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## Human Rights Council

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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## Written statement\* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, 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.

[19 August 2020]

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

## Genocide of Christians in the Federal Republic of Nigeria

### Boko Haram and ISWAP

Since the turn of the millennium, Islamist jihadist militant group Boko Haram has been terrorizing the citizens of Nigeria- in particular, Christians and non-jihadist Muslims- throughout northern and central Nigeria. Boko Haram's main objectives include waging a jihad- a holy war- and establishing a caliphate across Nigeria and the broader West African region.

“Boko Haram’s trademark was originally the use of gunmen on motorbikes, killing police, politicians and anyone who criticized it, including clerics from other Muslim traditions and Christian preachers. The group began to carry out more audacious attacks in northern and central Nigeria, including bombing churches, bus ranks, bars, military barracks and even the police and UN headquarters in the capital, Abuja.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2015, amidst the increasing influence and prevalence of Boko Haram activity throughout the region, the Nigerian military, in cooperation with troops from Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin, was able to temporarily decrease Boko Haram influence by destroying their bases in northern provinces. However, Boko Haram has experienced a massive resurgence within the past two years. According to the International Committee on Nigeria,<sup>2</sup> from the period of 2000 to 2014, Boko Haram was the primary actor in 2,989 incidents in Nigeria causing 20,436 deaths. Concurrently, however, nations directly surrounding Nigeria experienced only 147 Boko Haram- related incidents and 1,261 corresponding deaths, highlighting the implications should the violence expand beyond national borders. From 2015 until June 2020, Boko Haram was the primary actor in 2,989 incidents in Nigeria causing 22,806 deaths. During this same period, as well, Boko Haram activity in nations surrounding Nigeria vastly increased to 2,464 incidents and 8,353 deaths from 2015 to 2019. This consistency in frequency and casualty figures exhibits that in spite of all coordinated attempts to eradicate Boko Haram, it has been able not only to maintain its violent trends, but also expand its sphere of activity into more Nigerian states and nations adjacent to Nigeria.

In 2016, Boko Haram split into two distinct sects- one of them became the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the other kept its original name as Boko Haram.<sup>3</sup> Both of these groups have engaged in endless deadly attacks and mass kidnappings. In late July 2020, ISWAP circulated a video on social media in which a group of militants stand behind five Christian humanitarian aid workers, which they later on shot in the head at point blank range. Just a few months prior, in December 2019, ISWAP released a video in which they decapitate eleven blindfolded Christian hostages as a direct response to the killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by US military troops in October and, coincidentally, this video was circulated less than a week after the United States publicly condemned the Nigerian government for not upholding and protecting the religious freedom of its citizens.<sup>4</sup>

Boko Haram and ISWAP activity also includes mass abductions with hundreds of victims. In 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Nigerian schoolgirls while they were attending classes at their school in Chibok- 57 girls escaped during transport to a Boko Haram base, and the other 219 were forcibly transferred to captivity. Since the initial abduction, though some of the girls have been released to return to their homes and families, 112 of the victims remain missing, and one distressed mother explains that “They [Nigerian government] have not shown interest in ensuring that our daughters are found. They don’t care about us anymore.”<sup>5</sup> In 2018, Boko Haram conducted a similar abduction in Dapchi, where 110 Nigerian schoolgirls- predominantly Christian- were kidnapped from their school. Over the past two

1 BBC News, “Who are Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamist group?”, 24 November 2016, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501>

2 International Committee on Nigeria & International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice, *Nigeria’s Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, July 2020, available at: <https://clientwebproof.com/Nigeria-Silent-Slaughter/>

3 United States Department of State, *Nigeria 2019 International Religious Freedom Report*, 10 June 2020, available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NIGERIA-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

4 Rudolf Ogo Okonkwo, “An Islamic State Christmas killing of 11 hostages in Nigeria threatens to flare up religious tensions,” *Quartz Africa*, 28 December 2019, available at: <https://qz.com/africa/1776736/islamic-state-kills-11-nigerian-christians-pressure-on-buhari/>

5 Fidelis Mbah, “Nigeria’s Chibok schoolgirls: Five years on, 112 still missing,” *Al Jazeera*, 14 April 2019, available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/h?preview=Rejoinder+Nigeria.pdf>

years, the majority of the girls have since been released; however, one girl named Leah Sharibu continues to remain captive as she refuses to conform to Boko Haram demands to renounce Christianity.

## Fulani Militants

Another group responsible for the mass killings of Nigerian Christians is Fulani militants, who operate primarily in the Middle Belt, where they ambush Christian communities, kill entire families with AK-47s and machetes, burn farms and local churches, and sometimes rape female victims. Fulani militants, though they have not been active for as long as Boko Haram, are swiftly gaining traction throughout Nigeria. From 2005 to 2009, Fulani militants were the primary actor in only 13 violent incidents causing 693 deaths. However, during the next reporting period from 2010 to 2014, Fulani militants were recorded as the primary actor in 615 incidents causing 7,551 deaths. And within the past five years, Fulani militants were involved in 1,289 incidents causing 9,733 deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the difficulty in differentiating between multiple Islamist militias, evidence of violence is best provided by survivor testimonies, many of which have been compiled by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief.<sup>7</sup> These victims have reported that small, mobile groups of Fulani militants descend on Christian villages at night, wearing “black uniforms” and shouting inflammatory phrases such as “destroy the infidels” and “Allahu Akbar.” Unlike older reports that Fulani militants used sticks as their weapon of choice during these attacks, survivors recalled that their assailants had wielded assault rifles, machetes, machine guns, bows and arrows, and handguns, rendering the victims hopeless without means of defense. The militants have no mercy on even the most vulnerable community members, including children, pregnant women, and the elderly, and engage in indiscriminate slaughter.

Despite the horrifying reality of monthly, weekly, and even daily attacks on Christian communities, the government of Nigeria has failed to take concrete, visible steps to address the violence. Despite that Christian communities have reached out to police because they predict a coming attack, and despite that the national military “is aware of the location of Fulani training camps in the hills around Kurra Falls up to Riyom Local councils but has failed to take sufficient action.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, state governments and the national government has been reluctant to conduct comprehensive investigations on the murders, in some instances underreporting or misrepresenting casualty figures to downplay the conflict and at other times simply denying attacks. Finally, “the failure to protect the communities is further exacerbated by the fact that Christians feel discriminated against and unable to seek redress.”

In 2019, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice issued the following decision in response to the 2016 mass murder by Fulani militants of hundreds of members of the predominantly Christian community of Agatu in Benue State. This incident is evidence of the Nigerian government’s lack of concern for accountability and justice regarding the genocide of Christian civilians.

“Having been established by admission by the Respondent [The Nigerian Government] that lives were lost and properties destroyed, the Respondent ipso facto admits the violation of its obligation under Articles 1, 2, 4 and 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights as claimed. Furthermore, there is no evidence of the effort by the Respondent to promptly arrest the crisis and nip it in the bud or evidence that it carried out prompt investigation to identify the perpetrators, prosecute them and redress the victim. By virtue of Article 1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Right, to which the Respondent is a signatory, the Respondent is under the obligation to recognize the rights enshrined in the charter and adopt legislative or other measures to give effect to them. In other words, the Respondent is obliged to protect the human rights of its citizens, in the instant case, the Agatu communities as guaranteed under the African Charter and prevent their violations even by private.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> International Committee on Nigeria & International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice, *Nigeria’s Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, July 2020, *supra* note 6

<sup>7</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, *Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, June 2020, available at: <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

### **Recommendations to the Council**

- Hold the Nigerian government accountable to its human rights obligations as a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as a State party to numerous UN human rights mechanisms.
- Hold the Nigerian government accountable to the human rights standards as outlined in the Constitution:
  - Article 33 (1) Every person has the right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria.
- Appoint a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria.
- Appoint a Commission of Inquiry pertaining to Violent Extremism in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations to the Nigerian Government**

- Continue to accept visits from and cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, who releases timely and accurate reports regarding the violence in Nigeria.
  - Develop a comprehensive plan and/or policy to address and eradicate the violence against Nigerian Christians at the hands of Islamic jihadist Boko Haram and Fulani militants.
  - Publicly condemn all savage acts of violence against religious communities and identify, investigate, and prosecute –with transparency measures- all perpetrators of such violent intolerance.
  - Establish an official medium of reporting timely, accurate, and up to date information on incidences of violent attacks for verification, modeled similarly to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control's role in providing updated COVID-19 statistics and infection
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