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# VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

DEFENSELESS CIVILIANS KILLED

NATALIA BRUSCO





# VIOLETIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

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**NATALIA BRUSCO**

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# Violations of Religious Freedom in Nigeria

## Executive Summary

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation of approximately 195 million.<sup>1</sup> Around 50% identify as Muslim and 48.1% identify as Christian.<sup>2</sup> Both of these two world religions have an effect on political and social identity. In some places in Nigeria, the two religions cohabitate nicely. However, other places are plagued with events and headlines reading "'Corpses were scattered': Gunmen kill dozens in Nigeria massacre" and "Nigeria is a killing field of defenseless Christians". This needs to end. The government of Nigeria needs to ensure religious freedom by implementing more solutions to protect all citizens as everyone should feel safe to practice the religion of their choice.

This report will discuss domestic terrorism in Nigeria. It will draw specific attention to defenseless civilians being murdered at an alarming rate as well as violence committed by those who allegedly believe Islamic teaching is against anything that resembles the Western world.

According to the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, the government is to protect the religious freedom conditions for all citizens. However, the Nigerian government has failed in terms of its commitment to protect and provide security to its people as countless attacks in the name of religion have been committed. Further, within the justice system, actions for crimes are rarely held accountable and are, therefore, repeated.

In 2016, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, said those who are victims of Boko Haram's violence have experienced "unspeakable suffering."<sup>3</sup> Further, the UN reported in January 2020 "Northern

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank. "Population, Total - Nigeria," 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NG>.

<sup>2</sup> Diamant, Jeff. "The Countries with the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations," April 1, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/>.

<sup>3</sup> UN News. "UN Allocates \$13 Million from Emergency Fund to Support People in North-Eastern Nigeria | Africa Renewal," June 27, 2016. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/un-allocates-13-million-emergency-fund-support-people-north-eastern-nigeria>.

Nigeria has been in the grip of a Boko Haram insurgency for about a decade, which has led to widespread displacement.”<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has also made a statement condemning Boko Haram attacks stating that “The continuing violence by Boko Haram is an affront to international law, to humanity and to religious faith.”<sup>5</sup> Many feel their life, liberty, and security are at risk due to their religion. A rise in domestic terrorist attacks by several different groups, including Boko Haram, has increased tension, fear, and danger. Consequently, many are choosing to flee.

This is not a new phenomenon. Reports in regards to religious attacks date back to the 1980s. Terrorism in the name of religion has always been a concern for Nigeria; however, since 2018, religious divides and violence have increased in central and northeastern Nigeria.

## **Background**

### ***Nigeria’s Co-habitation of Two World Religions***

Like all conflicts, in order to study why they take place, it is important to understand the history that gave rise to tension in the first place. Both Islam and Christianity have changed the landscape of Nigeria due to the social values they transcend. The universal ideologies these religions portray leak into one’s political and social ideals.

One of the reasons religious intolerance is so rampant in Nigeria is because people’s beliefs and attitudes in regards to their religion or another religion spill over into their political and economic lives. Violence occurs as a response to these attitudes. Even though religious freedom is granted, religious identity still plays a major role within politics and social relations.

### ***Shari’a Conflict***

In Nigeria, the year 2000 is often referred to as the Shari’a conflict. Shari’a is Islamic law containing religious regulations that govern the lives of Muslims. In 2000, the Governor of

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<sup>4</sup> UN News. “Major Humanitarian Hub in Northeast Nigeria Burned in Attack | Africa Renewal,” January 24, 2020. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/major-humanitarian-hub-northeast-nigeria-burned-attack>.

<sup>5</sup> Ki-moon, Ban. “Statement Attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Recent Bomb Attacks in Nigeria Secretary-General.” United Nations. United Nations, October 3, 2015. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-10-03/statement-attributable-spokesman-secretary-general-recent-bomb>.

Kaduna<sup>6</sup> said that Shari'a would be implemented by the state. However, this was quickly retaliated against with public protests organized by the Christian Association of Nigeria. This became known as the 2000 Kaduna riots. Several other northern states adopted Islamic Shari'a law which caused further havoc. Many Christians and Muslims clashed for several months resulting in massive destruction and hundreds of deaths on both sides.

There are some people in Nigeria who still stand behind their position that Shari'a law should be implemented at the state level. As a result, over the years many groups have emerged with a goal to implement Shari'a law over *all* of Nigeria at any cost. Some of these groups use violence to instill their beliefs and therefore attempt to threaten societies to comply.

### ***Deeper Than Religion***

Religion is just one piece of the puzzle. Religious violence is rampant across Nigeria because behind one's religious identity there are ethnic and cultural differences as well. Everything is interconnected which makes this issue more deeply rooted.

One common reason some Muslims and Christians began fighting was because Muslim Fulani nomadic herders<sup>7</sup> would violently pass through Christian farmland. Adding climate change into the mix, more and more northerners began to migrate to the predominantly Christian south. North-central Nigeria, also known as the Middle Belt, is where most of the religious violence occurs as scarce resources and climate change manifest communal conflicts. It is known as the Middle Belt because this is where many predominantly Muslim northern states meet with predominantly Christian southern states.

In addition, the news plays an important role by polarizing Muslims and Christians with headlines and stories. This helps feed into the narrative that these religious identities are against one another. Further, the widespread destruction and killings from these religious attacks results

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<sup>6</sup> The Governor of Kaduna since 2015 to the present day is Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai, a Nigerian politician and former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory. He aligns with the "All Progressives Congress" party which is one of the two major contemporary political parties in Nigeria. The state of Kaduna is located in north-western Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup> This population refers to the semi-nomadic Fulani people whose primary occupation is raising livestock. However, due to the changing climate, many have been moving further south within the retrospective states they reside in including Nigeria, Ghana, and Mali. Conflict with farmers has occurred as a result and is becoming increasingly worse as cattle grazing on farmlands leads to destruction of crops which inevitably causes tensions.

in small-scale industries being destroyed and a rise of unemployment levels. As people grow poverty stricken, their anger and blame increases in the process.

However, at the end of the day, the fact is religious violence in Nigeria stems from many different factors and tends to escalate quickly. Throughout the 2000s, many countries issued travel warnings for citizens travelling to Nigeria because religious tensions erupt quickly and without warning.<sup>8</sup> Many of the causes of current attacks are deeper than religion, including political ideologies and ethnic differences.

## **Violations of Religious Freedom**

Although there are many different reasons for religious violence, there are distinct perpetrator groups in Nigeria that account for many of the conflicts.

### ***Boko Haram***

The organization's official name is "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad" which means "Group Committed to Propagating the Prophets Teachings and Jihad". However, many refer to this organization as Boko Haram.

Having existed since 2002 in northeastern Nigeria, the organization's initial goal was opposing what they describe as Western education. They have expanded with military operations since 2009 with a political goal to create what they call an Islamic state. These operations were in the form of violent insurgencies using terrorist tactics. Their understanding of Islam is to forbid Muslims to engage in anything associated with Western society. Essentially, they are against anything that derives from Western civilization whether that is participating in secular education or voting. Consequently, these attacks often involve innocent civilians. Their attacks initially involved men with guns on motorcycles, but have since grown larger to include bombing churches, military barracks, UN headquarters, and more.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sulaiman, Kamal-deen Olawale. "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications and Options for Peace and Stability Order." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (2016): 85-103. Accessed June 8, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24805708](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24805708).

<sup>9</sup> Bagga, Ferdaouis. "Central Nigeria: Overcoming Dangerous Speech and Endemic Religious Divides," February 2019. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/CENTRAL%20NIGERIA%20Overcoming%20Dangerous%20Speech%20and%20Endemic%20Religious%20Divides.pdf>

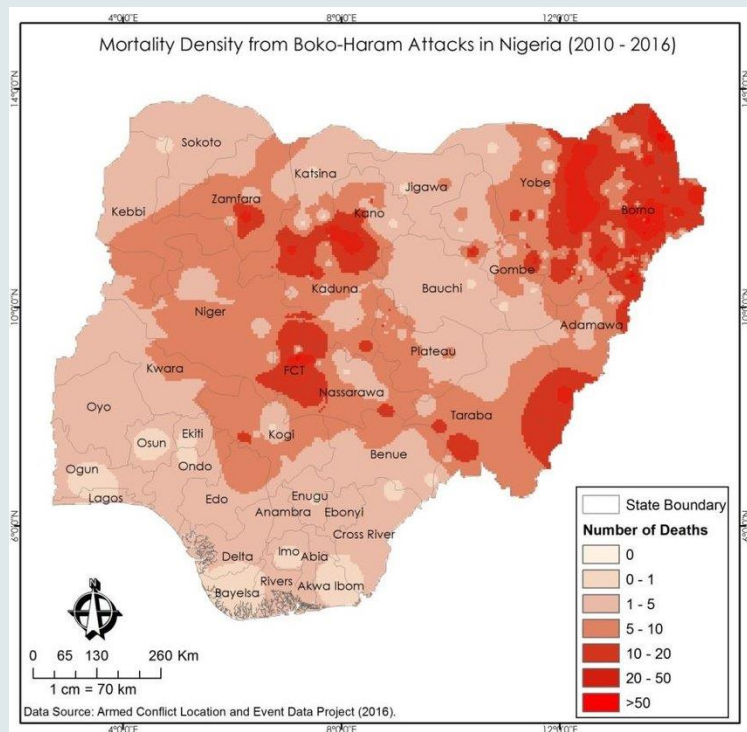


The group drew international attention in April 2014 when they abducted over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, a town in northeastern Nigeria. 112 of the girls are still missing today, over 6 years later. This terrorist act was designed to emphasize their opposition to the so-called Western education. Boko Haram has taken credit for many violent school attacks, but what is important to understand is that it does not matter whether or not students are Christian or Muslim, they all are allegedly committing a sin simply by attending school. After this attack, the UN Security Council added Boko Haram to its sanctions list.

In 2018, 4 years after the Chibok kidnapping, Boko Haram kidnapped 110 students from the Government Girls Science and Technical College, forcing them to renounce their religion. UNICEF says Boko Haram has kidnapped more than 1,000 children in northeastern Nigeria from 2013 to 2018.

This group has carried out multiple raids per year in which they seize towns, leaving behind dead bodies. For example, on January 3, 2015, hundreds of gunmen seized Baga, a town in the state of Borno, and left more than 2,000 dead. When Boko Haram militants carry out attacks such as these, they destroy everything, leaving the sites as one mass grave full of loss and terror.

Boko Haram militants mainly inhabit areas in the northern states of Nigeria, specifically Yobe, Kano, Bauchi, Borno and Kaduna. Boko Haram wanted all Christians out of the northern region of Nigeria and killed hundreds through bombings and shootings in January of 2012. In 2013, the government declared a state of emergency in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa and sent in troops to fight against Boko Haram.



In 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS, and formed “Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya” or the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP). However, due to infighting, the group split into two factions in 2016, ISWAP and Boko Haram, and have thus carried out attacks separately.

The enduring campaign of violence instilled by these terrorist groups has reached a breaking point and the attacks mentioned in this report are only a fraction of the total number of recorded attacks.

The Nigerian government’s attempt to demolish Boko Haram starting in 2009 failed and led to even more attacks against the government. Political scientists argue that Boko Haram should not have grown as large to begin with and place blame on the Nigerian government for lack of foresight. In retaliation, Boko Haram has specifically aimed attacks at military bases and government offices.



Olu Ajayi/AP - In 2012, this was one of three churches bombed by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.

### ***Refugees fleeing from Boko Haram***

Those that flee are followed with more danger. In February of 2016, two suicide bombers affiliated with Boko Haram killed approximately 60 people at a Nigerian refugee camp. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that between 2013 and 2014, 100,000 Nigerians fled to Niger to escape terrorism. The United Nations estimated more than 250,000 people have fled from northeastern Nigeria and the number is growing as attacks escalate.

Over the past two years, Boko Haram has been more specific in regards to their attacks. Choosing to target funerals, Christian weddings, and schools are just a few of the ways Boko Haram instigates fear. Using suicide bombings, drive-by shootings, kidnappings, and raids at night, Boko Haram has instilled anxiety in every corner of northeastern Nigeria. Targeting militaries, mosques, churches, and rural areas, over two million have been displaced and thousands have been killed since the attacks began in 2009.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Militant Fulani herdsmen***

Fulani herdsmen are a nomadic Fulani people, primarily Muslim, in Nigeria whose occupation is raising livestock. They represent the world's largest nomadic group scattered across Africa. The current President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, is ethnically Fulani.

Over the years, many conflicts have arisen between Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers, sometimes escalating into violent situations. However, when Boko Haram began to portray violent acts against the state of Nigeria, with the goal of imposing what they consider Islamic law, armed Fulani acted out as well.

There have been scores of reports in regards to attacks by militant Fulani herdsmen, referred to by some as "Fulani jihadis". In April of 2020, militant Fulani herdsman killed 25 Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt and displaced around 1,000 others through raids by stealing food and livestock and torching towns. Driving many Christians away, these Fulani militants proceed to use this open land for themselves. Citizens in Nigeria's Middle Belt continue to feel so threatened that local news reports argue this could lead to a civil war. Thus far, the national government has done nothing to stop these Fulani militants, focusing their attention instead on defeating Boko Haram. In 2015, the Global Terrorism Index labeled Fulani militants as one of the top five deadliest terrorist organizations in the world.

According to the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) for Nigeria, the government is consistently trying to increase inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims

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<sup>10</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2020, April). *Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*. Retrieved from [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report\\_42720\\_new\\_0.pdf#page=32](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_42720_new_0.pdf#page=32)

(Recommendation A/HRC/25/6/135.66-67). One problem with these initiatives is that the conflicts that led to them are not always based on religion, but have an underlying layer of other complications. For example, with climate change worsening, conditions for Nigerian farmers and herders in the northeast have become dire. These herders then search for better resources which happen to be located in the Middle Belt region. When some of these herders, most happening to be Muslim, start resource-based conflicts between farmers, most happening to be Christian, the situation takes a religious connotation despite fighting over land resources.<sup>11</sup> Although the country team considers enhanced dialogue between the two religions to be properly implemented by the state,<sup>12</sup> with the situation worsening today, more than “inter-religious dialogues” needs to be pushed for.

Providence, an Institute on Religion and Democracy, described the Fulani jihadis attacks as follows: “And the story is also nearly always the same: heavily armed jihadis suddenly appear in the dead of night. They attack house after house, breaking down doors, shouting *Allahu akbar*. They shoot the elderly and able-bodied men. They rape, mutilate, and murder women. They kidnap young boys and girls. They torch houses, schools, and churches.”<sup>13</sup>

This is more than “religious disputes” or a “resource-based conflict;” this is terror against innocent people whose lives are taken and destroyed.

### ***Thousands Perish***

Boko Haram and Fulani jihadis are the two terrorist groups in Nigeria that the rest of the world is watching closely. The International Committee on Nigeria collected data that Boko Haram has killed around 35,000 in the past five years and Fulani jihadis have killed 17,000 in the past ten years. Although these numbers can be skewed due to the displacement of people and the aftermaths of these horrifying events, this speaks even louder as to why the international community needs to act fast.

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<sup>11</sup> See the UPR 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – UNCT Nigeria inputs to UN Compilation Report

<sup>12</sup> UN Document A/HRC/WG.6/31/NGA/2

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, Lela, International Religious Freedom at Family Research Council, Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom, and Facebook. “Is the World Ignoring a Christian Genocide in Nigeria?,” April 20, 2020. <https://providencemag.com/2020/04/world-ignoring-christian-genocide-nigeria/>.

According to the United Nations, Boko Haram's frequent attacks in northeast Nigeria have totaled to around \$9 billion in infrastructure destruction.<sup>14</sup> Further, according to a study in 2014-2015 by the Nigerian government, the agricultural sector lost \$3.7 billion due to Boko Haram's insurgencies.

## Local NGOs

Ever since 2009 when Boko Haram began violent demonstrations against the state, humanitarian NGOs have fled to the northeast of Nigeria to help. With the Nigerian military also flocking to the northeast to contain the violence, conflicts and verbal welfare have arisen by the military against NGOs. In 2019, the army closed several offices of NGOs, some who were providing food aid. The reason for shutting down these offices was because they "accused the international bod[ies] of supporting terrorists."<sup>15</sup>

This is not a new phenomenon. In December of 2018, the army "temporarily banned UNICEF operations, claiming the agency spied for Boko Haram terrorists."<sup>16</sup> However, NGOs providing humanitarian support are vital for northeastern Nigerians to have because wherever the government cannot reach, NGOs fill in for them by providing food and health aid. Many NGOs think this is the reason the government dislikes them because wherever NGOs are delivering aid highlights the failure of the government to provide humanitarian support to that region.

The reason this is so troublesome is because NGOs are indirectly sabotaging the army's strategy which has been known for using food as a weapon, threatening the population they are trying to control with starvation. NGOs pass out food to whoever needs it, regardless of if they are part of a group that is against the government or not.

Many key humanitarian groups, needed desperately by the local populations, are also facing giant odds as Boko Haram has increasingly targeted aid workers through abductions and

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<sup>14</sup> CSIS. "Conflict, Environmental Degradation, and Food Security in Northeast Nigeria." Conflict, Environmental Degradation, and Food Security in Northeast Nigeria | Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 8, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/conflict-environmental-degradation-and-food-security-northeast-nigeria>.

<sup>15</sup> Kazeem, Yomi. "Nigeria's Military Is in a Battle with Humanitarian NGOs in the Country's Troubled Northeast," September 26, 2019. <https://qz.com/africa/1716064/nigerian-army-shuts-mercy-corps-ngos-amid-boko-haram-crisis/>.

<sup>16</sup> Kazeem, Yomi. "Nigeria's Military Is in a Battle with Humanitarian NGOs in the Country's Troubled Northeast," September 26, 2019. <https://qz.com/africa/1716064/nigerian-army-shuts-mercy-corps-ngos-amid-boko-haram-crisis/>.

executions. Simply wanting to provide aid, NGOs seem to be painted as enemies of the government regardless.

## **United Nations Human Rights Council**

### ***Universal Periodic Review***

In order to ensure all UN Member States are treated equally under the United Nations, a periodic review of human rights within each state must be assessed and corresponding recommendations suggested. This is so every country can receive proposals for how they can combat human rights violations in their countries.

Nigeria's third cycle of their Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was completed in November of 2018. A thematic list of recommendations, with input from countries all over the world, was drafted for Nigeria's third cycle to accept or reject. With topics covering everything from sex trafficking to refugees displaced in the country, Nigeria has a long way to go to ensure equal human rights for all its citizens.

In regards to this report, one of the suggestions under the theme *Impunity* reads:

- “Adopt measures to fight against impunity with an increased focus on Boko Haram’s crimes” (148.164)

Similarly, under the theme *Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion*, recommendations read:

- “Continue efforts to enhance dialogue among religious and ethnic groups and promote the enjoyment of the rights of freedom of religion or belief of minority groups in all regions of Nigeria” (148.188)
- “Continue the measures to increase the freedom of religion and belief for all” (148.189)
- “Protect and guarantee religious freedom and the rights of people of faith in Nigeria” (148.187)

This shows the international community is aware of the human rights violations being committed in Nigeria in relation to religion and are coming together to help find a solution.

### ***High Commissioner for Human Rights***

For the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review for Nigeria, a letter by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, was sent to the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Geoffrey Onyeama. This letter entails advice for implementing recommendations from the third cycle of the UPR.

In relation to this report on religious violence in Nigeria, the High Commissioner for Human Rights suggests:

*“In correlation with the right to life, liberty, and security of person*

- Strengthening measures to protect civilians from Boko Haram attacks, including the abduction of children from schools.
- Intensifying efforts to rescue all women and girls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents, ensuring their rehabilitation and integration into society, and providing them and their families with access to psychosocial and other rehabilitative services.

*In correlation with fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life*

- Continuation of support for initiatives to enhance inter-religious dialogue through the facilitation of engagement between Christians and Muslims.
- Addressing the conflict between farmers and herders, which, while ostensibly is resource-based, has taken on a religious or ethnic connotation.”

From this letter, we can see that these recommendations are not easy to implement and serious measures must be undertaken by the government of Nigeria to begin to sew these wounds that continue to be reopened without consequence.

### ***Nigeria’s National Report***

Nigeria’s National Report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in August of 2018, shows what Nigeria has implemented since the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> UN Document A/HRC/WG/6/31/NGA/1

According to this report, Nigeria has implemented the following programs as a response to the recommendations given during their second cycle of their Universal Periodic Review:

- The Countering Violent Extremism Programme (CVE), which works to stop violent extremists, has trained faith-based organizations and NGO's to stop violent extremism, carried out projects such as town hall meetings so communities could establish relationships and increase dialogue amongst one another, and helped create counter-narratives for the media, among many other projects.
- The Federal Government of Nigeria established the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) to help work towards a more peaceful Nigeria. Currently, the Institute is taking initiatives to increase religious and cultural harmony between religions. Setting up meetings between Muslim and Christian leaders of Nigeria, the IPCR is trying to increase interfaith dialogue.
- Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) was activated by IPCR which works to strengthen infrastructure that is at the root cause for religious intolerance such as socio-economic status, or differing political and cultural outlooks.

However, under Recommendations to *strengthen measures aimed at improving security in the country*, Nigeria claims that “There is [a] 90% drop in the number of terrorism related deaths in Nigeria. More than 12,000 persons taken hostage by the insurgents including 106 abducted Chibok and the 113 Dapchi girls were freed”.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the report boldly states, “Boko Haram insurgency has been largely curtailed. Civil authorities have been established in the areas affected by the insurgency”.<sup>19</sup> However, these facts are no longer true as Boko Haram still serves as a threat.

### ***Compilation of UN Information***

A report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that Nigeria has failed to protect its people from Boko Haram. Evidence for this is supplied with multiple instances recorded where security forces were not used when civilians came under attack, as well as the emergence of local self-defense groups in response, known as vigilantes.

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<sup>18</sup> National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, Nigeria, A/HRC/WG.6/31/NGA/1

<sup>19</sup> National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, Nigeria, A/HRC/WG.6/31/NGA/1



OHCHR then pushed for independent investigations to be conducted in regards to these allegations so that civilians can be properly protected immediately.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, security forces in Nigeria need a better way to arrest and detain Boko Haram members. As of now, there is evidence that legal authorities have been taking anyone they “suspect” into custody. Ironically, some of their captives were citizens trying to escape Boko Haram.

The Special Rapporteurs on health, on sale of children, and on slavery concluded that abductions of children are part of Boko Haram’s insurgency strategy. Further, many children who survive return with no resources to help them with their trauma for fear of being looked down upon by society. As abductees, many of these children have experienced being used as human shields during military operations, becoming impregnated, raped, and/or forced to marry an insurgent, and forced to convert their religion. Many females have even dropped out of school because they are concerned about a Boko Haram insurgency.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Outcome of the Review - Report of the Working Group***

In the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in regards to Nigeria was submitted. Many positive attributions made by Nigeria’s government were highlighted in this report.<sup>22</sup> For example, since 2013 when Nigeria had their second cycle of their Universal Periodic Review, the training curriculum for the military has been altered to include modules in regards to international humanitarian law. This has helped fight against terrorism and other domestic security threats. Further, a National Policy Framework and Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism was developed. After the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping, in which nearly 300 female students were kidnapped by Boko Haram, a program was developed to make sure children could return back to school and ensure their safety.

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<sup>20</sup> UN Document A/HRC/WG.6/31/NGA/2

<sup>21</sup> The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

<sup>22</sup> UN Document A/HRC/40/7

## ***Overview***

Overall, the United Nations is very aware of the persistent threats in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram. In the third cycle of Nigeria's Universal Periodic Review, many new recommendations were added to encourage the Nigerian government to tackle this domestic threat with new programs and strategies. Many new programs introduced after the second cycle of Nigeria's UPR are working effectively to slowly curtail religious violence. As this is a problem so deeply rooted into Nigeria's history, this conflict is not something that can be solved overnight. Nonetheless, according to the various UN reports mentioned above, Nigeria's government is working tirelessly to introduce new programs and policies as first steps to eradicating religious violence. In terms of subduing Boko Haram, the government continues to imprison anyone whom they find suspicious and unfair trials without proper representation are delivered thereafter. However, new strategies for how to crush Boko Haram's violence amongst defenseless citizens are being worked on by the government. Nigeria needs to continue fighting urgently against Boko Haram as more civilians are at risk of these terrorist attacks as each day passes. Solutions need to be adopted and implemented immediately.

## **Violations of Domestic and International Law**

### ***Domestic Law***

According to the Constitution of Nigeria, enacted in 1999, the Nigerian government is to protect citizens' freedom of religion, prohibit discrimination, and never have a state religion. Although the government is trying to protect all citizens, regardless of their religious background, the strategies they are currently using are only fueling groups like Boko Haram to continue the fight. By arresting anyone they find suspicious, irrespective of evidence, this is only feeding into one of Nigeria's other struggles of maintaining prison conditions that align with human rights regulations. Further, by using tactics such as starvation over a certain population to lure Boko Haram to surrender, only local citizens are left hurt and helpless against Boko Haram's reign of terror.

In addition, the Nigerian Criminal Code states an individual will be sentenced to two years imprisonment for insulting a person's religion. This code is not being used in Nigeria in light of the attacks over the past decade. Many of the attacks by militant Fulani herdsmen against Christian farmers over resources has led to these violent occurrences creating religious turmoil.

Villages are burned, people are raped and killed, and lives are turned upside down, yet the consequences of these incidents are rarely implemented due to corruption in Nigeria's criminal justice system. The United Nations is aware of these violent conflicts and has provided suggestions for enhanced inter-religious dialogue. However, as the situation has amplified over the past few years, much more than religious dialogue is needed to combat these occurrences. Laws such as the Nigerian Criminal Code need to be properly enforced in order to begin to end religious conflict.

### ***International Law***

According to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), Nigeria is responsible for tolerating Boko Haram's violations of religious freedom. This is because many of the attacks that were reported to the government were not dealt with properly and in many cases the army was extremely late to intervene or simply did not intervene at all. By failing to intervene quickly and effectively, the government is viewed as tolerating these violent religious encounters. Further, in a recent attack in January 2020, Boko Haram attacked a United Nations facility which housed aid groups. Aid workers have become increasingly targeted which is considered a war crime under international law.<sup>23</sup>

### **Response of the Nigerian Government**

The Nigerian army has attacked and displaced many members of Boko Haram. However, these attacks are met with hostility and retaliation. Overall, with the death toll from multiple terrorist organizations on the rise, the Nigerian government has failed to respond appropriately to this ongoing crisis of violence.

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<sup>23</sup> Ewang, Anietie. "Attacks on Aid Workers in Northeastern Nigeria," June 14, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/23/attacks-aid-workers-northeastern-nigeria>.



Reuters/Afolabi Sotunde – *The Nigerian military during an operation.*

The government is taking steps towards introducing more positive actions to improve community relations. They have held interreligious seminars to help some Christians and Muslims harmonize. However, peace between the two religions is far from being attained.

In 2014, the government introduced the National Counter-terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) to increase the state's response to fight terrorism. NACTEST argues that much of the religious violence we see in Nigeria is rooted in inequality and poverty.<sup>24</sup> Again, this shows that this crisis is deeper than religion; it is embedded into the history of post-colonial Nigeria.

Also, the Legal Defense and Assistance Project (LEDAP), based in Lagos, Nigeria, stated that “...security operatives had committed grave human rights violations in their response to the Boko Haram insurgency. Innocent citizens had been arrested, tortured and unlawfully detained.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Response of the International Community**

### ***United States of America***

The United States has paid particular attention to Boko Haram and religious violence in Nigeria. When the Chibok schoolgirls received international attention, the White House sent over 80

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<sup>24</sup> Okereke, C. Nna-Emeka. "Nigeria." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 1 (2015): 100-04. Accessed June 8, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/26351329](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351329).

<sup>25</sup> Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Nigeria, A/HRC/WG.6/31/NGA/3

troops to Chad to help find them a month after the incident. America's current president, Donald Trump, met with the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to denounce the religious violence in Nigeria and announced that America is working to stop Christians from being murdered in Nigeria.

### ***Christian Solidarity International (CSI)***

In January 2020, a Christian human rights NGO based in Switzerland, issued a genocide warning in response to the religious violence in Nigeria. They believe the government could be doing more to stop the violence and that at the rate it is progressing, the international community needs to step up immediately.<sup>26</sup>



### ***Multinational Joint Task Force***

Military personnel from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, have come together to form the Multinational Joint Task Force to fight against Boko Haram together. With its headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad, in 1998 this military unit was founded to terminate the Boko Haram insurgency.<sup>27</sup> They have fractured Boko Haram on many occasions; however, due to funding disputes and different national agendas, this multinational joint task force has remained weak. Nonetheless, multilateral cooperation allows for smoother operations and adaptability from each country. By sharing strategies and intelligence, the MNJTF has been proven effective and will hopefully succeed in its mandate to end Boko Haram's insurgencies and regain territory back.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### ***Conclusion***

This religious violence dents the image of Nigeria within the international community. A major factor as to why religious violence is escalating is because of the failure of the government to

<sup>26</sup> Christian Solidarity International. "CSI Issues Genocide Warning for Christians in Nigeria." Christian Solidarity International, January 30, 2020. <https://csi-usa.org/csi-issues-genocide-warning-for-christians-in-nigeria/>.

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group. "What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram? Africa Report N°291: 7 July 2020 - Nigeria," July 7, 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram-africa-report-n-291-7>.

intervene. In a religiously pluralistic state like Nigeria, inter-religious dialogue is needed.<sup>28</sup> With Nigeria being the largest country in Africa and practically the only country in the world where both Islam and Christianity are not minority religions, Nigeria could become an example of a pluralistic nation in which most Muslims and Christians collaborate and see one another as equal.<sup>29</sup>

Nigeria is experiencing its first stabs at maintaining a democracy since its independence and the international community must help sustain this democracy and promote peace in these ever-evolving religious attacks.

As there is evidence that this is a genocide, signatories involved in the Genocide Convention of 1948 are “committed to ‘undertake to prevent’ genocide”. More action needs to be taken immediately due to the gravity of this situation. Insecurity is rampant across the country with Boko Haram attacking in the northeast and violence between nomadic Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers in the Middle Belt. With villages destroyed, schoolchildren kidnapped, and thousands killed or fleeing the country, accountability and transparency are vital if the Nigerian government wants to instill a sense of security for their civilians. Further, the Nigerian government needs to be held more accountable for their actions against NGOs and how they respond to Boko Haram and militant Fulani herdsmen attacks.

### ***GICJ position***

Boko Haram (ISWAP) and militant Fulani herdsmen have been killing defenseless civilians. We condemn the actions of these two organizations as innocent deaths due to one’s religious identity will not be tolerated. The Nigerian government needs to stop these terrorist organizations from committing more attacks and they need to build peace between Christians and Muslims in order to hold responsible the violations that can be accounted for, building security for the entire nation. Additionally, the government needs to ensure programs and policies that already exist are being implemented properly and used effectively.

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<sup>28</sup> Sulaiman, Kamal-deen Olawale. "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications and Options for Peace and Stability Order." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (2016): 85-103. Accessed June 8, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24805708](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24805708).

<sup>29</sup> Rotberg, Robert I. *Nigeria: Elections and Continuing Challenges*. Report. Council on Foreign Relations, 2007. 3-6. Accessed June 8, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05763.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05763.7).

### ***Challenges to Implementing Recommendations***

Nigeria's National Report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in August of 2018, which laid out what Nigeria has implemented since the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, included a section at the end describing challenges Nigeria will face when trying to protect human rights. These challenges included the sheer size of the country, being the most populous state in Africa, and how this increases difficulties for implementing programs and policies. Also, with the legal system and the current administration showing blatant signs of corruption, transparency and accountability fail to be upheld.

### ***Recommendations***

The Nigerian government needs to:

- Take seriously the recommendations from the third cycle of their Universal Periodic Review. These recommendations need to be upheld and implemented with transparency in order to instill a sense of trust with the public and to limit corruption.
- Increase funding in terms of security and allow for larger military operations to be conducted to assist in dissolving violent situations faster.
- Work tirelessly to increase inter-religious dialogue and understanding as well as uphold citizens' constitutional right to receive protection from the government if their freedom of religion is threatened.
- Increase efforts to end Boko Haram insurgencies and assist the victims involved. Many schoolchildren are reported to drop out of school due to fears of a Boko Haram insurgency.
- Commit itself to protecting civilians involved in these attacks as well as address all religious intolerances.
- The destruction of property, kidnapping, and the loss of innocent lives needs to end immediately.

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Independent, International Non-Government Organization



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