

TRANSCRIPT

A JOINT WEBINAR

Nigeria Update #1

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

<https://savethepersecutedchristians.org/webinar-nigeria-update/>

Media File: Nigeria_Update_April_15.mp4

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

Dede Laugesen: Hello, everyone. Thanks for being here today for our Save the Persecuted Christians Nigeria update. This is a webinar that is going to be hosted every other Wednesday, starting today through at least June 24th. We really want to bring you trusted news about what's happening on the ground in Nigeria from a coalition of organizations that Save the Persecuted Christians leads, in partnership with the Save Nigeria Group, which is also leading a coalition of the Nigerian diaspora here in the United States and in Nigeria to bring the real news to America and the American public [00:01:00] about what's happening in Nigeria.

I'm Dede Laugesen, your host and moderator for this important conversation. I serve as the president and CEO of Save the Persecuted Christians. We are a U.S.-based nonprofit, which I helped found in 2018. Our mission is to raise awareness about the severe persecution of over 388 million Christians worldwide and to hold the perpetrators accountable for crimes against humanity. We are a strong coalition, with more than 200 civil society leaders working together to expose truth and urge action.

Over the years, I've also directed the Committee on the Present Danger China and the Sovereignty Coalition, and I had the privilege of serving as coalition director for the Donald J. Trump 2016 campaign in Colorado, where my husband, Wayne, and I still live. Together, we have six sons, four daughters-in-law, and three wonderful grandchildren, [00:02:00] with our fourth grandchild expected to arrive this summer.

In January of 2023, just before President Bola Tinubu took office, I traveled to Nigeria with a small team, including my good friend Judd Saul, who's on the call today. We went to Makurdi in Benue State and to Jos in Plateau State. We traveled with armed guards on those dangerous roads.

Dede Laugesen: Excuse me. And we witnessed firsthand the heartbreaking reality faced by so many families there. We visited massive IDP camps where thousands of

Christian families, children, and the elderly were living in the mud and the dirt under mosquito-net tents after being driven from their homes by Fulani militia and other Islamic jihadists. That experience deepened my commitment to this work, and it's why I am so grateful to be here with all of you today, along [00:03:00] with our outstanding panel of experts and advocates.

Now let me introduce you to our first guest, Doug Burton. Doug is one of the most respected voices reporting from the front lines. Please welcome award-winning conflict reporter Doug Burton. Doug is the managing editor of TruthNigeria.com, which was founded by Judd Saul's Equipping the Persecuted. He has mentored countless local journalists in north-central Nigeria, and since 2019, he has written hundreds of powerful reports for *The Epoch Times*, *Catholic News Agency*, *Providence Magazine*, and many others. His coverage has appeared on Fox Nation, CBN, and *The Washington Times*, and in June 2023, the Catholic Media Association honored him with first place for best coverage of religious liberty issues.

Before turning his focus to Nigeria's persecuted Christians, Doug spent two decades at *The Washington Times*, [00:04:00] covered the U.S. occupation in Baghdad, and reported on the fight against ISIS. He even broke the most complete story on the tragic blasphemy mob murder of Deborah Emmanuel in Sokoto in 2022. Doug, your courageous reporting and deep commitment to truth-telling mean the world to all of us. Thank you for joining us today. Please give us a breakdown of what's happened in the past two weeks, from Palm Sunday to today, in Nigeria.

Douglas Burton: We've been covering Nigeria for various publications for seven years. In the last three years, we've been reporting exclusively for Truth Nigeria. What we are seeing in Nigeria is sporadic, spectacular violence in one part of the country called the northeast, the Lake Chad area. There are spectacular attacks there that periodically kill dozens, even hundreds of people. They are caused by the [00:05:00] Boko Haram insurgency.

But across the north, there are continuous smaller attacks by so-called terrorist bandit gangs. These are terrorists, chiefly of one minority, the Fulani militia. These are Fulani ethnic militias. Beginning in the period from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, we registered the number of civilians, as well as soldiers and police, who were killed by terrorists. And we reported, up until Easter Sunday, that 185 people nationwide had been killed by these terrorists.

According to Open Doors, Nigeria is the number one country where Christians are killed. The number of deaths exceeds those in any other country in the world. [00:06:00] In the week following Easter Sunday, this last week, we reported that 133 people were killed in various attacks in eight states. It's a rampage.

Now, what we have to share now, which has just been posted on our website, is an extraordinary and heartbreaking ransom demand. Thirty-seven innocent, guiltless Christian people in Kachia County in southern Kaduna, in north-central Nigeria, were kidnapped from their church on Sunday morning, Easter Sunday, and they were marched out into the forest, where they have been tortured, where they have been whipped, already for more than ten days.

Douglas Burton: And the terrorists who are holding these people are demanding an extraordinary ransom of \$0.74 million, which has to be paid according to them very soon, or they're going to be shot. [00:07:00] They're going to be killed.

This kind of ransom demand is extraordinary, but in a sense, it's part of a continuous criminal industry of kidnapping Christians across southern Kaduna and in northern Nigeria generally. This kidnapping industry in Kaduna State itself, in southern Kaduna, we estimate, is pulling in an aggregate amount of revenue of approximately \$1.8 million per year.

The kidnapping industry is understood and acknowledged by the government. The government makes virtually no effort to end it. These Christians have been videotaped. Photos of them are on our story at TruthNigeria.com. It's heartbreaking because this kind of criminality can be remedied. Clearly [00:08:00] the killers, the criminals, who are radicalized Muslims, do believe that the government will intervene behind the scenes and pay them a stack of money.

Douglas Burton: They may not get \$0.7 million. They might be happy and settle and return these people if they get \$40,000 or \$50,000. These kinds of ransom payments are completely against the law. People can be sent to jail for paying the ransoms, but the governments at the federal and state level are believed to have paid these ransoms for years. It's part of a known industry. It's a system, and the government is very likely part of it.

This is the tragedy that is not reported by Western media. It's not understood by Western media. And as Dede knows very well, we have published 18 documented stories, which are interviews with survivors of these horrible hostage-holding camps. There are several of them. There are at least four big ones in [00:09:00] the southern, central area of Nigeria. Eighteen of these stories. And only a Christian broadcasting company, only the Christian Broadcasting Network, has interviewed our reporter. No other Nigerian media have covered our reports.

The government does its very best to suppress this information. They do not answer the calls of our reporters. So we are stuck in a media black hole. Our stories are spiked. They're ignored. They're not understood by mainstream media, which never sends reporters into the area, never sends reporters there to talk to the victims.

Douglas Burton: Although we have offered to do that, Truth Nigeria is ready to make these victims available. They can interview the people on Zoom. We can bring them to Kaduna City, where there's good network coverage. We can allow it. But the fact is that the controlled Nigerian [00:10:00] media, virtually all of whom are threatened by the government if they publish unflattering stories, and who are routinely bribed by the government, don't cover the story.

So we're stuck in a situation that may be compared to the tragic situation in Ukraine in 1932 to '34, whereby the Soviet Union was deliberately, pointedly starving millions of Ukrainian citizens to death. They were starving them because they were considered disloyal. And *The New York Times* had a prize-winning reporter in Moscow who refused to cover it because he was a friend and a stooge of the Communist regime. What we have in Nigeria today is a fourth estate that does not fulfill its role as truth-telling. That needs to change, and that is why we welcome [00:11:00] Dede Laugesen and Save the Persecuted Christians and all who are supporting this series of presentations.

Dede Laugesen: Thank you, Doug. So next up, we're going to go over to Alheri Bawa. And part of what Doug was talking about is some attacks in Kaduna that happened both — there's one in March that happened, and the officials completely tried to suppress any news of that attack being put out to Western media whatsoever. There were threats to people in town, to the people who had just experienced an attack, and many people were taken into captivity at that point.

And then just this past week, another attack happened, and the Nigerian Army came out and said that they had saved those who had been captured. And then that story collapsed, and we came to realize that that did not happen. They did not [00:12:00] rescue them. They didn't even show up until the terrorists were gone with their captives.

So, Alheri, you are from Kaduna. I had the pleasure of bringing you to Washington, D.C., in June of 2019, when many leaders of the Adara tribe, including your father, were detained by then-Governor Nasir el-Rufai, who is Fulani. And there were 20 youth also who had been detained following the death of the Adara tribe's leader. So, Alheri, you have some on-the-ground facts to share with us today. Tell us about the experience in Kaduna and what's happening in terms of suppression of these attacks and news of these attacks.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: Hello, everybody. Thanks for having me. It has been, for the past few years, a very terrible [00:13:00] time for Kaduna State, especially Kajuru Local Government. That's where I'm from. I'm from the Adara tribe in Kajuru Local Government. And the attacks we've been talking about since we started this webinar have been in Kajuru and Kachia Local Government. My tribe, the Adara tribe, spans between these two local governments. Those are our two major local governments.

So the suppression is really bad. And I have firsthand experience, since in 2019 when I met Dede, thankfully, because when my dad was locked up with the other elders, every time we spoke up about it, they would tell us to keep quiet. I personally have uncles who worked with the government at the time, who came to my house crying that the government was threatening them that they would lose their jobs if they couldn't make me keep quiet.

And it made me want to dig more, because [00:14:00] I didn't understand why my posts — I'm nobody. I don't work with the government. I'm just here. So that was when it dawned on me that they really didn't want these things to be said at all.

But I have to say that whatever it is we thought we faced during our time, on the topic of suppression of the news, it can't be compared to what we're facing now. It was bad then. It's worse now, because now you're not even allowed to give out statistics. So imagine me now: I have a family member — maybe my child, my sibling, my parent — kidnapped. I'm not allowed to come to social media to say, "Oh, my mother was kidnapped," or "My sister was kidnapped," without a government official calling me to say, "Oh no, if you put it on social media, we're not going to help those people."

And that's something I want to talk about today because it's a very serious issue. If you talk [00:15:00] about the killings, because it's not your direct family member, right — so, for example, an attack happens in Kajuru, and I go to Facebook and I post that in a particular village, an attack happened — they reach out to the victims and tell the victims that if they agree with what I wrote, they will not be helped in securing the lives and property of their village. And the government is not going to help in rescuing their loved ones in the village.

And then it puts me in a situation where I could be arrested for false news, because if I'm arrested and the victims I'm talking about come online to say, "Oh, that never happened," then what happens to me? So it has put a lot of people who usually speak out in a position where they have to be very careful.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: But then my colleague Ruben Buhari — he's a journalist, he's fearless. I think he's more fearless than all of us. So when what Doug [00:16:00] was talking about happened, where they kidnapped a number of people, it happened on a Sunday and we heard about it. But like I said, because of what I just explained, we're very careful because they're on us, especially because they've targeted us as the ones who speak out. So we're very careful in what we put out, so we don't get arrested.

So we did not talk about it or post about it, even though we knew about it on Sunday, because you have to allow the victims themselves to talk about it, and then you share it. Because if they get to them and they deny it happened, then you're put at risk. That's what happened to Audu Maikori when he was arrested years ago.

So we didn't talk about it. And then we kept waiting, because the villagers — we spoke to the village chief, the youth leader, the victims who were able to escape — they were very hurt, very angry, very ready to talk. And so we were very confident that this one wasn't going to be swept under the carpet, because the people were angry. And then we waited [00:17:00] Sunday night, Monday, and still didn't hear anything about it.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: And Ruben tried to go there himself to get people to talk directly. But soldiers stopped him and said nobody was allowed to go there. As a journalist, he's an on-the-ground journalist, so he took a bike. He has videos up on his wall — Ruben Buhari, if you check on Facebook — where he had to take a bike and sneak into the community. And he was able to ascertain for certain himself that something like that happened and was able to video a few victims talking.

And to our greatest shock, the chairman of the local government, whom the victims had told us they had given a list of those who were kidnapped, went online and went to the Government House. He and the commissioner of police then said nothing like that happened. And here is what interests me: when they [00:18:00] talk, they don't just say, "Oh, nothing happened." They say, "We are going to arrest and deal with anybody caught spreading false news."

And so it's like a double injury. You're hurt, you're not allowed to talk about it, and now you're being threatened that if you do talk about it, you're going to suffer the consequences of speaking about it. Apparently, we found out later the reason why, on Sunday and Monday, early Monday, the villagers did not talk. A few news agencies went there, but the villagers refused to talk.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: It was later, when the video of the chairman — who had promised them that if they didn't talk, the government would do something about rescuing their people — after they saw the video of him in front of the Government House with the police commissioner saying nothing like that happened, that's when the villagers got upset and realized they were being tricked. That's when they started talking and allowed people to video them, and that's when it went viral.

So immediately it went viral. And this is why they don't want it going viral, because once it went viral, the first confirmation we even had was from the police headquarters in Abuja, not Kaduna State. So imagine the cover-up: over 70 people [00:19:00] kidnapped in a small village at one time, in one night — sorry, in one day, because they were in church, three churches attacked at the same time. And imagine that it took a few days for Abuja to confirm it. Nobody in Kaduna was willing to talk about it.

And I don't know what the governor or the state government tells our politicians, tells the newspaper agencies. I'm really disappointed in our journalists who are on the ground because, as a journalist, I would think your first duty is to say the truth. Nobody is saying

tell lies or distort facts. No — say the truth about what you see. Even if you go to [00:20:00] a village and there are soldiers there and they tell you you can't access the village, that's a story on its own. Then you go out and say, "Oh, I went to this village. So-and-so was said to have happened, but the soldiers wouldn't allow me to enter." That's a story on its own. And the more people talk, the more we get the world's attention, the more people get help.

If the world had not taken notice, I'm not sure those people would have been released, because they were eventually released. And then the same thing happened in Ariko, in Kauru Local Government, on Easter Sunday, when 37 people were kidnapped in church. And then the Army brought out a statement saying they had rescued them.

Ruben Buhari again, my colleague, took it upon himself to do his research. And then he posted, because once you have your proof, you post it. But even with having your proof, you have to be constantly on your toes, because after what he posted was posted, he got [00:21:00] called by the Army, actually. And then he had to go and explain, and they were explaining. They even released a statement after the meeting they had with Ruben Buhari and some elders in the community.

So here's what they're trying to say. They're trying to say — and that's the same thing they did before — that when they said "rescued," they meant the people who were able to run away and hide. And that's ridiculous. We all know what a rescue means. So it's ridiculous that we're being told what rescue means. They are saying that when they said "rescued," they meant that if they hadn't arrived when they arrived, after the terrorists had gone, then the terrorists probably would have gone with more people, because they came and shot guns in the air. The noise may have made the terrorists not carry as many people as they wanted to carry. And then secondly, sometimes [00:22:00] when they're running away into the bush with the people, when they hear the gunshots, some people are able to run away. But there are ways to word that, not to say you rescued them. That is not a rescue. People running away from terrorists and hiding, and then when the soldiers come, they come out of hiding — that's not a rescue.

And unfortunately for them, yesterday the terrorists themselves posted on TikTok with the 37 people kidnapped, mostly women and children. There's even a baby. And they've been there, and they're threatening to start shooting them, just like Doug said.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: They're threatening to start shooting them if they don't pay the ransom. And I heard Doug calling numbers, and let's be very honest: we all don't know the numbers. We can't know the numbers because of how people [00:23:00] don't even have access to report these things.

Okay. For example, in Kauru, the councilor who stood his ground — which is very rare, to find a public official representing the people who actually stands for the people — he

actually came on TV to say that's not true, that the Army didn't rescue anybody. And then he was suspended. So imagine a public official, who is supposed to have some form of power, being suspended from work. So imagine what the rural people, who don't have anything — the only thing they have is hope in your words that, okay, the government is going to do something. So it tells you the level of suppression.

And something funny happened yesterday. So there's another village called Alile in Kauru Local Government where they too had people abducted. [00:24:00] So they released a statement yesterday with a picture that the Army had released about the kidnapped victims they said they rescued from Ariko. And then the community came out with a statement and with a picture saying, "These people you put as the people you rescued from Ariko are actually the people from our own Alile who were kidnapped." So imagine the cover-up.

Dede Laugesen: Are the people from Alile returned, or are they still in captivity? And one more thing. I know because you're on the ground there and through Radi you are serving the people, the victims. Can you tell us a little bit about what they say life is like in these ransom camps? I call them open-air Auschwitz camps in the forests of Kaduna. So tell us a little bit about their experience [00:25:00] in these ransom camps.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: I think the seven people they said they rescued were not from Ariko, they were from Alile. I didn't even know there was an attack in Alile until the people came out to say, "Oh, the pictures you are posting of the people you rescued in Ariko are actually the people from our own Alile who were kidnapped." I think they said the seven people had paid ransom to get back from the kidnappers.

So the cover-up from the Army, from the government, has been so disheartening, to say the least. And yes, we deal directly with the victims, especially when they come out. Officially, when you're not allowed to pay ransom, the government actually threatens families sometimes that if you pay the ransom, you'll get arrested. So ransom is not something that you openly — although it's so bad now that people actually come out to request money because they're already at [00:26:00] rock bottom. So it doesn't matter to them. They're not afraid of the threat anymore.

And the camps are really terrible. Just yesterday — yesterday I had to go to Maban to see three people who were released after almost four months. One, two, three, four, five of them were kidnapped from a house in Agunu, all from the same house, and they requested a ransom for all five of them. The family paid a ransom. Before then, the family had been attacked. This was the third attack on the same family. So they had sold everything they had prior to this one, and they were just trying to build their lives back together.

And so they paid the ransom, and then they released one pregnant woman. They paid a second ransom. Nobody was released. They paid a third ransom before these three were released. I went to see them yesterday. The other girl couldn't talk. Luckily they weren't pregnant, because normally they come back pregnant. So the girls say they're raped by different men almost every single [00:27:00] day. Every time the men have an urge, they pick a girl. They rape the girl consistently every day.

The men are raped too, actually. Men are raped too. And then there are times where they allow the sun to get really hot, and then they make them lie down and look straight into the sun for as long as they want. And you know how damaging that is. And if you don't leave your eyes open, they beat you so badly. They keep beating you. You have to keep looking at the sun or they make the men remove their pants and then make them — you know, most times the terrain in my local government is rocky. So they look for a rock and wait until the sun is really hot.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: And then, you know, the rock is really hot, and then they make you undress, and then they make you sit on it. And if you move from it, you get beaten. There was one who told us how they gathered young kids less than ten and made them lie down and [00:28:00] spread their legs and then undressed them. And then they keep hitting their private parts. They just keep hitting them until the pain begins to get so much that they pass out.

And then there are stories — well, not stories, witnesses. Victims tell us how a father, when they realize, "Oh, you're in the camp with your two daughters," so they make you watch while your daughters are being raped, while your wife is being raped.

And right now, one of the girls that came yesterday is so traumatized. Today, after this webinar, I have to go see her with a trauma specialist because she's just in bad shape because of how she was raped consistently every day for almost four months. She's a nursing student in Zaria. Her mates graduated while she was in the bush. And they've sold everything. They've borrowed. They're up to their necks in debt. They don't even know what to do. So mentally they're just not in a good headspace.

Alheri Bawa Magaji: This morning someone called me [00:29:00] and said his four kids and his wife are in the bush with the kidnappers. And so one of the men that came back — yes, two days ago — that I went to see yesterday brought a message from the kidnappers that if he doesn't bring 5 million naira, they will start killing his kids. His wife and four kids.

That's why I say we don't really know the numbers. The numbers are way more than we think they are because these things happen on a daily basis. But who do the villagers complain to? There's really nobody to complain to. Even the ones that get out, we who are in town are not even allowed to speak about it.

And it's very strange for me because even during a time that things were bad, the government then — Samuel Aruwan — would still come out and list names of victims, list where attacks happened. Then we were so upset that they were calling names and not doing anything about it. We felt they were just making announcements. Well, now it's worse because you're not even allowed to make the announcement. So [00:30:00] just imagine the trauma people are feeling: to have a family member, and then the family member is either killed or kidnapped, and the government is telling you, "Oh, they don't exist." You're not allowed to say they exist.

[00:30:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Everything that you have told us today is so incredibly horrible. I really think that the American people don't have this knowledge — that literally thousands upon thousands of Nigerian Christians are right now being held captive in these conditions that you're talking about. And now, especially after President Trump has designated Nigeria as a country of particular concern since October 31st, the government is strategically and intentionally suppressing information about attacks and confusing the situation.

I want to [00:31:00] go over now to Judd Saul. He's my good friend, one of my favorite people in this movement, a true friend and boots-on-the-ground hero. Judd is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, entrepreneur, missionary, and the founder of Equipping the Persecuted. Back in 2011, on a mission trip with his wife, Sherry, and their five children, this mission trip changed their lives forever. Since then, he's been returning to Nigeria three to four times a year over the past decade, working hand in hand with local pastors and missionaries to provide early alerts, prevention, and rapid response for persecuted Christian communities. He's on the ground there.

I have visited the school that Judd built just outside of Abuja. I have seen the work that he is doing, and Save the Persecuted Christians is so grateful [00:32:00] to partner with Judd and his amazing team. He's not just talking about the crisis — he's living the solution every single day. He's on the ground, and unlike so many other Christian ministries and organizations that left Nigeria during COVID and have not come back, Judd is there on the ground.

Judd, it's so good to be with you. You and I have worked together arm in arm trying to bring these facts to the U.S. administration, both to the Trump administration and Principal Adviser Mark Walker at the State Department, and to members of Congress, with Representative Chris Smith, who is the true champion for Nigeria, and Representative Riley Moore, whom President Trump has essentially assigned the task of gathering the facts and seeing what we can do. So [00:33:00] Judd, how do you see it going? We know that the Nigerian government has hired several lobbyist firms, including DCI, for \$9 million, and groups like ours are smaller groups. We don't have the kind of access that the lobbyists have. Let's talk about your recommendations and what

you see about what's going on on the ground, and specifically respond as well to Alheri's statements about local officials and their suppression of these stories.

[00:33:41] **Judd Saul:** Wow. A lot of stuff to cover in a short amount of time. First, I will address what's going on in Kaduna, and also just in the Middle Belt of Nigeria in regard to kidnappings. The fact of the matter is that there is total government complicity in what's going on. As [00:34:00] you brought up before, the government said they rescued 30 hostages when that really never happened. And what that did was it gave the kidnappers more time to take the victims into the Rijana Forest, where the kidnapped victims are being held.

This is actually a pattern. This isn't new. This is, I believe, the third time where kidnaps happen and local government officials jump in and say the kidnapping never happened, nothing to worry about. They even put out a news story when they find out the kidnapping actually did happen, giving more time for the kidnappers to take the victims into the forest.

We've been investigating this issue for a long time, and based on what we found out, the government officials know where the [00:35:00] hostages are. The government officials know where the hostage camps are located. We know where the hostage camps are located. We can give [00:35:00] you some geo-coordinates of where those hostage camps are located. The problem is that no government entity has the willpower to save these victims.

Going back to the Easter attacks and all the attacks that have happened in the past two weeks — three weeks before Easter, I came out publicly because we had intelligence on the ground that they were going to attack Bokkos, they were going to attack Barkin Ladi, they were going to attack Riyom in Plateau, they were going to attack in Benue, they were going to attack in Nasarawa, and they were going to attack in Kaduna. And I named the specific locations where they were going to attack.

How did we find this out? We've developed a great network of sources and people on the ground who are trained: when they see something, they say something, they report it back to us. And that has given us the ability to accurately predict over 160 [00:36:00] terror attacks with 93% accuracy in the last two years. And every time we put out a terror alert, the Nigerian government is notified, local officials are notified, and we notify local villagers. When we get word of these attacks, in every single case except for one out of 160, the Nigerian government did nothing to intervene, and in many of those situations took proactive steps to protect the Fulani ethnic militia and let them go around killing Christians unimpeded.

So to say that the government is inept — that's not the case. It is total government complicity. And that's what we're seeing on the ground. [00:37:00] We've been warning

about this. We've been trying to get word out about this. We have friendly people, as you said, Mark Walker within the State Department. There are people that are listening to what we're saying, and we're praying and hoping for more real action from the United States government in dealing with the persecution of Christians in Nigeria.

The military, the intelligence community — they're only focused on ISIS right now. And that's the terrorist group that both Boko Haram and the Fulani hate. No one likes the ISIS terrorist element in Nigeria. So when Trump says, and the government says, "Oh, we're going to fight terrorists in Nigeria," they're only focused on one group, and that's the ISIS element, which is from the local tribe. But no one is focused on the Fulani ethnic militia, and very little work is being done to deal with Boko Haram. So [00:38:00] we need to continue to get our intelligence community, the military community, and the Trump administration to say: if you really care about persecuted Christians, we need to be looking at the Fulani situation.

We've gotten a long way, more than we've ever had before. They've designated Nigeria a country of particular concern. There's legislation that's been submitted — I believe it's called the Nigeria Accountability Act — which we need our congressmen and senators to actually pass, which will give funding and put more pressure on the Nigerian government to help our persecuted brothers and sisters.

[00:38:42] **Dede Laugesen:** Last but not least, certainly, I want to introduce our speaker Stephen Osemwegie. He is a new, dynamic coalition partner and rising leader. Stephen is the president and founder of Save Nigeria Group USA, which is a U.S. nonprofit [00:39:00] that has been standing up for several years now, uniting Nigerian civil-society leaders on both sides of the ocean to end the genocide against Christians. Under his leadership, they champion education, human rights, religious freedom, health care, and real democratic reform.

He was born in Benin City in Edo State. Stephen is a devoted Christian, a successful entrepreneur, a former Labor Party gubernatorial aspirant in Edo State, and the visionary behind a new direction for Nigeria. He holds degrees from the University of Nigeria and Southwest Minnesota State University. He's currently pursuing his PhD at Columbia International University, and he and his wife, Dr. Chioma, are raising three beautiful children. Stephen lives here in the United States.

Stephen, your passion for justice, transparency, and a better Nigeria is truly inspiring, and we're so thankful you're here with us today. Can you tell us a little bit about [00:40:00] the missing piece you've seen in the Nigerian diaspora and how to bring them all together, and also tell our audience about what we have planned for June?

[00:40:13] **Stephen Osemwegie:** Thank you so much, Dede. I'm very excited to be here. Greetings to everybody. Like she did introduce, I am a Nigerian citizen living here

in Minnesota. Save Nigeria Group is just one of many organizations that are focused on bringing the truth to the United States, because as we heard from our sister in Kaduna, many of the truths of what's happening do not get across because of the media censorship. So I'm very glad to be here on this first edition of this program.

One of the things I wanted to touch on is this: for those in the United States, you must be wondering, why does this matter to us here in America? What is happening far away in Nigeria? I'll just give you some quick information. Nigeria is the largest population in Africa. Up to 240 million [00:41:00] people call it home. And Nigeria is also the largest oil producer in Africa and a member of OPEC. I'm sure with what's going on with oil right now, you will realize that such a major producer — up to 2 million barrels per day in the OPEC quota — is important for the world.

And why the crisis in Nigeria matters to the United States and to the global community is that when ISIS was displaced in Syria, they moved their headquarters to Nigeria. And the attack against ISIS on Christmas Day 2025 is not by accident. The real truth is that Nigeria cannot be allowed to fall and become a caliphate. There are many major terrorist groups operational in Nigeria. Most of them you may have heard of — Boko Haram, ISIS — but there are many more.

Stephen Osemwegie: As a matter of fact, the way countries hear about new businesses and branches launching, that is how terror groups launch in Nigeria. [00:42:00] Every week there's a new group. It is rampaging across the Sahel, across several countries in the West African subregion. But more importantly, the front line is now the middle of Nigeria, called the Middle Belt: Plateau State, southern Kaduna, Kwara, and Kogi State.

I am from the south. The majority of the southern part of Nigeria are Christians of all stripes. I'm from the Pentecostal tradition, but we have Catholics and all sorts of Christian groups in their millions. At least 150 million Christians are in the southern part of Nigeria, and what is happening is putting their lives in danger. And not just Christians are being impacted — there is also a huge number of moderate Muslims who disagree with the terrorists who are also being slaughtered.

What is the reason why this is happening? It is because the terrorists want to create a caliphate. I'm [00:43:00] sure you remember the dislodged ISIS caliphate in Syria. Well, they plan to create that in West Africa. And if that is allowed to continue, it can threaten the security of these United States and the wider Western world. So that is why what is happening in Nigeria should matter to you.

And just to touch on what Judd Saul, our brother from Equipping the Persecuted, mentioned, there is currently a bill introduced by Congressman Chris Smith and Riley

Moore, and it's called the Nigerian Religious Freedom and Accountability Act of 2026, bill 5747, something like that.

Stephen Osemwegie: We want you to call your Congress members to cosign this bill. And the reason why we say that is because when this bill is passed, it calls for sanctioning the sponsors of the terror groups.

Just one quick point of information: in the last one month, Nigeria has lost generals, brigadier generals, and corporals. So many soldiers have been killed, particularly in Adamawa and Borno State, [00:44:00] where Boko Haram is very active. They use weaponry such as drones, RPGs, and very sophisticated arms, and sponsors are funneling weapons to these groups to attack the Nigerian military that is even willing to fight, not to talk about the local suppression of the truth.

We are seeing a coordinated international effort to take over the largest, most populous country in Africa. That is why it's important for all of us to be part of what is happening and learn about it, including seeking information from places like TruthNigeria.com, which is a great organization by Judd Saul and Doug Burton, who are bringing out the truth about what is happening. When I was listening to our sister from Kaduna, it broke my heart just hearing about the rape and the carnage that is going on unreported.

And one of the things we want to do as an organization, which is now broadening into a coalition, thankfully, is to come to Washington, [00:45:00] D.C., on Saturday, June 20th. We want to bring out the Nigerian diaspora, Christian and faith leaders, civil-society groups, everyone that is concerned about the rise of radical Islam against the global Western world or the global community. I think Saturday, June 20th, in Washington, D.C., at Lafayette Park, we will be gathering there, and we are calling this rally the Save Nigeria Rally.

And we broaden it to say "Save Nigeria" because when we try to end the persecution and genocide against Christians, many other groups will be saved as well. Because what is happening, even though the Christians are the prime target, the terrorists say that they want people to convert, pay a fine, or die. Those are the three options you have if you're a Christian and these terrorists encounter your town or village.

And in the last Easter holidays, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, we have [00:46:00] had several attacks, including the major one that happened in Jos, where gunmen on motorbikes made their way into the city center slaughtering people, all because that was Palm Sunday, when Christians are celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So what is happening has a lot to do with religion, but beyond that there is also an effort to take land, to displace people, and create a radical Islamic caliphate from which they build a base to become a terror to the world, which is why the world must act.

So I want to invite you to do two things. Number one: mark your calendars and join us in Washington, D.C., on June 28th.

Stephen Osemwegie: It's going to be at 10 a.m. at Lafayette Park, just outside the White House. And we're going to have victims, survivors, clergy, both from Nigeria — people like Ezekiel and other faith leaders, including Bishop Idahosa, the leader of one of the largest churches in the world. He plans to come, [00:47:00] and many others, including survivors and people who are currently living in camps. We're bringing a few of them to come and tell their story to the American public and make the case to President Trump, the U.S. administration, Congress, and the American public that we need help to solve this crisis of radical Islamic terror in Nigeria.

And another thing I'll quickly touch on is that there is an online petition that we are inviting you all to sign. Why do we want you to sign a petition? You've signed several. Well, this one is important because we believe that if we can get a million signatures, we can write a letter as an organization directly to President Trump at the White House, accompanied by a million signatures from concerned citizens here in the United States and across the world, that we need to see this issue as important as the crisis that is happening out there in Iran.

We appreciate the fact that the United States is taking the fight to the terrorists and pushing back at [00:48:00] attacks on religious liberty across the world, but Nigeria is the epicenter — which is the title of a book written by one of our friends, Mike Arnold — about Nigeria being key to the global jihadist takeover, which we see rearing its head in Texas, in my home state of Minnesota, and across America. They are beginning to come in with this very quiet move to take over societies.

Stephen Osemwegie: Nigeria introduced Sharia law in 2001. It was all fine and dandy at the time, but looking back, 12 states in Nigeria now have very strict Sharia law for everyone in the state, even if you're not Muslim. And they want to bring that to the United States. So what is happening in Nigeria is a foreshadowing of what could happen here if we do not act.

So come on June 20th, Saturday, in Washington, D.C., and we look forward to engaging with civil-society organizations, churches, and everyone, including moderate Muslims, who want to condemn the terror attacks. [00:49:00] Because at the end of the day, what we are looking for is the right for everyone to worship in peace and safety, and for the 11 million displaced in Nigeria and across northern Cameroon and neighboring countries to be able to go back home and live in peace.

So thank you for this webinar. We look forward to coming back and giving you more updates as we get closer to the events coming up on June 28th in D.C. Thanks for having me. Save Nigeria Group and the U.S. coalition are open for more partnership,

and we look forward to engaging and finding solutions to the crisis that we face today. Very grateful for the opportunity to be here.

[00:49:51] **Dede Laugesen:** Thank you so much, Stephen, and it's great to be working with you. It's always so encouraging when fresh, vibrant young people get involved in religious-freedom issues, and especially when they're speaking for their people back in Nigeria. [00:50:00] I'm seeing now, after working on this since 2018, a real momentum pushing forward. And it's so refreshing to see, after knowing about this death and destruction and people in captivity for so long.

In fact, next month we'll be talking about Leah Sharibu, a 14-year-old who was taken from Dapchi in 2018, and she is still held by Boko Haram. And so it'll be the day before her birthday, and we'll have Dr. Gloria Puldu with the Leah Foundation as our special guest. And that's in May, on May 13th, when we have that episode. So I invite you all to join us.

We have two questions in the chat. And so I'm going to go to Doug for the question from Allison. She [00:51:00] says, "Is the Nigerian government aligned with the Muslims, or is it about money? Why is the Nigerian government not working to end the terror?" Doug.

[00:51:12] **Douglas Burton:** Good question. The answer is both. The Nigerian government is complex. In some states, the federal government is collaborative with the terrorists in a subtle way. For example, the Nigerian Army refuses to send troops to assist with the remediation of attacks, with the idea that they will not offend their Fulani tribal allies who are in the government. There are many Fulani people who are part of the cabinet itself. They are cabinet ministers. For example, the national security adviser is Nuhu Ribadu, who is a prominent Fulani. He's a former police chief. The minister of state for defense, Mr. [00:52:00] Matawalle, is a very prominent Fulani man, ex-governor of Zamfara State.

There is a tremendous amount of money, huge rivers of money, that accrue to being in government, and all Nigerians know this. Simply being in government at any level means wealth is coming to you. If you're just a county chairman, you automatically have access to secret budgets. You're a wealthy man automatically. Once you're at the governor's level, you're a multimillionaire. You're on your way to being one of the wealthiest people in Nigeria.

There is a secret slush fund that all governors have. It's called security votes. Now, what does that mean? It means that the federal government makes available to each governor a very large amount of money to tamp down, supposedly, on violence, terrorism, crime, etc. But [00:53:00] nobody knows what the amount of money is. These are secret accounts. They're called security votes. And the governors can use them to buy trucks, luxury vehicles. They can steal the money. Nobody knows how much money

they have or how they spend the money. They can use this money to make amnesty agreements with bandit gangs. They can use it to pay very large ransoms to terrorist bandit gangs.

This is extremely consequential. The Nigerian government is one of the least transparent governments in Africa. And it is the wealthiest nation in Africa.

[00:53:37] **Dede Laugesen:** And many in the government just recently called the terrorists “our brothers, our prodigal sons.” And that has certainly set off a firestorm.

Nina Shea asked: “Is the U.S. government supporting security experts [00:54:00] to give self-defense training and tools to a network of Nigerian Christians?” And I know, Judd, that this is something that Equipping the Persecuted certainly has been doing.

Nina also asks: “As for the efforts to get the Nigerian diaspora to the June 20th rally, is there a strategy for the rally?” Certainly we have a strategy for the rally. Nina wanted to let you know about that. But Judd, over to you on the U.S. government and security training.

[00:54:23] **Judd Saul:** The answer is no. There has been no effort from the U.S. government on the ground to train and work with local security forces. The U.S. government has only essentially partnered with the Nigerian government and the Nigerian military up north to fight ISIS. Zero resources have gone into the Middle Belt. According to the U.S. military, military intelligence, and the CIA, nothing’s [00:55:00] happening in the Middle Belt. No point looking at it. And we’re trying to get the Trump administration to actually put out an operating directive from the CIA to tell their agents to start collecting intelligence on the Middle Belt. Right now there is none of that going on. There is no focus on the Middle Belt of Nigeria. So the U.S. government coming in — it’s only working with the Nigerian military up north to fight ISIS. And as an organization, we’ve been taking it upon ourselves to train and work with local village security teams exclusively in Nigeria.

[00:55:30] **Dede Laugesen:** They have open borders, essentially, and they’ve been inviting Fulani from across the Sahel to come and settle in Nigeria. We often hear that there’s this farmer-herder clash going on, and we see that there’s a lot of equivocation happening, in which the people who are attacked — the subsistence farmers, who are mostly Christian in the [00:56:00] Middle Belt, and who have been living there for hundreds of years — are being displaced by violent Fulani ethnic militias that are overtaking their communities and villages. And they start this displacement with the kidnapping-for-ransom campaigns, softening up the community, getting people to flee, and then they start the violent attacks.

But for some reason, the Trump administration is completely missing what’s happening in the Middle Belt and confusing the issue, saying Muslims and Christians are both

impacted, that it's not religious-based violence, even though it is multiple terror groups acting in jihad to establish their own caliphates across Nigeria and literally to conquer Nigeria and make it an Islamic republic. Very, very frightening [00:57:00] times in Nigeria today.

I want to thank all of my guests, and especially all of you, for joining us today. Thank you for being with us here. We will be back again in two weeks' time on April 29th. And then we will be here on May 13th. It's the May 13th episode where Dr. Gloria Puldu with the Leah Foundation will join us. So, Stephen, I see you have your hand up. You have one more thing to say, and then we'll say goodbye to everybody. Go ahead, Stephen.

[00:57:34] **Stephen Osemwegie:** Yes. Thank you very much, Dede. I wanted to respond to our beloved sister Nina Shea's question around how are we galvanizing the Nigerian diaspora for the June rally. And in her question, she mentioned that if you don't rise up to hundreds of thousands, you don't get as much attention in Washington, D.C. I'm [00:58:00] responding to appeal to everyone on the call. We have very limited resources as a new coalition and an organization. We want everyone to please buy into this rally and help us spread the word. And if we had all the funding, we'd hire PR companies to help us create awareness. But because we are doing more like mission work — it's God's work, we are on the side of truth — we don't have the lobbying money.

We can only use friends like you on the call. We are reaching out to all Nigerian groups, but beyond just the Nigerian Christian groups, those who want to push back at radical Islamic terror and terrorism globally. That is an event they want to attend. So please help us spread the word: June 20th, 10 a.m., Lafayette Park.

[00:58:41] **Dede Laugesen:** And thank you, Stephen, for that, because it's important for Americans to understand that even the Nigerian diaspora here in the United States generally have family back in Nigeria. [00:59:00] And like Alheri was describing, the pressure on Nigerians to be quiet, to be mum, to be silent about the violence happening to Christians in Nigeria is excessive, it is very strong, and people's lives are at risk. They're targeted and they're in danger.

So the Nigerian diaspora is very slow to stand up and be active on these issues, because they have friends and family at home who are in danger. And so it rests on us, American Christians who know about what's happening in Nigeria, to come and stand with the Nigerian diaspora — those who are brave enough to come out and speak — and really to show up in droves. Thousands upon thousands of us Christians showing up in front of the White House on [01:00:00] June 20th would make all the difference. It would show President Trump that there is public momentum behind this, and it would strengthen the efforts of the U.S. government to address Nigeria.

Nigerian government officials don't want any attention shown toward the Fulani ethnic militia, and they won't allow the U.S. government even to look there. The U.S. government just stripped the visa of the leader of the Miyetti Allah cattle group, which is the Fulani group. And we're hopeful that a conviction — that he's actually been financing these attacks — would enable the Fulani ethnic militia to be designated as a terrorist group.

So there's work to be done, but we need American Christians — black, white, every color, [01:01:00] every stripe — to join with Nigerian Christians who truly are not able to speak the way that we are able to speak, to stand in solidarity with them. Thanks for being here today. We'll see you on April 29th, and we look forward to another great discussion.