

Written evidence submitted by Open Doors UK & Ireland (IRN0012)

Open Doors UK & Ireland is part of an international NGO network which has for 60 years supported and strengthened persecuted Christians. We now work in over 65 countries worldwide, in close consultation with church leaders and Christians who experience first-hand the reality of the denial of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Our aim is freedom of religion to be understood as a fundamental right, covering far more than just the right to worship privately in a building, and taken seriously in policy decisions. Since 2014, we have been increasingly concerned about the situation in Nigeria; specifically, the religious dimension seen to conflict and violence. Religiously motivated violence is taking place on a mass scale, and although it is not an exclusive driver of the violence, it is undoubtedly the primary driver of the violence – and needs to be acknowledged as such by the UK government.

The extent and impact of this violence is appalling with more than 37,500 people estimated to have been killed since Boko Haram's insurgency started in 2011,¹ while at least 3641 people were killed between January 2016 and October 2018 due to Fulani militant violence (57% of them in 2018 alone).² Between October 2019 and September 2020, 5678 people were killed due to Boko Haram insurgents, Fulani militants and armed bandits.³

Every year at Open Doors we collate in depth research to compile a World Watch List which ranks the countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. As of 2021, Nigeria has re-entered the top 10, ranking number 9 on the Open Doors World Watch List for the most extreme levels of Christian persecution.

Human rights abuses such as those mentioned in this submission are significant, especially since Nigeria is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We are profoundly concerned about the worsening situation in Nigeria. There needs to be a clearer and firmer recognition from the UK of the human rights abuses taking place when considering the future of diplomatic and economic relations. Indeed, the UK has an opportunity and a responsibility to take an international lead in prioritising the violence in Nigeria. This leadership is urgently needed. Given the demography of Nigeria and its strategic location, without such a prioritisation it is becoming increasingly likely that the violence may result in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Africa. Consequently, a clear and strong promotion of human rights needs to be incorporated into the UK's integrated review involving diplomacy, trade, investment strategies which will compel action on Nigeria's international commitments and legal frameworks.

¹ <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/boko-haram-nigeria>.

² "Nigeria: The Harvest of Death - Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria", Amnesty International, December 2018. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9503/2018/en/>.

³ "WWL 2021 - Compilation of all main documents", World Watch Research, January 2021, pp. 44-47. Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WWL-2021-Compilation-of-main-documents-ODA-version.pdf>.

Nigeria has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Nigeria is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- The state is manifestly failing to protect Nigerian Christians' fundamental rights (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are murdered in indiscriminate attacks (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian women are raped, gangraped and sexually abused (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian children are forced to adhere to Islamic religious precepts in the Northern states (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Converts to Christianity suffer from discrimination and violence in the Northern states (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 26)
- Christians are accused and charged with blasphemy in Northern states (ICCPR Art. 19)

Overview of the problem

The most significant area of persecution we are seeing in Nigeria against religious minorities is violence. Violence against Christians perpetrated by Boko Haram, ISWAP and Fulani militants, as well as unidentified gunmen, has spilled over from the north and Middle Belt into the southern states. This has caused increased pressure related to a sense of insecurity and impunity.

Most violence against civilians, especially Christians, occurs in the north (including the Middle Belt) and is perpetrated by Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), Fulani militants and unidentified gunmen. They injure, rape, kill, abduct, and destroy property with impunity. They often attack the small, mainly Christian, communities spread over states such as Benue, Borno, Kaduna and Plateau. In the north, Christians also face societal discrimination as second-class citizens. Converts with a Muslim background face pressure and violence and may have to flee their homes.

Violence has increased and spilled into southern states, which heightens the sense of insecurity and level of impunity. President Buhari has increasingly positioned Muslims in the most important government roles, which makes it harder for Christians who have suffered human rights violations to speak out. President Buhari is a Fulani himself and life patron of the Fulani herders organisation, certain of whose members are engaged in criminal acts that have been referred to the Court. He has openly and publicly admitted knowledge of the atrocities, often adducing justifications for the criminals.

According to one report, Nigeria has witnessed a decade of violence which exceeds even the 30 months Biafra civil war.⁴ Within this landscape, one group is suffering disproportionately: the 95.4

million Christians in Nigeria who make up 46.3% of the population.⁵ Nigerian Christians have endured many years of extremely high levels of structural repression and discrimination. In 2012, Nigeria accounted for over 50% of global Christian deaths reported from the Open Doors World Watch List; by 2018, it had peaked to 90% of all Christian deaths worldwide⁶ and some of the attacks against them rank as being among the most serious anywhere.⁷

It is also acknowledged that Christians are not alone in facing violence in Nigeria, specifically in the North. Victims of Boko Haram attacks cut across religion and ethnic identity. However, the attacks on Christians are distinct. Nigeria's Christians – including those of the same ethnicity as the attackers – have been selected for a particularly severe form of assault, a devastation that is deliberate and is incomparable in scale and range to the crimes happening to other victims. Christian identity is critical in the selection of targets, including how captives (when taken) are selected (e.g. infidels separated, with a tendency to free Muslim captives and keep Christians).

Boko Haram/ ISWAP and bandits in the North

The Global Terrorism Index 2015 found that Boko Haram and the Islamic State in the Levant were jointly responsible for 51% of all claimed global fatalities in 2014, with Nigeria experiencing the world's largest increase in terrorist activity with 7,512 deaths in 2014, an increase of over 300% since 2013.⁸

Despite Buhari's declaration that Boko Haram was militarily defeated in 2015, they and their offshoot ISWAP are still more than capable of causing devastation in attacks – which includes abducting a significant number of Christian women and girls, causing wounds and trauma to whole communities and families and destabilizing security in Nigeria.⁹

- On April 14, 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok. More than 100 of them remain in captivity as of today. The families of the hostages hardly ever receive updates on the government's efforts to release them. Arms proliferation, impunity and Government inaction allowed the expansion of Boko Haram and increasing violence in the northwest of Nigeria, where attacks by armed bandits on villages and schools are becoming endemic.¹⁰
- Between December 2020 and March 2021 there have been at least five reported cases of abductions of schoolchildren in the north of Nigeria.¹¹

⁴ Michael Ireland, 'Decade of Tears and Blood', Assist News, 24 September 2019, at <https://www.assistnews.net/decade-of-tears-and-blood/> accessed 5 September 2020.

⁵ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nigeria-WWR-Full-Country-Dossier-March-2021.pdf> (password: freedom)

⁶ This is based on its 2012 ranking in the WWL published by ODI/WWR Unit.

⁷ See WWR List 2012 and WWR List 2019, at <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nigeria> (password: freedom), accessed 15 September 2020.

⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism', 17 November 2015, p.4.

⁹ "WWL 2021 Compilation of Pressure Points and GSRP profiles for countries ranking 1-74", World Watch Research, March 2021, pp. 17-18. Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WWL-2021-Compilation-of-74-GSRP-Profiles.pdf>.

¹⁰ <https://issafrika.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria>.

- On 11 December 2020, armed bandits abducted 300 students from a school in Kankara, Kastina state. The students were held in captivity for six nights until their release. The Government's only response to the abductions was to close about 600 schools in the region, putting the right to children's education at risk. So far, no one has been held accountable for the abductions.¹⁸

The lack of Government action is fostering impunity and encouraging further bandit attacks. A military solution to this security crisis is insufficient to address the root causes of the formation of militant groups, the spread of radical narratives and increased banditry. Comprehensive programs aimed at disseminating counter-radical narratives, addressing distrust between communities and the NSF, and aimed at targeting socio-economic factors that create discontent and disillusionment in young generations should be promoted and encouraged especially in Nigeria's northern states. In the short term, it is of utmost importance that the Nigerian Government takes all measures to ensure the safe return of children to school and ensure security in schools in northern Nigeria.

Fulani Militant Violence

Currently, violence in the Middle Belt has become one of Nigeria's most serious security challenges. Six times deadlier than Boko Haram in 2018, Fulani militant violence has displaced hundreds of thousands and intensified ethnic and religious divisions in the country.¹² The violence has complex and often disputed root causes.

- On April 20, 2021, Fulani militants attacked Greenfield University in southern Kaduna and abducted 22 students and a member of staff. Militants killed five of the abducted within a week.¹³
- On April 25, 2021, Fulani militants attacked a Sunday service of a Baptist church in Chikun Local Government Area (LGA), southern Kaduna. The militants killed one person, injured another and abducted four women.¹⁴

The Nigerian Government's inadequate response to the escalating crisis fosters impunity and heavily questions the Nigerian Security Forces (NSF) and their accountability. There are several concerning reports of wilful negligence or, at worst, complicity, by the NSF in deadly attacks against predominantly Christian farmer communities. NSF officers reportedly abandoned villagers seeking protection from Fulani militants, ignored credible warnings of imminent attacks and did not arrest known attackers.¹⁵

In February 2016, the Nigerian Government established a Human Rights Desk for the army aimed at investigating and curbing human rights violations by NSF officials. Special focus has been given

¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/nigeria-seven-years-since-chibok-the-government-fails-to-protect-children/>.

¹² Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence, International Crisis Group, July 2018. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>.

¹³ https://www.legit.ng/1414238-bandits-threaten-kill-remaining-students-abducted-from-kaduna-private-varsity.html?utm_source=direct&utm_medium=rads

¹⁴ <https://www.csw.org.uk/2021/04/26/press/5238/article.htm>

¹⁵ Amnesty International, *Ibid.*, pp., 50-57

to violations regarding the Boko Haram insurgency;¹⁶ but not to alleged violations committed by the NSF in the Middle Belt. This climate of impunity is intensified by the scale of proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the country. Fulani militants attacking farmer communities have access to military-grade weapons such as machine guns and AK-type rifles.¹⁷

Studies show that civilians possess the majority of weapons in circulation in Nigeria, and that the majority of arms in Nigeria are held illegally. The Nigerian Government's efforts to control the proliferation of SALWs do not address its root causes, failing to reduce the amount of arms in circulation and consequently the level of violence affecting the Nigerian people and the respect of their inalienable rights.¹⁸ Predominantly Christian communities complain of the Government's failure to seize Fulani militants' weapons – with the NSF often showing up only hours after a Fulani militia attack, leaving predominantly Christian communities defenceless and at the mercy of violent militants.

The combination of inadequate government response, negligence by the NSF and the proliferation of SALWs results in an extreme level of insecurity and fosters violence, which particularly affects Christian communities in the Middle Belt. Despite having ratified the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Nigerian Government is yet to transpose it into national law and take concrete measures to prevent and regulate the civilian circulation of arms to avoid arms possession by militants and criminal groups perpetrating violence.

Religious dimension to conflict

Boko Haram's specific targeting of Christians and symbols of the Christian faith can be seen in the following illustrations:

- On 6 May 2020, Boko Haram attacked Debiro, Dakwiama and Tarfa communities of Biu LGA in Borno State, burnt two EYN churches, razed down the two villages, killing Mr Audu Bata and some houses in Tarfa.¹⁹
- On 21 February 2020, Garkida community, the birthplace of the EYN movement, was attacked by Boko Haram. The first EYN Church was built here. Two other Churches Anglican and Living Faith were also burnt. The EYN Brethren College of Health Technology, EYN Rural Health Department and its vehicles, prominent Christian houses and shops were looted and burnt. Mr Emmanuel Bitrus Tarfa was abducted.²⁰
- On 2 February 2020, Boko Haram attacked Leho community of Askira/Uba LGA of Borno State again. All three EYN Churches were burnt, EYN Leho 1, Leho 2 and Leho Bakin Rijiya.²¹
- On 2 February 2020, Boko Haram attacked Michika Community of Adamawa State and abducted Rev Lawan Andimi the EYN District Church Secretary.²²

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/NigeriacreatesamilitaryHumanRightsDesk.aspx>

¹⁷ Amnesty International, *Ibid.*, pp. 50-61; 35-37

¹⁸ J. U. Yahaya, "An overview of the security implication of inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Nigeria Perspectives", pp. 18-22. Available at : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340870416_An_overview_of_the_security_implication_of_inflow_of_Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons_A_Nigeria_Perspectives.

¹⁹ 'Address', 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

- On 2 January 2020, Boko Haram kidnapped and later beheaded the EYN District Church Council leader and CAN Chairman of Minchika LGA in Adamawa State.²³
- 29 December 2019, Mandaragirau community of Biu in the LGA of Borno State was attacked. 18 Christians were abducted, the oldest was a 42-year-old woman, the youngest was a three year old child. The Church building and foodstuff were destroyed as well as the primary school.²⁴
- On Christmas Eve 2019, Boko Haram jihadists driving trucks and motorcycles stormed into Kwarangulum near the town of Chibok in Borno, firing at residents, looting all they could and burning their homes.²⁵
- On 22 December 2019, in Borno state, Boko Haram jihadists attacked two passenger buses and released the Muslim passengers. They then held back the Christians, separating the men and women. A pastor from Deeper Life Bible Church and two other men were killed on the spot, while the pastor's relative and two humanitarian workers were abducted.²⁶

Armed Fulani herdsmen are also attacking Christians, on their holy days and in their holy places as the following illustrations show:

- Attack on Christmas carolers in southern part of Kaduna State on 22 December 2017 by armed Fulani herdsmen which left 5 Christians killed and several others injured;
- Attacks on worshippers on Christmas Day 2017 by suspected Muslim Fulani Herdsmen during Christmas service in Benue State that left 3 Christians killed and others injured, and also attacks on New Year's Day that killed over 70 Christians;
- Attacks on four churches in Kwara State on New Year's Day 2018 with many injured, rapes committed and properties destroyed by local Muslims;
- The killing of two priests and 17 others during a service at St Ignatius' Church, in Mbalom, Benue State on 24 April 2018 by armed Fulani herdsmen;
- Attacks in Adamawa State on Christmas Eve (24 December 2017) by suspected Muslim Herdsmen (1 death, 4 injuries).²⁷
- 500 churches have been destroyed in Benue State since 2011, one of the States worst hit by the conflict. In Taraba State, more than 100 churches were destroyed by Fulani herders in 2014 and over 200 abandoned out of fear of further attacks. Approximately 65% of local churches in Wukari were burnt and the entire population displaced.²⁸
- The bombing of St Finbar's Catholic Church in Rayfield on 12 March 2012.²⁹
- On 31 December 2011, Boko Haram issued an ultimatum asking Christians to leave the North and go the South. By midnight, they were going from house to house to search out Christians by name for elimination.

²² Ibid.

²³ CSW, 'Boko Haram executes chair of Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa State', 21 Jan 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/21/press/4530/article.htm>, accessed 17 September 2020.

²⁴ 'Address', 15.

²⁵ Adapted from 'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief', 61, p.1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ To this point, all are extracted from USNLG, 'Consolidated Human Rights Fact-Finding Report On Killings By Herdsmen In Nigeria's Benue State In 2018: Rivers Of Blood On The River Benue', 2018, p.5.

²⁸ 'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief', 54, para 86.

²⁹ 'Nigerian Catholic church attacked in Jos', BBC News, 12 March 2012.

- The bombing of Madala church building in Suleja, Niger state, near Abuja on Christmas Day 2011.³⁰

We urge the FAC to also consider the 2019 Bishop of Truro’s Independent Review for the British Foreign Secretary on persecuted Christians globally. It highlighted Nigeria as a focus country and examined the killing of two priests and 17 others during a service at St Ignatius’ Church, Mbalom, in Nigeria’s ‘Middle Belt’ on 24 April 2018. The Bishop assessed that the evidence suggested a religious motive lay, at least in part, behind this notorious event.³¹ Additionally, Open Door’s World Watch Research Unit has a series of in-depth studies on four Nigerian states (Taraba, Benue, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa) that show very clearly how Christians have been singled out for their religion.³²

Double victimisation

Boko Haram’s abuse of women and girls is not about gender alone, it is *also* on the basis of religion. Women and girls have been targeted because of their gender *and* their religion. There exists a clear double vulnerability. Other factors contribute, such as girls receiving perceived ‘western’ education models. However, this is objectionable to Boko Haram because it associates the ‘West’ with Christianity, and ‘Western’ education with Christianity. We are therefore concerned that the FAC and FCDO must not fail to connect the two compounding vulnerability factors. Assessments of Boko Haram specifically targeting victims based on gender and perceived traditional social roles must be broadened to include religion.

- For instance, the world’s most notorious long-running mass abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls was mainly of Christian girls. The girls themselves were 90% Christian and the school was originally an American mission school.

Recommendations:

1. To prevent impunity, ensure institutional accountability and curb endemic violence in Nigeria, the International Community should:
 - Liaise and cooperate with the Nigerian Army Human Rights Desk and urge the Desk to investigate and prosecute violations from armed forces across Nigeria. Training programs on international human rights standards, including religious tolerance, should be an integral part of the mandate and work of the Desk;
 - Urge the Nigerian Government to ensure the domestication of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons into national law and ensure its full and effective implementation;

³⁰ Felix Onuah & Camillus Eboh, ‘Islamists kill dozens in Nigeria Christmas bombs’, Reuters, 25 December 2011.

³¹ Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen Bishop of Truro, ‘Bishop Of Truro’s Independent Review For The Foreign Secretary Of FCO Support For Persecuted Christians Final Report And Recommendations’, 2019.

³² The four case studies are ‘Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: The Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 - 2015)’, ‘Nigeria: Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014 – 2016)’, ‘Nigeria: Southern Kaduna and the atrocities of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen (May 2016 – September 2017)’, ‘Nigeria: Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State An Examination of the hostilities against Christians in the period January 2013 – May 2016’. An overview is contained in ‘Migration and Violent-Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram Violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria’.

- Support the Nigerian Government in establishing a system to track, collect and destroy illegal weapons; do everything in its power to disarm members of violent militant groups;
 - Work alongside the Nigerian Government to curb corruption associated with the illegal manufacturing of, trafficking in, illegal possession and use of SALWs;¹⁹
 - Urge the Nigerian government to take a strong stance against all violence, including Fulani militant violence, investigate the perpetrators, hold them accountable to the justice system and break the cycle of violence that is expanding to other areas of the country.
2. To combat militant groups like Boko Haram, its offshoot ISWAP and other similar groups and to counter radical narratives, the International Community should:
- Urge the Nigerian President to continue his efforts to liberate the hostages held by Boko Haram, including young Christian girls such as Leah Sharibu and the Chibok girls who are still held captive;
 - Urge the Nigerian President to create a position within the Government for the sole purpose of maintaining an active family liaison and an open and accessible channel of communication with the traumatized parents of the hostages;
 - Support a holistic approach to counter radical narratives in the 12 northern Sharia states, supporting and funding community-focused programs of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the region aimed at targeting the socio-economic factors that contribute the spreading of extremist ideals. Reforms to educational programs and curricula aimed at providing inclusive education focused on inter-faith and inter-religious studies should be an essential focus of such programs.
3. The International Community should integrate flexible funding opportunities into their programming to allow well-coordinated and non-partisan Faith and Community Based Organizations (FBOs/ CBOs) in Nigeria to carry out their work including providing access to food, safe drinking water and essential medical supplies, locally-appropriate psychosocial care, reconciliation and community-building projects amongst the internally displaced; and develop local peacebuilding initiatives to address the violence and its root causes.
4. To ensure the respect and protection of the right to education of Nigerian children the Nigerian Government must urgently act to restore security to schools in northern Nigeria through laying out a comprehensive plan that will ensure children's safe return to school; investigate these attacks and hold those responsible to account.

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