

# TRANSCRIPT

## Nigeria Update Episode 3 **The Warfare on Women** *Remembering Deborah Emmanuel and Leah Sharibu*

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[00:00:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Hello, everyone. Welcome, and thanks for being here. I am Dede Laugesen, your host.

Today we remember the victims of Nigeria's warfare on women: Deborah Emmanuel. Oleg, please bring up the picture of Deborah, also known as Deborah Yakubu or Deborah Samuel. Her name is Deborah Emmanuel.

Deborah was a 22-year-old Christian student at Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto, Nigeria. Four years ago yesterday, on May 12, 2022, she was accused of blasphemy by her fellow students for thanking Jesus for helping her with her exams in an online study group. She was dragged from a security post by a mob [00:01:00] of fellow students, beaten, stoned to death, and her body burned as they called what she had said blasphemy. No one was prosecuted for her death. Her murder highlights the deadly enforcement of blasphemy accusations against Christians. No one has ever been prosecuted for this crime, witnessed by hundreds. Deborah was martyred for loving Jesus. She is truly a red martyr.

Leah Sharibu was 14 years old when she was abducted, along with over a hundred classmates, from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, on February 19, 2018, by ISWAP, a Boko Haram faction affiliated with ISIS.

[00:01:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Most girls were released within a month, but Leah remains in captivity, the only one held because the terrorists said she refused to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam. Her courage has made [00:02:00] her a global symbol of resilience and a living witness to Christ, a living martyr, a white martyr. Her 23rd birthday is May 14, tomorrow.

This webinar will explore the ongoing crisis, honor these victims, and discuss pathways for advocacy, accountability, and support for persecuted communities in Nigeria. Stephen and I are your hosts. We are joined by Leah Foundation President Dr. Gloria Samdi Puldu, USCIRF Commissioner Maureen Ferguson, former NSC adviser on international religious freedom Sarah Makin, and Truth Nigeria editor Doug Burton.

Before we go to our first guest, I want to set the stage with a short video clip of Lawrence Zongo, a Truth Nigeria reporter, interviewing with CBN just two days ago. He's telling the story about an attack in which we [00:03:00] now know three pregnant women were murdered and a three-year-old child was macheted.

[00:03:00] **Media clip:** Nigeria's Lawrence Zongo is here with dire and urgent breaking news from Nigeria. My friend, what can you tell us?

[00:03:00] **Lawrence Zongo:** Saturday, May 10 of this month, Fulani ethnic militias invaded one of our communities called Zongo District. This district shares a border with another district called Miango District. They killed Christians, and among those killed we have two pregnant women. We also have one pregnant woman in the hospital because ten people survived bullet wounds, gunshots, and machete cuts. Children were among those killed. We buried a three-year-old [00:04:00] boy who was killed too.

And this very community has continued to face these attacks for a long time. This is 25 years of ongoing killings by these ethnic militias, at least in my own district and the chiefdom entirely. Over 2,000 Christians have been killed since 2016, when these attacks intensified. And the attacks or the killings are not just going on in Bassa County. That's my county, where I came from. We have attacks in the entire Plateau State and the Middle Belt. This attack is still going on by the Fulani ethnic militias.

These are an ethnic tribe that has a history of religious violence since 1804, under their leader who is referred to as Usman dan Fodio, who killed thousands upon thousands to forcibly convert them to Islam. And now today, the concept of what they are [00:05:00] doing is more or less political. They are using the Fulani ideology to overrun Christian communities and, after capturing them, to use that as a means of political pressure against other ethnic tribes, including the Hausa Muslims who are part of them. So the jihad is actually being carried out by the Fulani ethnic militias, targeting Christian communities and ordinary Muslims in the Middle Belt.

[00:05:00] **Dede Laugesen:** I'd like to show a couple more photos for you of ransom victims who have just come out of one of these kidnap-for-ransom camps in the forests surrounding many of these communities. There literally are thousands of women and children being held in these camps, tied to trees, tortured every day in merciless ways.

You can see from the [00:06:00] two pictures that we're sharing of these ransom victims the emptiness in their eyes, the torment that they have experienced. Alheri Bawa Magaji

was on our webinar on April 15, and she told us that in these camps, the terrorists will strip the children naked and make them sit on hot rocks to burn their genitalia. This is beyond the pale, and this is why we are here today to talk about these women and children.

It was a chilling report from CBN. In truth, Nigeria and these attacks are happening on a regular basis. I want to note that these are the only two American media outlets consistently giving us accurate reports on the genocide of Christians in Nigeria: Truth Nigeria and Christian Broadcast News, CBN. Thank you. We need more media attending to these matters.

We're [00:07:00] going to go first to Dr. Gloria Samdi Puldu, a longtime friend of mine, president of the Leah Foundation and global director of Give Her Voice. Dr. Puldu is a professor of political science and university lecturer at the University of Jos, and a passionate advocate for the sanctity of human life, women's rights, and the release of Leah Sharibu through the Leah Foundation. She champions education, empowerment, and advocacy for persecuted women and girls in Nigeria.

Our organization works closely with hers. We have sponsored Gloria multiple times in the U.S., and we look forward to having her join us in Washington, D.C., for our Save Nigeria rally at the White House on June 20.

Gloria, tell us how you are commemorating Leah's birthday tomorrow and why her story is so important. Also, give us a general overview of the statistics and facts surrounding [00:08:00] the warfare on women in Nigeria.

[00:08:00] **Dr. Gloria Samdi Puldu:** Thank you very much, Dede, my dear sister. I also want to appreciate Commissioner Maureen and Honorable Sarah, who have joined us today, and all others who have joined us and those who are online. It's quite an honor always to have you amplify our voices.

I'm currently in Nigeria, and I can tell you that the tension is palpable. You can feel it because the insecurity has increased so greatly. So we are going to mark Leah Sharibu's birthday tomorrow, because it is not a celebration, but just to mark her birthday. She will be turning 23 years old. So we will have a prayer, which we have tagged "Remember Leah Sharibu," and it will be by 5 p.m. ET, 5 p.m. Nigerian time. We would like people to join us. If you look at our website, [00:09:00] the Leah Foundation, you will be able to see it.

And I do want to say that the plight of women in Nigeria, looking at those pictures, brought so many tears to my heart. And I'm sure that every person that has seen that picture will definitely not remain the same, because those are horrible pictures. And these are even some of the better pictures that were brought up. Because if we were to show you the other pictures of what women are going through in the hands of Boko

Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militia, and all the different Islamic jihadists who have different names in Nigeria, it would be terrible.

So we want to say that the floodgates of mass abductions of women and girls, apart from their killings, started way back. In 2014, the entire world came to the awareness of what was happening to women when 276 [00:10:00] girls were abducted in Chibok. But before that time, we had a lot of communities where they would go to the schools and simply kill the people in the school. On September 29, 2013, before the Chibok girls, 42 students were killed at the College of Agriculture in Gujba in Yobe State. And then a few days later, 39 others were murdered.

Then in 2014, they started abducting them and taking them so that they would turn them into sex slaves. They force them into marriage, they force them to convert, and then they make sure they give birth so that they can continue to have more children to indoctrinate and take into that warfare. So women and girls constitute like 60% [00:11:00] of all the targeted violence. Men are killed. A few of them are kept alive so that they can bury the dead. They can also dig graves. They can do that hard work for the terrorists in the forest. But most of them are being killed, especially Christian men and moderate Muslim men that don't really believe in that. They are instantly killed. So it's not just us that are being killed, including those who are not supporting that kind of ideology. But we want to focus on women and girls, who constitute 60% of what has been happening to women in Nigeria.

So we have just talked about Deborah's case. Deborah was killed in a school, by her classmates, by her colleagues in school, in an educational environment. For me, being a professor in the university, I can imagine how horrible it is for me to imagine students to whom we are giving Western education picking stones and stoning a classmate — for what? [00:12:00] For no reason.

And then also Leah Sharibu: she is still in captivity just because she refused to renounce her Christian faith at 14 years old. Now she's going to be 23 tomorrow. Her brother is living her life now, because just this past week we celebrated his graduation from the university, because we picked him up right from eight years ago, when Leah was taken, and we tried to put him in school so that he can also come out and fight for his sister. So he has just graduated, and by the grace of God, he will start speaking even concerning his sister.

So there are a lot of things going on with women in Nigeria that are so horrible. We have Rhoda, who just posted a divorce case on Facebook. Deborah Rhoda had to stay in jail for a long time in Bauchi State. It took only the intervention of the U.S. government and other lawyers [00:13:00] who stood for her for her to be able to come out.

So we have a lot of our women who are out there and still in captivity. Let me just mention a few of the abductions. Since 2014, we have had 2,275 girls — like I said, 82 of them are still missing. Those are from Chibok. Then in 2015, we had 8,000 Christian women abducted. This can be seen in the report by Intersociety Group, where they have given us that statistic. And early this year, we had 1,800 Christian women and girls abducted in just the first 96 days of the year.

What are they doing? Open Doors has given us the list. They abduct these children, and as far as they are concerned, when they abduct these women and girls, what do they do with them? Thousands of them are kept in the forest so [00:14:00] that they can continue to produce and enslave them, kill them, sell them as slaves, even to foreign communities like Niger, Chad, and every other neighboring country.

And Open Doors gave us the list in 2016, and they recorded 3,490 Christians who have been killed just for their faith. Some of them are pregnant women whose stomachs are slit open and these children are brought out and killed. It's a horrible experience that most of the time, when we begin to speak about our plight, because of the pain, you can't even coordinate yourself to give the full figure. But I pray that one day God will give me the opportunity to say this is a bygone thing, and that when we are talking, we can talk with our hearts and with our minds calm, because I [00:15:00] am in the environment. I can imagine. You can imagine. You can help me imagine and understand exactly what we are going through.

So the sexual violence needs to stop, and the pregnant women need to be allowed to give birth to their daughters. The ones who have been abducted need to be released. So we want to appreciate President Donald Trump for designating Nigeria as a country of particular concern. But we are praying that America will help us very fast because it's a window — you know, opportunity comes on tiptoe. Now that we have this opportunity, these terrorists need to be crushed. They need to be stopped. The financiers need to be sanctioned so that we are able to have peace and our women are able to — people like Leah Sharibu are able to come back to their parents.

We know that she has four children. A young girl who escaped captivity in January this year told us she has given birth to the fourth child by different terrorists, not one single terrorist, but because they have been passing [00:16:00] her around. And that's what they do to all the girls.

So I want to take this time to say these things that are happening to women and girls are calculated. They are jihadist ideology, using women and girls as weapons of war. And we want to plead with the entire world: do not keep silent. Christian women are being demonized. The men are being killed. Entire Christian communities are being erased. We need you to step in and help us. But we are grateful for those of you who have always supported us and your organization, and Doug Burton, Truth Nigeria, and

all of you who are speaking out and pointing this out. CBN — the only Christian organizations or media that are speaking up — we want to say thank you. Keep amplifying until we have a solution to that. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

[00:16:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Thank you, Gloria. I think many people are just really reticent to believe that the horror in Nigeria, as terrible [00:17:00] as we describe it — I received a photo about a week ago that I've been struggling with, and I'm reminded of a little three-year-old boy who washed up on the shores, I believe in Greece, many years ago. And it really blew the lid off the immigrants coming from Africa trying to get into Europe because of the ISIS violence.

This is a picture of a little baby boy who had a rope put around his neck, and it wraps around him and ties to his feet behind him, and a rock is placed there.

Doug, I'm going to call on you next. We've had a long-time partnership with you at Save the Persecuted Christians, and you're an award-winning conflict reporter with experience in the Middle East during ISIS. You've seen it all. You began your advocacy in Nigeria by connecting with and mentoring brave, independent journalists on the ground in Nigeria with a program called Rural [00:18:00] Watch. And eventually another SPC coalition partner, Judd Saul, with Equipping the Persecuted, partnered with you to found Truth Nigeria.

It now is America's most credible source of up-to-date news on the genocide of Christians in Nigeria, and you can follow his work at TruthNigeria.com. Doug, your coverage of the mob murder of Deborah Emmanuel was truly award-winning. Where others covered the blasphemy, stoning, and death, you dug in. You refused to allow the victim to be wrongly named in international media reports, and I believe you restored her dignity when you gave her back her name.

Tell us about the incident that took Deborah's life and what has been done to bring her killers to justice. Also tell us about the security response on the day of the attack and in the days that followed. And finally, Deborah wasn't the only victim. Tell us about Deborah's cousin, who was on the scene that [00:19:00] day, and about Rhoda Jatau, who was held for 19 months in prison. She's the mother of five children, simply for sharing Deborah's story online. Doug, over to you.

[00:19:00] **Douglas Burton:** It's painful to talk about these tortures. It's blood-curdling. It's painful to see the photo of this infant who was strangled to death. And yet the whole reason that my boss, Judd Saul, created Truth Nigeria is so that hidden truths can be exposed, and so that the full horror of the Christian genocide can be brought into the noonday sun. And the reason is that when it is seen by a larger public, the government authorities who are supporting and are complicit with these killings and these murders that happen daily, they change their behavior.

So many genocides have happened in the history of the world. There were genocides against Jews that were not revealed during World War [00:20:00] II, but only at the end of the war, when the concentration camps were toured, did we find out about the vast extent of the terrible Holocaust. Only many years after it happened did we find out about the genocide against people in Turkey. Only when it was too late did we find out about the genocide in East Africa during 1994, when President Clinton was president. He didn't attend to it in time.

There is plenty of evidence of a vast genocide against Christian people in the Niger Basin. And the Christians are tortured on a regular basis. One of the hidden truths that we'd like to talk about today is the reason that women are the target of these attacks. Women are subjugated in Nigeria [00:21:00] and all over Africa. And that is that there is a ruling order in radical Islamic states. The ruling order insists that men must be in charge. Men must have all the positions of authority. And the bodies of women are the illustration of male authority and control. And when women's behavior is not controlled, and when it does not conform to the requirements of the male society in Muslim states, it is an affront to the honor of all the men.

One thing we've got to understand is why Deborah was targeted. Deborah really didn't commit any blasphemy. She was targeted because she was uppity, because she refused to be cowed and bullied by her male students in a public WhatsApp channel. It was a messaging medium where students were sharing information about the cooking class that they were all taking. And Deborah was [00:22:00] an outstanding student. She'd already passed the mathematics and science exams that her male students were trying to pass, and she was coaching them. But she offended them when they cautioned her and chastised her for giving credit to Jesus Christ for helping her pass their examinations. They said she should give credit to Allah and give credit to the prophet. And she said, "Don't tell me about your prophet. I don't care about your prophet." And she didn't mention the name of Muhammad. But her fellow students saw that as an indictment. They saw that as a killer statement. And they began to plot her assassination from that time.

And one of the hidden truths about the killing of Deborah Emmanuel is that it was not spontaneous. It was planned many weeks in advance. I know this because I'm the only reporter that spoke to her family members. Perhaps by luck or serendipitous fortune, I already had contact with [00:23:00] certain Protestant pastors in Sokoto before Deborah's killing. So I contacted them, and those pastors put me in touch with Deborah's relatives who personally witnessed her killing. They were in Sokoto, standing at a gate 50 yards away, while a crowd of about 100 to 150 people wanted to kill her. They tried to burn her to death. They tried to break into a guardhouse where she and her cousin — her cousin named Josephine — were taking shelter. They were in that house for close to three hours. The crowd outside tried to burn the house. They tried to

break in. It was defended by a security guard who was an employee of the college. He was unarmed. He tried to keep the people out of the locked door, and he was very severely beaten.

And by the way, the killing of Deborah was witnessed by 17 federal policemen in Sokoto. I know because I called the commissioner of police the next day. [00:24:00] He answered the telephone, and I challenged him. I said, "Why didn't you send police?" He said, "Yes, well, the police were there." And I asked him, "Were the police armed?" He said, "Oh yes, they were armed." "Well, did you make an effort to stop the killing?" He said, "Oh yes. We fired tear gas." But these guards were 100 yards away from the killing. They never came closer. They didn't approach the house, the guardhouse where Deborah and Josephine were holed up inside. They fired tear gas into the ground, and the crowd stepped away until the tear gas disappeared. Then they came right back trying to break into the house.

The police were there, and also the special security police came — it's called the DSS. Five of them came. And we happen to know through our own secret sources, because some of them were Christians and they were friends with some of our reporters, so we know, we have their testimony. They were there. They tried to get into the house and rescue Deborah, and they got beaten up by the crowd. [00:25:00] Of course, the secret police are there, like the FBI in Nigeria. They had guns. Yeah, they had rifles. And they could have used them, and they could have stopped it. They could have fired their weapons into the air. They could have stopped it. They dared not do it because they would have been prosecuted. Their careers would have been ended, or they might have been prosecuted and sent to jail if they did it.

So they didn't use their weapons. The police dared not interfere. And you know what we have to realize, Dede, is that the mood, the motivation, and the attitude toward this blasphemy killing, and hundreds of blasphemy killings like it in Nigeria that have happened and are going to happen again and again, bears a very close resemblance to mob lynchings of black people in the United States by the Ku Klux Klan. And this has to be said. I've mentioned it at press conferences at the National Capitol Visitor Center. Fact is that the way the [00:26:00] radical Muslims, the jihadists, operate is very much like the Ku Klux Klan. It's a terrorist criminal organization. It has a common religion. The Klan was fundamentalist Christian. It had an ethnic basis. The vast majority of the Ku Klux Klan were Scotch-Irish white men. The people who are part of this killer organization called the Fulani ethnic militia are of one ethnicity, and they are of one religion, radicalized Islam. And they have to stop women who step out of line. They are like nails that stick up. They have to be hammered down.

And Deborah Emmanuel was such a person. She was an uppity young woman. She was a brilliant student. She was a very beautiful young woman. Some of the jihadists

actually wanted to date her, and she rebuffed them. The main thing that made it important to kill Deborah is that she had challenged their religion. She had humiliated her fellow students [00:27:00] by saying something that offended their deeply ingrained jihadist beliefs.

So several weeks in advance, I found out a year after she was killed from her uncle that there was a plan, possibly by the Hezbollah organization in Sokoto. There was a conspiracy to separate Deborah and to stone her to death. And that's why a crowd suddenly appeared on May 12, 2022. There was a crowd of people, some of her fellow students and some who were not. They were armed with clubs, and they came to Deborah's dormitory and tried to find her. She was hiding. Finally they did find her.

Her cousin Josephine was called beforehand, and Josephine came. By the time she got to the campus, she saw there was a crowd of people beating Deborah, or trying to beat her. She was in the company of the security guard. He was trying to shield her, [00:28:00] but they were trying to hit her with clubs. And so the security guard locked her in the gatehouse. Okay. And then they were beating Josephine as well. So he locked both of these two young women in there. They were trapped.

No one came to help them. The police came after about 30 or 45 minutes. The police stood off on a hill a hundred yards away and watched. They watched Deborah being murdered. And then finally, after several attempts to burn their way in, they got the key. Somehow they got a key to the front door. They burst in. They found Josephine, the first person in the first room, and they started to beat her. They tried to strangle her to death with a chain. This is her direct testimony to me. But then they realized, because a fellow student was in the group, that it wasn't Deborah. He told the killers, "No, this is not Deborah." So they let her go. She had superficial wounds.

And then [00:29:00] in the next room they found Deborah, and they started beating her with clubs. They beat her unconscious and then burned her body. According to some accounts, she was burned to death. We don't really know. But it was horrific. It was a horrific killing. And they were very proud of it. The man who burned her showed his box of matches on a viral video that was shown. It was absolutely horrific. It was a snuff film. It's painful to watch it. It's painful that it was allowed to happen.

So this is what happened then, and this is going to happen again and again and again, just like there were hundreds — in fact, there were thousands — of lynchings over an 80-year period from the time the Ku Klux Klan first emerged in the United States in 1866. And there were three iterations of this horrible organization. And it was finally ended when the conscience of the [00:30:00] American people was finally so enraged, was so wounded, was so confronted by the actions of the Klan that in the 1950s and early 1960s the federal government, especially under the Kennedy administration, put

the full force of the Federal Bureau of Investigation into investigating, exposing, and prosecuting the Klan.

Now that has to happen in Nigeria. This happens first when the Nigerians themselves experience complete shame. We have to see this happen. The solution to the Christian genocide in Nigeria is not for the United States to intervene, although there are things the U.S. can do. The solution is for the Nigerian people themselves to throw off the subjugation of this evil ideology and to recognize the full integrity of women as well as men, [00:31:00] to see women as worthy of the same respect, the same protection, as men in their society. Now, Islam may not want to do it, but there has to be a reform in Islam.

[00:31:00] **Dede Laugesen:** I want to just say that there are a number of very uppity women on this panel today, and we uppity women are coming. For those in Nigeria who do not believe in the dignity of women, the hand that rocks the cradle is the one that rules the world. And that is truly why terrorists go after women and children. Because if they can strike the woman and the core of the family, if they can destroy that, they can send fear straight into the heart of the community and cause them to flee.

It's so important that we address the violence, the marginalization, the terror, and the burden that the women of Nigeria are bearing right now. There are thousands upon thousands upon thousands of women [00:32:00] who have been widowed, and now they are coming together, forming communities of their own so that they can live together with their fellow widows, women who have been so violated in Nigeria.

Next up, we're going to hear from our USCIRF Commissioner for International Religious Freedom, Maureen Ferguson. Maureen is a strong advocate for Nigeria, and I see her almost every time I'm in D.C. advocating for Nigeria. Maureen was appointed to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom by Speaker Mike Johnson in May of 2024. She is the founder of Sienna Consulting and is a widely published writer, speaker, and strategic adviser on cultural, political, and family issues. She serves as an adviser and board member to a number of organizations, and previously served as senior fellow with the Catholic Association and co-host of the nationally syndicated EWTN radio show.

Maureen, [00:33:00] President Trump has moved to protect Christians wherever they are being harmed, but most especially in Nigeria, where he claims there is a genocide raging. As we gather today to talk about the burden our sisters are carrying there, what do you see in America's involvement, and how does ending the violence there help advance America First policies? And just in general, tell us about your heart for the women of Nigeria.

[00:34:00] **Commissioner Maureen Ferguson:** Well, thank you, Dede. And yeah, so I'll get to your policy question. But first, let me just say on a personal level, I've been serving on this commission for about two years, and I've really pushed the commission to focus on witness testimony because there's nothing like hearing firsthand from the witnesses. And our staff on the commission has done a good job gathering witness testimony, and we've heard a lot [00:35:00] of it. And it's all heartbreaking. It's all incredibly hard to hear. I think we all have so many tears bottled up inside over the way in which people suffer.

But I would say nothing has struck a chord with me more, and been more compelling, than the story of Leah Sharibu and all of the other women like her. As you were just making the point, there is such an asymmetrical effect on women and children from this type of persecution and violence. I just want to say again, I'm so inspired by her story. I'm so inspired by her resilience, that she's been able to survive all these years in captivity. It's impossible for me to imagine giving birth in the forest under these conditions as a teenage girl, 14 at her first capture. So I pray for her daily, and for the others like her.

On a policy level, [00:36:00] at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, our main job is to make recommendations to the State Department about countries of particular concern. So that's sort of the main policy that we do, in addition to other things to raise awareness.

And to answer your question of why it's important for America to focus on international religious freedom, there's a real correlation between religious freedom and many other things: our national security, the reduction of terrorism, promoting stability and democracy around the world, and promoting human dignity and human rights in general. There's a real correlation between religious freedom and peace and economic security. So where religious freedom thrives, human beings tend to thrive, because we know that the ability to practice your faith goes to the very core of who you are as a human person. So it's very important to elevate religious freedom as a key component [00:37:00] of our foreign policy.

One of our particular recommendations has been to ask Congress to pass a ban on lobbying by those foreign countries that have been designated as countries of particular concern. And there's no more important example of that than Nigeria. Of course, the U.S. government has given all sorts of different kinds of aid to Nigeria. And once this CPC designation came from President Trump, the Nigerian government hired lobbyists in Washington, D.C. They're spending \$9 million to minimize the persecution, to put a happy face on things.

One of the examples of what they've done with that \$9 million is they brought the first lady of Nigeria to Washington. She made the rounds on Capitol Hill. She made the

rounds with various media outlets. And in one of those interviews, if you sort of read all the way down, [00:38:00] the first lady of Nigeria, when asked about the sexual violence against girls, when asked about the kidnappings, these mass abductions, said, if you can believe it — I'm not quoting her directly — something like, "Oh, some of these girls, they don't even want to be rescued. They fall in love with their captors." That's just the most jaw-dropping statement to come from the first lady of any country, let alone a country in which the sexual violence against girls and women has become routine.

We know in the north of the country, the terrorist groups like Boko Haram — which of course translates to "Western education is forbidden" — a lot of people forget what Boko Haram even means. You wonder, why are they capturing schoolgirls? Well, there you have it. They're opposed to girls being educated. So you have [00:39:00] in the north these terrorist groups like Lakurawa, like Islamic State West Africa Province, ISWAP, Boko Haram. And this is a rampant tool of terror for them. The sexual violence against women and girls.

And then you have across the Middle Belt these fertile farmlands where the Christian farmers live, and you have the Fulani militants pressing south and burning these Christian villagers out of their land. And rape and sexual violence are also routine. We've heard story after story. The others on this event have done so much to document the horrific violence against women and girls, the sexual violence.

And, you know, just yesterday I was reading a report — I was reading this on CNN, I think. They had the exclusive on it. It's a new report on the October 7th attack and the sexual violence that was a large part of that attack. It was an act, an absolutely preplanned weapon of war, a tool of terror. And yet many denied that. Many denied that for a long time. And now you have people like Hillary Clinton and Sheryl Sandberg as part of this new report documenting the sexual violence. And it's still so shocking to me that there's still some denial about this in Nigeria.

So I just want to thank all of you on this call for everything you do to document it, everything you do to keep these stories alive. Gloria, your work is unbelievable. I know we're going to hear from Sarah Makin in just a little bit, who's done an incredible job shining a light on all of this. Dede, thank you for everything you do. So [00:40:00] I guess I just want to say thank you. And I think the USCIRF recommendation on the ban on lobbying is really important. That has not gotten a lot of attention, but I think that's an important policy initiative. Again, I pray for Leah and others like her on a daily basis. And it's just heartbreaking, these stories. So thank you again.

[00:40:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Thank you, Maureen. We are so thankful for the work of USCIRF and all that you do to make these recommendations to the State Department so that they can make the designations. It's an incredibly important commission for the United States and oftentimes comes up against funding issues, but we always work

hard for USCIRF to continue on because it is one of the greatest tools that we as nonprofit organizations have to work with in the United States government on these [00:41:00] issues. You are always accessible.

I have shared into the chat the information for USCIRF on Nigeria, the country report, and also a publication on the Fulani terrorists that operate there. The Nigerian government lies and manipulates, and because of that the U.S. government has not yet recognized the Fulani as being one of the main players in this genocide of Christians.

I wanted to say that in the cases of blasphemy, there have been 300 blasphemy deaths in Nigeria, and not one of them has been prosecuted. So Deborah's story is certainly not singular. Nigeria does not want to address those murders at all.

My friend Sarah Makin is a young and incredibly capable single mom whose energy for the persecuted never ceases to amaze and inspire me. She served in President Trump's first term as the only ever [00:42:00] appointed national security adviser, a cabinet-level position on international religious freedom. The position is mandated by the 1998 IRF Act, the International Religious Freedom Act, but Trump was the only one to fill it. It remains open in his second term.

She recently spoke at CPAC 2026 and is here with us today to discuss further what's happening to women and girls in Nigeria and indeed all across North Africa and the Sahel, from east to west Sahara. Sarah, why are women and girls, whether they're murdered, taken captive, raped, or left widowed and childless, bearing the lion's share of this burden? And what can America do to help them?

[00:42:00] **Hon. Sarah Makin:** Thank you for hosting and organizing this. It's really an honor to be with Dr. Gloria, Commissioner Ferguson, Stephen, Oleg, and Doug. You know, Truth Nigeria is the best, most trustworthy, and most thorough reporting [00:43:00] on Nigeria. And I want to encourage anybody who's watching or listening, if you have contacts at other news outlets, please share the reporting from Truth Nigeria. We need to encourage other outlets beyond CBN to cover this. We have TBN and other Christian broadcast networks, and Doug and the team at Truth Nigeria are doing the work for them. We just ask them to cover it.

I will say, I apologize — but not really — for the emotion that I show. As you were sharing that photo of that blessed baby boy, my nanny is texting me photos of my three-year-old, who's playing peacefully and happily in the park with his friends. And, you know, I don't know how anybody could turn away from that or look away. And I know it's not just in Nigeria. I mean, this happens around the world. It's a global problem. And I [00:44:00] think it's vital that we highlight these abuses, not only because we know it's wrong, we know it's a sin, but because it impacts any and all of our U.S. engagement with Nigeria, with a country like Nigeria.

I have said this before, and I stand by it: in my humble opinion, Jesus was the original defender of women, and we should take His lead. He demonstrated perfectly God's ideal of mutual respect and love and justice. We know that harming women out of offense at their strength or their character, like what was done to beautiful Deborah, contradicts everything Christ stood for. And so I think that's really what motivates so many of us as we watch what's happening there. We know what we're called to do, and calling it out is vital.

You know, we've seen that rape and sexual slavery, forced marriage, [00:45:00] are deliberately and frequently used as a weapon of war. Again, this is global and historic. Women and girls make up over 95% of all conflict-related sexual violence cases. And this trauma that is forced upon them obviously leads to a number of downstream consequences, whether those are pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases that these women then live with, social stigma, and long-term health issues. Women and children make up the majority of refugees and internally displaced people around the world. They face heightened risks of exploitation, loss of livelihood, lack of protection in these camps. Again, we've seen this historically around the world, and this is happening today in Nigeria to these women.

And then, of course, there's the collapse of health care that leads to rises [00:46:00] in maternal mortality, malnutrition — we saw that in those images you shared earlier — especially for pregnant and breastfeeding women, preventable diseases. I mean, the downstream effects of this trauma and hurt on women is really — you can't calculate it. And we know that women of reproductive age in places like Nigeria face up to three times higher mortality risk. And that's from direct violence, but also indirect death from disease and hunger and all kinds of disrupted systems that lead them to be hurt further in their lives, right? And that's not even speaking of the trauma that they will deal with for the rest of their lives, both physically [00:47:00] and mentally, and then what they pass down to their children. Again, you really can't even calculate it.

And, you know, it can get so dark, right? And I have to be reminded of what God tells us about hating violence and oppression. The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked His soul hates. And He commands justice for the oppressed. Women, widows, children — we're called to defend and speak up for them. We know that the mistreating of widows or the fatherless brings divine judgment. I try to go back to that, to remind myself why we're here and why we do this.

And the last thing I really just want to talk about a little bit is, given my work on the National Security Council, [00:48:00] what I saw was why this matters to us and why this matters to our participation with Nigeria, or our bilateral agreements. Again, it all impacts these issues. It impacts everything about our engagement because we cannot trust or work with a government that allows these things to occur.

And the strongest argument is really a pragmatic one. It's rooted in our national interest. It's not some sort of abstract ideology. A government that enforces blasphemy laws or tolerates unprosecuted crimes and rejects impartial rule of law in favor of selective, ideological, or arbitrary power makes them inherently unreliable partners for the U.S. There is no predictable enforcement of agreements. There are no credible security guarantees. There are heightened risks of instability, corruption, and blowback. The rule of law in a country is the bedrock of effective international cooperation. And so this, for me, is really the key [00:49:00] reason why we have to highlight this and call attention to it for our own government, because they need to recognize that the Nigerian government is not one that we can work with and trust, for all of the reasons I just outlined. The selective impunity and corruption, all of this undermines the stability that we have, or the trust that we can have, in partnering with a country like Nigeria.

[00:49:00] **Dede Laugesen:** And Nigeria is a very important country across Africa because it is the largest by population, over 220 million people, maybe 240 million. They don't have a census like we do here, but they are expecting that population is going to overtake that of the United States by 2050, and maybe reach a billion people by the end of this century.

It is also one of the countries where they have the highest rate of children out of school, and that is because it is so dangerous to go to school. So we have a massive young population. The vast majority of Nigerians [00:50:00] are 18 or under right now, about half the population. So if the jihad that is raging all across the Sahel of Africa and spreading into Nigeria with al-Qaeda forces, JNIM coming in from the Sahel as well — you have terrorist groups exploding now in Nigeria, and they are being funded by foreigners. And weaponry is coming in, and the people on the ground, the Nigerian citizens, they don't have the right to own guns and they cannot defend themselves. And more and more, we're seeing that the government is arresting these citizen guards, what they call vigilantes, but they really are the local neighborhood watch. And those are the people who are arrested, not the terrorists causing the harm.

We're going to go over to Stephen Osemwegie, my partner and co-host here on the show, to give us [00:51:00] a roundup of these comments. And then I would like to go on for another 15 minutes or so just to have some discussion. I understand some of you may not be able to stay on, but I do think that we need to discuss some of this more thoroughly.

So, Stephen, give us your opinion of the conversation that we've had so far today, and why the women of Nigeria really matter to America, and why America needs to pay attention to what's happening in Nigeria. Because if that comes to the United States — which it is doing — we will suffer for it.

[00:51:00] **Hon. Stephen Osemwegie:** As a Nigerian, as an African, our culture demands that we be appreciative of people who set out their time to do what you are doing. So let me thank Dede Laugesen of Save the Persecuted Christians for working with me on this. And we call her “Mama Nigeria.” She is speaking for millions of women and girls.

I wanted [00:52:00] also to thank our commissioner for joining us, Ms. Ferguson, and my dear friend Sarah Makin. Thank you for what you guys are doing. Of course, Doug Burton is a Nigerian even though he was born in Maryland. So thank you for what you guys are doing for us.

At Save Nigeria Group USA, we were compelled to join this effort because we felt embarrassed that we are Nigerians, I grew up in Nigeria, and now I’m living out here in America, in Minnesota, watching what was happening and asking, why are we not doing anything? I looked around and jumped in last year. And since then, it’s been a deluge of daily reports of what is happening.

Very quickly, I wrote some things down. Number one is that one person is killed every 41 minutes in Nigeria — 35 a day. That means since we’ve been on this call, one person is dead. That is the real stark implication of what Nigeria is facing, which is what we call the silent genocide that the world continues to ignore. But thankfully, that is [00:53:00] beginning to change with people like Dede and those on this call.

We also know that since January 1 to today, May 13, 3,000-plus have died, particularly Christians in the Middle Belt and northeast of Nigeria. Of course, more deaths occur, but these are the deaths that relate to the jihad that we’ve heard so much about on this call.

We know that Nigeria is the deadliest place to be a Christian. Open Doors has numbers as high as 52,000 since 2009, but our numbers go as high as 130,000 — the majority Christians and moderate Muslims being killed. Eighty-five percent of the 11 million displaced — what we call internally displaced persons, IDPs — are women and children. And in Nigeria, women bear the brunt of this crisis.

If you go to IDP camps where they want for everything, you find women and children in large numbers. And what we’ve touched on today, why we [00:54:00] call this a war on women, is that in Nigeria the terrorists use sex as a weapon. Fifty percent of all those that have returned from captivity have either come back pregnant or suffered multiple episodes of rape. And these people live with the post-traumatic stress of what is occurring, and the world continues to ignore it.

We understand that Africa’s pain is not the biggest news, but we thank those who are stepping outside that norm in Washington and elsewhere to begin to speak. People like President Trump. We are very grateful that he’s the first president to step out and talk about what is happening in Nigeria. So we are very grateful to the Americans that are

doing what would normally be ignored. And at least some things are starting to move in the right direction as far as awareness.

However, since the Christmas Day bombing of ISIS in Sokoto State, we have seen an escalation. So we are desperately asking that the current U.S. presidential administration please put its foot down. [00:55:00] Of course, like our commissioner said, \$9 million is even one of the lobby groups. We now have information that there are more lobby groups that have been hired. So you're looking at tens of millions of dollars floating around Washington to hide what is happening.

As a matter of fact, the person in charge of security in Nigeria, the NSA, just left Washington four days ago, and he met with Vice President Vance and Secretary Rubio. And they have pictures. And the Nigerian government used that as propaganda. "Hey, look, we met with Vance. Everything is fine." Whereas people are dying daily.

We know that educating the girl child is one of the ways to tackle this ideology. And that is why our sister commissioner who spoke mentioned Boko Haram, which means Western education is forbidden. They are really targeting the girl child because the truth is, when women are empowered in education, the country benefits, society benefits.

My wife, for example, here in Minnesota, is one of the only pediatricians in this area, and she's a woman. If she [00:56:00] was not allowed to go to school in Nigeria, she wouldn't be a physician today. So we have many potential physicians, many potential professors like Dr. Puldu, who is on the call, Gloria. They are up north, and they are not allowed to go to school because schools are being attacked.

So we have to do something to create awareness. For us, at Save Nigeria Group and the U.S. Nigeria Civil Society Coalition, we are having a major event on June 20, just next month, outside the White House. We want to implore everyone who is watching: please join us at 10 a.m. at Lafayette Park. Let us create awareness. Let us talk to the American public and the U.S. administration that while your focus is on Iran and China, there is a major issue going on in the Sahel. Nigeria is one of the most populous countries. If it falls to the jihadis, it can threaten the security of these United States.

So I wrote down some quick solutions. Number one, direct humanitarian deployment. We need aid to the 11 million displaced. Eighty-five percent of them are women and children. They need everything: [00:57:00] clothes, food, shelter, PTSD treatment. We need that.

Number two, I said kinetic military action. Yes, the U.S. has deployed 200 soldiers as advisers, but the truth is, we do not benefit from advisers at this time. The crisis is so severe that some elements in the Nigerian security architecture are sympathetic to what is happening, so they protect some of them. So we need U.S. or United Nations military action. Force is the only solution. Force. Military force.

Then number three, we need the U.S. to play an outsized role in strengthening democratic institutions and processes. Nigeria has a major election in just over a year, in 2027, a presidential election. If we have the United Nations or the United States government present on the ground to make sure the election is free and fair, the people know whom to elect to protect them. That is the cheapest way to go.

So I want to implore the United States government: don't look away. We need you to help us strengthen democracy, [00:58:00] because democracy is not a Nigerian creation. We got it from the West. So it is incumbent on the West to make sure we do it right, because right now I can tell you for free, our democracy is a sham. It is in name only.

Lastly, we need to pass legislation. Congressman Riley Moore and Chris Smith have legislation, House Resolution 7457, which will hold accountable those sponsoring this and release funds and aid to the displaced communities. Please let us pass that legislation. So call your congressman. Riley Moore and Chairman Chris Smith have a bill, the Nigerian Religious Freedom and Accountability Act of 2026. Please let us get that bill moving and codified into law. Now we have an administration that even cares to talk about the issue before things change in Washington. Help us pass that bill.

Join us on June 20 in Washington, D.C. And of course, on June 23 we have an award for President Trump, Chris Smith, Riley Moore, and Secretary Rubio. We want to thank them at the gala at the Hilton Garden [00:59:00] Inn at 6 p.m. Join us on Tuesday, June 23.

But more importantly, please add your voice to what is happening. I want to thank Dede for this. I'm headed out to Texas right now, about to catch a flight. I'll be with her at the Texas Patriot event in Dallas tomorrow night. So we'll be talking about the same thing. And we are going to San Antonio over the weekend, still on this issue.

So please help us. We are very grateful, and I'll stop there because indeed, Dede, I've taken a little bit of time. But thank you. I'm very grateful. Save Nigeria Group and the U.S. Nigerian Coalition will continue on this issue until every internally displaced person can return home safely and the terrorists are brought to justice. God bless you. Thank you very much for standing with the persecuted.

[00:59:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Amen. Thank you so much. We're always thinking about the women in north Nigeria who live under Sharia law, the Christian women who live in the states where Sharia law is active. And a lot of those girls [01:00:00] we see in Kano — they have these mass Muslim weddings. And I've heard that a number of the girls who end up being married in Kano are actually Christian girls. And many, many times the parents will give their girls to a Muslim because they need money or something. And there's just this intense need that the women have for trauma support and such.

Gloria and others, talk to us about the dignity of the women in the North, especially the Christian women who are forced to live under Sharia law. And Gloria, I know that you specifically are bringing women out of the IDP camps and giving them a space where they can heal and refind the dignity in themselves and have a second chance at life. How can we do more of this? How can we support the women and children in Nigeria?

[01:00:00] **Dr. Gloria Samdi Puldu:** You know, the human cost, especially on [01:01:00] women, as everybody has spoken about, is very devastating. Christian families usually do not give out their daughters. Their daughters are stolen from them, from communities. Apart from Boko Haram, we have terrible radical leaders who preach that Christian girls are supposed to be slaves to Muslim communities. So in the northwestern part of Nigeria, where you have the 12 states under Sharia, what happens is that those Christian minorities in those communities — their parents do not have control when their daughters are stolen from them. When they are on their way to school, they are taken. And then you go to the police. Nobody answers you. You go to the emirs. Nobody answers you.

And even one-time governor of Kano State, who is [01:02:00] now on the team of President Tinubu, was the one who came on national TV and made Christian young teenagers begin to recite the shahada, converting them, when their parents had not given permission. So if a governor will do that, you can imagine what an ordinary citizen — and they don't even respect the law. Those who are supposed to uphold the law, that is what they do. And that is what so many Christian girls are going through.

We have had opportunities to have Christian women lawyers fight this, but it's very difficult to get justice for one girl. And one lawyer even had to run away, had to be taken out of the country because of the persecution she faced when we were able to work through and get one girl out. They were about to kill her.

So that is the situation. And then we have a lot of them who run away [01:03:00] from such terrible conditions. Where do they go? They go back to their families. Their families are afraid because they will be attacked and killed. So organizations like ours have to take them away and hide them and make sure that we rehabilitate them, disciple them, encourage them, make sure they get all the psychosocial support they need, and then also give them a skill and resettle them in different communities where they can continue their lives.

Some who escape from Boko Haram can't go back to their communities because when they go back, it's horrible. Their communities are so scared they can't accept them. So that stigma is there. The families are broken, and they are very traumatized survivors. But where do they go? Organizations will have to take them and help them.

[01:03:00] **Dede Laugesen:** That's an important point, Gloria, that women who come back from being kidnapped, and many times they're pregnant, [01:04:00] are shunned by their own communities and by their families.

We have only just a few minutes left, so I wanted to go ahead and open up the mics and allow each one of you to have some concluding thoughts on the discussion that we've had today, and really call out to the hearts and minds of the American people to dig in and be engaged on these issues.

[01:04:00] **Commissioner Maureen Ferguson:** To this point of the cultural shame surrounding this, that's a very real thing. My takeaway on that is that it's all the more incumbent upon us to call this out with clarity and with loud voices, because so many of the women and girls who are suffering this trauma do not talk about it. So I guess that'll be my final thought. Just thank you again for shedding a light on this.

[01:04:00] **Hon. Sarah Makin:** What we've seen around the globe is that creating this leadership or security vacuum in a country, especially with a majority youth population, [01:05:00] what happens there — and there's a term for that — is a youth bulge: when 60% or more of the population is under the age of 30, or there's a large cohort of them aged 15 to 24, like in the case of Nigeria. And when we see this security vacuum created, it creates a dramatic increase in the risk of instability, violence, and state failure moving forward, and radicalization, right? And so this dynamic is very well documented.

And I think it was Churchill who said, if we don't study history, then we're doomed to repeat it. We have to learn from history and recognize this happens. And we have to see this for what it is going to be, right? Weak or absent institutions, like there are in Nigeria, remove any safety valves for these young people: jobs, education, legitimate [01:06:00] political channels, democratic channels, right? And it is a catalyst for chaos. And that's another reason why it is incumbent on our government and, I think, the globe to focus on what's going on in Nigeria and do what they can to help address the issues. And that applies across all of Africa and North Africa and the Sahel, because we can see what will happen if we allow this to go on. We know what will happen.

[01:06:00] **Douglas Burton:** I would just say, Dede, thank you for bringing me on. I would say if anybody thinks that Nigeria is 5,000 miles away and that we're not affected by that, rethink that entirely, because there is going to be karma — this is a Buddhist term — karma, a kind of blowback to a person if they do something wrong to other people. If we allow the Nigerian people to go through this genocide unremarked, unknown, as if they're not a part of us, [01:07:00] that is bad karma. That's going to come back on us.

As a believer myself, I think the United States is on the verge of having some kind of religious revival or awakening. But for that awakening to happen, we have to realize that

people in Nigeria are not different from us, not at all. And that the threat of civilizational disruption or takeover in Nigeria is coming to this country as well. They are us, and we are them. We just have to keep that in mind.

[01:07:00] **Hon. Stephen Osemwegie:** I am very grateful to those who have joined us, but I want to appeal. We do have the challenge of the media rebuffing our attempts to make them aware of what is happening and also to invite them for what we're doing in June. These two events on June 20, which is about five weeks from now — we want to implore you to help us invite your friends. Everyone take ownership of it, because it's being organized by the U.S. Nigeria Civil Society Coalition. [01:08:00] We're new in this space, so we want to leverage those who are here on this call. Help us spread the word. The more folks we can bring out there on that Saturday, the better for us.

And of course, if you know leaders involved in this awareness for Nigeria and the persecuted, we would like to have them at the leadership gala and dinner on the 23rd. Feel free to reach out. We're trying to do our best.

But I want to thank Dede. Oh my God. Thank you, Dede. We love you so much. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

[01:08:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Thank you, Stephen. And I want to thank everyone for being here today.

As we close out, I'd like to play the song I wrote for Leah and tell everybody that tomorrow, May 14, at 12 p.m. Eastern Time, 5 p.m. Nigerian time, there is a Zoom meeting that Gloria, with the Leah Foundation, is hosting. That information is in the chat. I will share that out to our groups as well, Gloria.

And now, just to close out the show with the song that I wrote for Leah, and my [01:09:00] colleague Oleg designed the music.

Leah, we love you. We know you're coming home, and we can't wait to hold you in our arms and welcome you back to your family. You will not be shamed. We love you with every ounce of our being.

[01:09:00] **THE SONG PLAYS:** "Leah, Did You Know?"

[01:12:00] **Dede Laugesen:** Thanks again, everyone. We'll see you next time, two weeks from today. God bless and take care. And please pray for the Christians in Nigeria. Love you all. Goodbye.