

June 13, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
521 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1804
United States

Dear Mr. Speaker,

As religious freedom advocates and leaders of grassroots organizations with millions of American members, we urgently appeal to you to co-sponsor House Resolution 220, sponsored by Rep. Chris Smith, which recommends redesignating Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for particularly severe religious persecution.

House Resolution 220 calls for the Secretary of State to address the egregious, systematic, and ongoing religious persecution, in Nigeria, specifically by redesignating Nigeria as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA).

Nigeria is the world's deadliest country for Christians, according to Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List. Of the 4,476 Christians killed for their faith worldwide during the reporting period, 3,100 (69 percent) were in Nigeria. FIDES, a Catholic news agency, indicated that over ten years least 145 priests had been abducted and eleven murdered.

In addition, designated terror groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province have killed thousands of Christians and Muslims who reject their dictates and suppressed the rights of women and girls. Boko Haram kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in 2014 in Chibok, Borno State, half of whom remain captive, forced them into sexual slavery and pressured them to convert to Islam. In another case, Leah Sharibu remains enslaved following a 2018 terrorist raid on her school.

Most of this slaughter, however, is carried out by militant Fulani Muslim herders, who have been allowed to target Christian villages with impunity. In its recommendation of CPC designation for Nigeria, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) concluded in its 2021 Annual Report that the Nigerian Government has "routinely failed to investigate these attacks and prosecute those responsible, demonstrating a problematic level of apathy on the part of state officials."

Christians who are violently attacked and whose land is confiscated by the militant Fulani Muslim herders, end up living in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, which are unspeakably inhumane and unfit for animals. Currently there are well over 2 million people living in such camps in the Makurdi diocese alone. The Pontifical foundation, Aid to the Church in Need, which works to help the Church in areas of high distress in Nigeria, has collected this video evidence from Makurdi of Christians living in such camps.

Authorities also enforce Islamic blasphemy laws that have resulted in recent death sentences for Sufi musician, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, and two Muslim clerics, and "religious insult" laws that led to a 24-year sentence for Nigeria's Humanist Association head, Mubarak Bala. These laws have also been accompanied by a routine grant of impunity for extrajudicial attacks against their perceived violators. In 2023, there was the unprosecuted mob killing of student Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu after she was accused of blasphemy and the unprosecuted serious death threats against the Sultan of Sokoto, Sokoto's Catholic bishop, and Rhoda Jatau, a Christian woman, all three of whom were targeted for expressing disapproval of Yakubu's murder.

On March 13, 2025 the House Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Africa held the hearing: "Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria; The Case for a CPC," with Catholic Bishop Wilfred Anagbe of the Makurdi diocese in Benue State, Nina Shea, Hudson Institute's Senior Fellow and Director of its Center for Religious Freedom, and Family Research Council's President Tony Perkins-- all testifying to the medieval-like persecution currently targeting Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.

Ms. Shea stated that "Nigeria's government has not undertaken a thorough, objective, and transparent investigation of the militant Fulani herders' organization, leadership, motives, or intent in these attacks." Yet, Shea noted, "[s]urvivor accounts, collected by churches and journalists on the ground, frequently report that their attackers spoke Fulfulde and shouted 'Allahu Akbar' or other religious sentiments as they killed, as USCIRF noted in its reports."

Following the recent congressional hearing and subsequent international scrutiny, Nigeria's President, Foreign Minister and other governmental authorities, such as the Governor of Benue, have undertaken an aggressive public affairs campaign to deny and deflect the truth about their inaction to stop the Fulani aggression against defenseless Christian farming communities occurring in several Nigerian states. Bishop Anagbe has even been personally threatened following his testimony in Congress.

We were alarmed to hear reports that between May 24-26, 2025, Fulani Muslim militants waged another massacre in Benue state, possibly in reprisal for Bishop Anagbe's speaking out about Fulani violence in his testimony before Congress. This recent attack was against the bishop's home village of Aondona, as well as its surrounding villages of Ahume, Tyolaha, and Tse-Ubiam. Reuters reports that at least "42 people were shot dead by suspected herders" in those attacks and that 32 of the villagers' bodies were recovered in Aondona and Ahume, alone. In response, the U.S. Mission in Abuja issued a statement on X strongly condemning these brutal attacks and urging Nigerian authorities to investigate and hold the responsible parties accountable. Other governments also issued similar statements. Experience shows that the Nigerian government has routinely failed to ensure such investigations and accountability on what have become relentless Fulani herder assaults on defenseless Christian farming villages.

Encouraged by the example of Bishop Wilfred Anagbe, others are also speaking out against the government's grant of impunity in the face of such atrocities. This is a critical time for Congress to act, as Nigerians in the Middle Belt area are supporting international attention.

Nigeria wields significant influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. By allowing severe religious persecution to proliferate within its borders, Nigeria is compounding already heightened regional insecurity.

We respectfully ask you to co-sponsor House Resolution 220 and urge the passage.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Sam Brownback
Co-Chair
International Religious Freedom Summit

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett
President
Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice

Nina Shea
Senior Fellow and Director
Center for Religious Freedom at Hudson
Institute

Frank Wolf
Member of Congress (VA) 1981-2015, retired

Dr. Mary Ann Glendon
Former Ambassador to the Holy See and
Chairman of the State Department Commission
on Unalienable Rights

Douglas Burton
Director
Truth Nigeria

Richard Ghazal, Esq.
Executive Director
In Defense of Christians (IDC)

Patricia Streeter
Co-leader
Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Faith J. H. McDonnell
Director of Advocacy
Katartismos Global

Mark Tooley
President
Institute on Religion and Democracy

Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
Founding President, Genocide Watch
Chair, The Alliance Against Genocide

Steven Wagner
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Solidarity with the Persecuted Church

Troy A. Miller
President & CEO
National Religious Broadcasters (NRB)

David Trimble
President
Religious Freedom Institute

Michael Arthur Vacca
Director
International Catholic Jurists Forum

Travis Weber
Vice President for Policy & Gov't Affairs
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George Weigel
Distinguished Senior Fellow and William E.
Simon Chair in Catholic Studies
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Dede Laugesen
Executive Director
Save the Persecuted Christians

Kelly (Monroe) Kullberg
General Secretary, American Association of
Evangelicals (AAE)

The Rt. Reverend Andudu Adam Elnail
Anglican Bishop of Kadugli and Nuba
Mountains, Sudan
Co-leader, Global Anglican Future Conference
(GAFCON) Suffering Church Network