Africa. It's an area of growing concern about what's happening, in particular the tension that's taking place there between religious groups. And it's often the religious affiliation is used to try to recruit and inspire violent acts."

The lack of comparable response by the UK is both stark and alarming. If HMG continue to ignore or downplay the strong religious factor fuelling the conflict, as identified by the US State Department, resources will be wasted on the implementation of solutions based on a premise that has little-to-no impact on the violence.

UK Government response

Over £2 billion of UK bilateral aid was given to Nigeria between 2011 and 2018, an equivalent of £800,000 every day. However, we share growing concerns over how the funds are spent; and how it could be better spent – especially in relation to the protection of those most at risk of attack and the need to bring perpetrators to justice. The UK is also one of the largest donors to the World Food Programme's emergency operation in north-east Nigeria, but it does not currently provide humanitarian assistance in the middle belt states, despite this being one of the worst-affected regions.

For the UK merely to "emphasise the importance of mediation and inter-faith dialogue" trivialises the scale of persecution of Christians. It is too simplistic for the UK Government to label atrocities committed by Fulani militia as driven by desertification, climate change or competition for resources. Protracted attempts to address these (albeit important) longer-term factors will not stop the current rate of killings.

We therefore urge you to consider urgently how you can shine a light on these mounting crimes against humanity, undoubtedly predicated by a hatred of people who refuse to renounce their religious beliefs. We would also ask you to use your seat at the UN Security Council to prioritise these concerns, to seek a resolution which significantly enhances the security given to communities at risk of attack, and for signatories of the 1948 Genocide Convention – including the UK – to fulfil their obligations to prevent and protect. We would be happy to provide draft wording for such a resolution as we have been looking into the different options available.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Alton of Liverpool
Baroness Cox