

THE APPG FOR INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF¹

Written Submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on 'Implementing the Integrated Review in Nigeria.' (IRN0019)

1. The biggest barrier to trade and private sector development in Nigeria is violent conflict. In order to stimulate investment, there must be peace and stability. Therefore, the UK Government's priority in Nigeria should be to collaborate with the Nigerian Government and international partners to tackle the causes of conflict in Nigeria.
2. The APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief published a report in 2020 entitled '[Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?](#)' which examined the root causes of the devastating and escalating violence in Nigeria involving farmers and herders. This violence has manifested along religious lines, as the militants are predominantly Islamist Fulani Muslims and the farmers are predominantly Christians. The violence has claimed the lives of thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. It has caused untold human and economic devastation and heightened existing ethno-religious tensions.
3. The report was based on an extensive parliamentary inquiry which took evidence over two years from individuals and organisations from Nigeria and beyond including the Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria, the UK Government, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Deputy Governor of the Nigerian Central Bank and many others. Working with these experts, the APPG developed a comprehensive set of recommendations which address the root causes of conflict. The report also outlines the steps that the UK and the international community should take to reduce the violence. These are as follows:
 - i) Develop an international consortium to conduct independent research into the violence. Donors should fund NGOs, academics, and other investigators to carry out research to improve understanding of the conflict. This is vital to developing appropriate policy responses.
 - ii) Encourage the Nigerian Government, bilaterally and multilaterally, to implement the National Livestock Transformation Plan and offer financial, technical and capacity building support to implement the plan and the recommendations of the APPG report.
 - iii) Provide financial support and capacity building training for State Governments to help them better manage resources and conflict and to implement the recommendations of the APPG report.
 - iv) Provide support for people displaced by the violence. Funding is desperately needed to provide adequate relief for the many survivors of farmer-herder violence.

¹The APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) is a group of over 130 cross-party parliamentary members who champion the right to FORB, as outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among their fellow parliamentarians, policy-makers, the media and the general public and pursue effective implementation of policy recommendations relating to this right. Established in 2012, the group benefits from the expertise of 25 human rights and faith-based stakeholder organisations.

- v) Encourage the Nigerian Government and Nigerian Parliamentarians, bilaterally and multilaterally, to actively engage with the Middle Belt. For example, there should be regular presidential visits to the region.
 - vi) Demand full investigation of cases of military complicity in violence and human rights abuses. This is key to establishing trust between communities and security forces but also to maintaining respect for human rights.
 - vii) Identify NGOs who are running effective reconciliation programmes and provide them with funding and capacity building support. Helping to scale-up programmes which have already proven to be successful can be an effective way to peace-build while lowering the risk associated with starting new initiatives.
 - viii) Provide international officials working in Nigeria with training in religious literacy and freedom of religion or belief. This training should be more than simply teaching officials about religions. It should also endow officials with a deep understanding of how religion affects politics and conflict in Nigeria and what steps they can take to promote freedom of religion or belief.
 - ix) Push for Nigeria to hold an extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to deliberate on the farmers-herders clashes in the region. The aim of this session should be to find a meaningful and durable solution to the problem by supporting accountability mechanisms to ensure suspected perpetrators are brought to justice. The UK should also encourage international actors at the African Union (AU), and United Nations (UN), to agree upon actions to address root causes of environmental degradation and desertification across the region.
 - x) Support civil society organizations to monitor and document all cases of human rights violations against the civilian population. Efforts should be made to ensure that the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission and other relevant institutions, both national and international, take appropriate steps to ensure compliance to International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law by the military while conducting internal security operations.
4. The UK Government should also cancel the planned aid cuts to Nigeria. There is currently little specific information over where cuts will fall but an FCDO internal letter obtained by Open Democracy² highlights the proposed levels of aid cuts to certain countries, including Nigeria where there is a 58% cut expected. Reducing aid at this critical time will place further pressures on overburdened communities, increase competition both within and between groups and limit peacebuilding programmes which will likely contribute to further waves of conflict.
5. According to the Institute of Development Studies' Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, the consequences of the cuts could be irreversible. Similarly, the UN Secretary

² <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/uk-government-accused-of-grotesque-betrayal-as-full-foreign-aid-cuts-revealed/>

General Antonio Guterres called the ODA cuts a “death sentence” for many of the millions of people who rely on UK aid.

6. The timing of the cuts is particularly concerning given that Islamist violence is spreading throughout Nigeria to areas such as Yoruba where there have been massacres and other atrocity crimes. The APPG has heard concerns from Nigerian communities that this escalating and spreading violence may cause Nigeria fall into civil war. Currently, the Nigerian Government is seeking more international support, even requesting, in contradiction to its previously held position, that the US move its military headquarters which oversees Africa, AFRICOM, to Nigeria from Germany.³ This demonstrates the desperate nature of the situation and that the UK should be doing more to support Nigeria, not less.
7. The UK Government should also not be afraid to challenge the Nigerian Government on issues such as claims of state and military complicity in human rights abuses. The APPG heard evidence during its inquiry from many sources about claims of military crimes against civilians and the Nigerian Government, as recently as June 6th, has imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of expression of Nigerian citizens by banning Twitter.⁴ Violations of human rights inevitably lead to more instability so if the UK wants to help alleviate conflict in Nigeria, it must use every available avenue to encourage the Nigerian Government to respect human rights.
8. In conclusion, Nigeria is a large, complex society and there are no easy answers or short-term solutions to its challenges but a committed, persistent, multi-lateral approach to reducing tensions and promoting peace is the only way for a prosperous UK-Nigeria relationship to be sustained in the long term.

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³ <https://theconversation.com/moving-us-africa-command-to-africa-will-not-solve-the-continent's-security-issues-160119>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57368535>