

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to urge the Biden Administration to reevaluate the United States' decision to not designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act.¹ In light of several recent tragedies, it is clear that the Biden Administration must make religiously motivated violence a top priority in its engagement with the Government of Nigeria.

While many Americans were celebrating Christmas surrounded by family, the reality in Nigeria was far bleaker. According to Amnesty International, in roughly 20 communities across central Nigeria, terrorists "killed for sport," butchering an estimated 200 Christians on the holy day.² These tragic events are nothing new. Reporting indicates that in 2022 alone, at least 145 Catholic priests in Nigeria were killed, with 30 others kidnapped in 39 separate terror attacks.³

This failure to designate Nigeria falls short of the needs of the Christian communities throughout Nigeria that are facing constant threats from jihadists. Islamic State terror groups such as ISIS, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda perpetuate this senseless violence across Africa.⁴ Throughout

¹ "USCIRF Calls for Congressional Hearing after State Department Fails to Designate Nigeria and India as Countries of Particular Concern." *USCIRF*, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 4 Jan. 2024, www.uscirtf.gov/newsroom/releases-statements/uscirtf-calls-congressional-hearing-after-state-department-fails.

² Tilsley, Paul, and Fox News. "World Looks Other Way as Christians 'killed for Sport by Jihadists' in Nigeria." *Fox News*, FOX News Network, 30 Dec. 2023, www.foxnews.com/world/world-looks-other-way-christians-killed-sport-jihadistsnigeria.

³ "145 Nigerian Catholic Priests Killed by Terrorists, 30 Others Kidnapped in Several Attacks in 2022 - Report." *Sahara Reporters*, 23 Jan. 2023, <https://saharareporters.com/2023/01/23/145-nigerian-catholic-priests-killed-terrorists-30-otherskidnapped-several-attacks-2022#:~:text=At%20least%20145%20Nigerian%20Catholic,report%20released%20by%20SB%20Morgan>.

⁴ Gilbert, Lela. "Africa's Christian Believers Face Ever-Increasing Dangers." *Hudson Institute*, The Washington Stand, 13

northern and central Nigeria, violent assaults on churches and their congregations are reportedly carried out on a near-weekly basis. Moreover, according to Open Doors, a Christian Advocacy group, more than 90% of the global total of Christian deaths occur in Africa.⁵ While such atrocities have existed within Nigeria for decades, the Nigerian Government's unwillingness to address the violence is the cause of significant concern.

For these reasons, we are extremely concerned that the State Department's January 4, 2024, press release titled "Religious Freedom Designations" fails to designate Nigeria as a CPC despite the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) repeatedly recommending otherwise. The Integrated Country Strategy for Nigeria's first mission goal is to build "Stronger Democratic Institutions, Governance, and Respect for Human Rights."⁶ The Department's inability to conduct even the most basic diplomatic engagement by sending the Ambassador for Religious Freedom to investigate these severe violations of religious freedoms in Nigeria only adds to the disconnect between the Nigerian people, the Government of Nigeria, and U.S. foreign policy.

We request that the State Department thoroughly report to Congress on its plan to address our concern for Nigerian Christians slaughtered at the hands of Islamic Jihadists. This report should include specific details on how the State Department plans to engage with the Nigerian Government to eliminate the atrocities occurring under their watch. Additionally, we request specific details as to why the Biden Administration removed Nigeria as a CPC in 2021 and why recent events failed to meet the threshold of concern. Continuing to ignore the repeated massacring of a particular group of religious and ethnic people only perpetuates the cycle of violence. More must be done to combat these heinous acts.

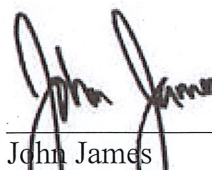
Sincerely,



Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress



Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs
Committee




John James
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Africa
Subcommittee

Dec. 2023, www.hudson.org/religious-freedom/africa-christian-believers-face-ever-increasing-danger-lelagilbert#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%2036%25%20of%20the,of%20Christians%20are%20in%20Africa.&text=So%2C%20what%20exactly%20is%20taking.%2C%20and%20ever%2Dincreasing%20terrorism.

⁵ Sherwood, Harriet. "Christian Persecution Rises as People Refused Aid in Covid Crisis – Report." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 13 Jan. 2021, www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/13/christian-persecution-rises-as-peoplerefused-aid-in-covid-crisis-report.

⁶ *Integrated Country Strategy - Nigeria*, 23 June 2023. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ICS_AF_Nigeria_Public.pdf. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.



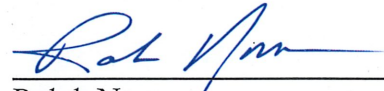
Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Andrew Ogles
Member of Congress



Harriet M. Hageman
Member of Congress



Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



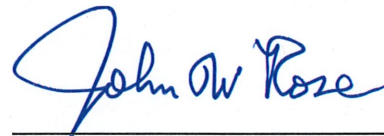
Rich McCormick, MD, MBA
Member of Congress



James R. Baird, PhD
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



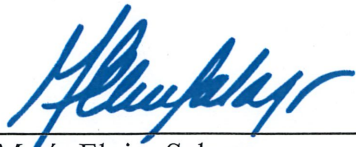
John Rose
Member of Congress



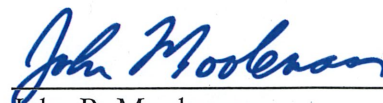
Michael Cloud
Member of Congress



Michael Guest
Member of Congress



Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



John R. Moolenaar
Member of Congress



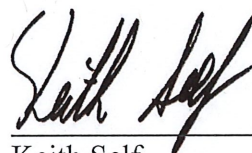
Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Chip Roy
Member of Congress



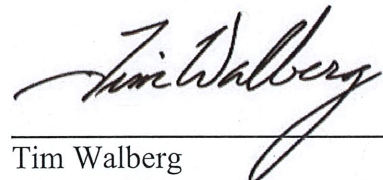
French Hill
Member of Congress



Keith Self
Member of Congress



Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress