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NIGERIA: Jubilee Campaign Publishes Rejoinder In Defense of Bishop of Sokoto Matthew Kukah

WASHINGTON, D.C., 27 AUGUST 2021 – This week, Jubilee Campaign published its new [Rejoinder from Jubilee Campaign to Response by the \[Nigerian\] Presidency to the Statement Made by Bishop Kukah Before the United States Congress](#). In mid-July, Nigerian presidential spokesperson Garba Shehu castigated Bishop of Sokoto Matthew Kukah and alleged that he had made inflammatory remarks during a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) virtual hearing “[The State of Religious Freedom Around the Globe](#)” on 13 July 2021, as well as in the [written testimony](#) that he submitted to the record. This press release summarizes the main points discussed in our full 18-page rejoinder.

Summary of Claims: Mr. Shehu made claims that (1) Bishop Kukah sensationalized the situation of insecurity in Nigeria; that (2) Bishop Kukah claimed that Christian schools are the sole targets of militant abductions; that (3) Bishop Kukah attempted to exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions; and that (4) Bishop Kukah’s remarks do not represent the views of Nigerian citizens.

Bishop Kukah did not sensationalize the issue of insecurity in Nigeria; on the contrary, his remarks duly pointed out major domestic issues such as violence, corruption, trafficking, abductions, and poverty, as well as the Nigeran government’s inability to solve these problems. Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics’ December 2019 [Survey on Corruption as Experienced by the Population](#) [which surveyed 33,000 households] revealed that the actors most reported to take bribes were police officers (33%), land registry officers (26%), tax/revenue officers (25%), prosecutors (23%), federal road safety corps (21%), judges/magistrates (20%), and others. Bishop Kukah also raises the ‘culture of violence’ in Nigeria, which can be [exemplified in the patterns](#) by which “security forces, militias, vigilantes, religious fundamentalists and criminal gangs regularly violate civil liberties” and “torture, ill-treatment in police custody, extra-judicial killings and illegal military detention camps are still part and parcel of law enforcement operations”. In mid-July 2021, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law published a [report](#) highlighting that in just the first 200 days of 2021 (1 January to 18 July), there were 3,462 Nigerian Christian casualties resulting from Islamic jihadists.

Bishop Kukah did not claim that militant groups are only targeting Christian schools for mass kidnappings. Instead, he highlighted the importance of security in educational facilities that serve people of all faith. For example, Bishop Kukah explains that “A significant percentage of senior Muslims in Nigeria and non-Christians and non-Catholics are beneficiaries of Catholic education”

and that “we require practical, measurable forms of assistance that can help us to change lives. Indeed, schools with Christian students and Muslims students alike have come under attack by mass abductions; however, it is only expected that Bishop Kukah, who in his address at the TLHRC hearing was speaking on behalf of the Catholic Church, would focus on the situations that have affected the community with which he engages most regularly and most closely: the Christian community. On 5 July, just eight days prior to Bishop Kukah’s testimony at the TLHRC hearing, [unidentified assailants abducted](#) 121 Christian children from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna state. As of 25 July, 34 of the kidnapped children have either escaped or were released by their perpetrators, but 87 still [remain in captivity](#).

Bishop Kukah did not attempt to exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions. He did make the point that herdsmen and bandits are wreaking havoc on communities by launching violent attacks and killings; however, while he did not specify that those engaging in violence are specifically radical and militant, he did clarify that “what is happening in Nigeria does not represent Islam, does not represent the Muslim community, as I already said. What is happening is a strain within Islam, that is, the Salafist brand of Islam that believes that the only practitioners of Islam are those who believe what they believe and how they believe.” Furthermore, Bishop Kukah in remarks made numerous points that peaceful Muslims and Christians have been able to put aside religious differences and work together on issues of security, and that measurable steps taken to eradicate violence – for example, abductions from schools – would equally benefit children of all faiths.

Bishop Kukah’s remarks, while they certainly do not represent the perspective of each and every Nigerian civilian, have drawn tremendous support. Jubilee Campaign read through the readers’ comments on articles regarding Bishop Kukah’s remarks at the TLHRC hearing and other news on Mr. Shehu’s response, and we found that the audience generally supported Kukah’s statements. In particular, many stated that his speech was “justified”, “true”, and “measured”. On the contrary, many readers expressed agitation that Mr. Shehu had so frivolously disregarded Kukah’s remarks, and one reader commented that “whenever someone speaks truth to power, you will respond swiftly [...] I totally disagree with this style of response to every meaningful critic [...]”. Jubilee Campaign found that the vast majority of comments on relevant news articles expressed similar views supporting Bishop Kukah, while comments of the opposing perspective were few and far between.

To read Jubilee Campaign’s full rejoinder, please click the document icon below:



Jubilee Campaign is a non-profit organization which promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and faith minorities in the most oppressive countries. We assist individuals seeking asylum from religious persecution as well as promote the care and well-being of larger groups of refugees fleeing persecution.