

Jubilee Campaign Joins USCIRF in "Appall" at the State Department's "Unexplainable" Removal of Nigeria from the List of Countries with Religious Freedom Violations



Photo courtesy of Alheri Magaji with [RADI](#) | Pictured: Bandage covering the head injury of a baby, as a result of a gunshot fired by Fulani militants. The militants shot the child's parents to death during the same attack. (Spring 2020)

WASHINGTON, D.C., 19 November 2021 – Jubilee Campaign joins USCIRF in their disappointment at the US State Department's removal of Nigeria from the list of countries with egregious religious freedom concerns and violations. This designation removal signals that the United States will treat Nigeria as a country with "no severe religious freedom violations," despite [USCIRF reporting](#) widespread killings and abductions of Christian leaders and individuals in north-eastern and central Nigeria, and attacks on religious ceremonies of Christians and Muslims alike.

USCIRF has been recommending Nigeria for designation as a Country of Particular Concern since 2009 in their annual reports, and its most recent [2021 report](#) raised new concerns about the recent application of the Sharia penal code in northern Nigerian states, particularly in regards to a court recently sentencing a Sufi singer to death for alleged blasphemy. The Federal Court has since called for a retrial, but the Northern state has continued to detain the singer since March 2020. USCIRF welcomed the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern last year and

had recommended that the State Department uphold the designation in 2021.

The absence of Nigeria from the [list of countries](#) with religious freedom concerns comes in the wake of statistics that over 2,557 Nigerians were kidnapped and 2,197 killed by Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), or Fulani militants, as reported in July 2021. Other statistics by the [International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law](#) show much more drastic numbers; the group estimates that between the months of January and September 2021, no fewer than 4,400 Nigerian Christians had been killed and 3,500 "sedentary Christians" had been abducted by jihadist actors.

"The removal of Nigeria from the State Department's list of violators of religious freedom is a significant setback in efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. The USA has chosen to reward Nigeria's abject failure to keep its citizens safe and pursue justice for the survivors and victims of jihadist violence and hate crimes. This is unconscionable when Christians in the Northeast of Nigeria are murdered every single day." - Ann Buwalda, Executive Director, Jubilee Campaign

While we note that the State Department has designated Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa as Entities of Particular Concern (EPCs), it fails to address the diversity of Nigeria and the [current situation](#) in several states where "bandits", often identified as Fulani militants, are increasingly responsible for mass abductions of schoolchildren. In Kaduna state, the Global Terrorism Index in 2020 [reported](#) a 77% increase in terror-related attacks perpetrated by Fulani militants. These criminal groups have [targeted](#) Christian and Muslim schools with abductions, disproportionately targeting female girls and Christian students. They have also been responsible, as of September 2021, for the abduction and killings of at least 11 Christian pastors and priests in 2021. [Reports from survivors](#) of these mass abductions by bandits have revealed that some of the perpetrators share the extremist beliefs and motivations of Boko Haram [*boko haram*: 'non-Islamic education forbidden']. Victoria Sani, one survivor, told AP News that her captors threatened that if she returned to school, they would "come back for us"; they also said they would make sure "all the schools in Kaduna state shut down." Excluding Nigeria and those deemed responsible for the latest school kidnappings actively works against efforts to alleviate the situation of general insecurity in Nigeria.

Moreover, reports from Nigerian civil society note that the Government of Nigeria has become increasingly unable and unwilling to address the impunity of these abductions. While the government of Nigeria has been swift to track down and [arrest](#) individuals with links to secessionist movements even abroad - such as in the cases of [Sunday Igboho](#) and [Nnamdi Kanu](#) - they have displayed either reluctance or inability to identify and prosecute the bandits and Fulani militants conducting both mass abductions of children and attacks on homes and churches in Kaduna and other states. Many resources have also been spent - to the detriment of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression - on arresting peaceful protestors and journalists such as [Luka Binniyat](#), one of whose reports criticized the Kaduna state government's response to the killings of Christians. Meanwhile, Nigerian citizens abducted by militant groups such as Boko Haram years ago remain captive to this day; Christian girl [Leah Sharibu](#) has been held by Boko Haram for nearly four years for refusing to convert to Islam.

The Biden Administration can, however, still rectify the situation to address the widespread violence by jihadist militants and the impunity the perpetrators of abductions and violence against women and children enjoy. In light of the United States anticipated reentry into the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2022, we urge the Biden Administration to work with other UN member states to establish a credible and effective mechanism for accountability for the grave crimes being committed in Nigeria. For example, an independent and impartial commission of inquiry should be established to collect evidence of atrocities, analyze the evidence, and preserve it for future prosecutions, before it is too late.

The State Department should also reverse the decision to remove Nigeria from its list of religious freedom violators if the Administration truly stands by its [commitment](#) to "not waver in its commitment to advocate for freedom of religion or belief for all and in every country."

Additional Responses to the Removal of Nigeria from the State Department's CPC list:



To Whom It May Ignore: U.S. Abandons Terror-filled Nigeria

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THE BARONESS COX
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Urgent Statement on Nigeria

Our colleagues in Nigeria and here in the UK are so deeply disturbed by the US Department of State's decision to remove Nigeria from its list of 'Violators of Religious Freedom'.

I attach a brief statement on behalf of my NGO, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART).

Please do be in touch if you would like further information.

With best wishes,

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Urgent
Statem...21.pdf



URGENT STATEMENTS from CSW and HART about the US State...

CSW concerned at critical omissions from State Department's Countries of Particular Concern list 18 Nov 2021 CSW is deeply concerned at the United States (US) State Department's decision to remove Nigeria from its Countries of Particular Concern...

Other Relevant News:



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In late June, the Biden administration released the first Trafficking in Persons Report of its presidency. This annual report includes a list of countries identified by the U.S. State Department as having government forces or government-supported ...

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*The US President **granted** Nigeria a national interest waiver pursuant to section 404 of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (22 U.S.C. 2370c-1) in September despite no tangible proof that Nigeria is able to protect children from being recruited into criminal groups as fighters and/or trafficked, leaving fewer options to hold Nigeria accountable. The answer to the question raised in the above linked [article](#) - "Will Biden have courage on child soldiers?" - is unfortunately no, according to Rachel Stohl, Vice President of Research Programs, and Ryan Fletcher, Research Associate at the Stimson Center.*

Jubilee Campaign is a non-profit organization which promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious 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 religious and ethnic persecution.

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