



# **NIGERIA: UNFOLDING GENOCIDE?**

Three Years On

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## FOREWORD – JIM SHANNON

It will come as no surprise to fellow parliamentarians that I care deeply about Nigeria. I have had the privilege of visiting the country twice as a Member of Parliament – most recently in May 2022. There, I heard first-hand the gruelling stories of religious-based persecution. I was humbled by meeting brave women who fled their abductors and abusers. I was inspired by the strength of faith the persecuted exhibit. But I was also alarmed.

My last visit to Nigeria was four years on from when the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief first started collecting evidence for our report *Nigeria, Unfolding Genocide?* That report assessed the harrowing situation in Nigeria and the rampant violations of freedom of religion or belief. It stressed the urgency of action. And yet, I did not find in 2022 that the situation in Nigeria had improved. In fact, a mass shooting in southwestern Nigeria mere days after my visit cemented this concern.

A significant driver of religious-based persecution in Nigeria is Islamist extremism. A devastating example can be found in the mass shooting and bomb attack that occurred at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, on 5 June 2022. Estimates for the number of faithful who died range from 40 to 80 people. This attack was notable not only for the large number of lives lost, but also for having occurred in southwestern Nigeria – typically a peaceful state. In recent years, attacks from extremists have been concentrated in northern Nigeria. The Owo mass shooting marked a concerning spread of violence through the country.

Tragedies such as the above put Nigeria in dire need of increased international attention. Nigeria now ranks 6<sup>th</sup> on the Open Doors *World Watch List*. They found that more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than in the rest of the world combined. On average, 14 Christians are killed each day in Nigeria. This needs to stop. We cannot stand idly by while so many lives are lost.

Such an important question as to whether genocide is occurring in Nigeria cannot be asked and then simply forgotten. To this end, I wished for the APPG to produce another report on Nigeria and the deteriorating situation there. It is my hope that the following report will lead to a positive, tangible improvement to the lives of ordinary Nigerians – Christians, Muslims, Humanists, and others.

I conclude my comments with the same plea as I made in the previous report: I urge the UK and Nigerian Governments to do all that they can to bring an end to this violence and bring its perpetrators to justice.

# INTRODUCTION

In response to growing concerns from stakeholder groups of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), this report was compiled to assess the nature of FoRB violations in Nigeria – and to discern policy priorities.

With reference to the conditions laid out in the 2020 APPG report *Nigeria: An Unfolding Genocide?*, this report seeks to establish whether the situation in Nigeria has improved, stabilised, or deteriorated in the years following that report. The contributors to the report consist of a range of non-governmental organisations, including charities, human rights campaign groups, think-tanks, and representative bodies – both in Nigeria and the UK. Individual contributions are also included from parliamentarians, academics, journalists, faith leaders, and human rights experts.

All contributors were surveyed to assess conditions since 2020 and to identify the core drivers for FoRB violations. Respondents were then asked to rank the core drivers in order of significance from a list of: Poverty (increased competition for resources), Climate change, Tribal and/or ethnic tensions, Breakdown of traditional mediation mechanisms, Criminality and corruption, Politics, Governmental response, Misinformation, Religious extremist ideology, Mis/reporting by local and international actors, and any other drivers (see Fig. 1). Contributors were asked to provide examples and given the opportunity to provide witness statements to support their conclusions. Some submissions requested anonymity for security reasons.

Respondents also submitted recommendations for what actions should be taken by: the Nigerian Government; the UK Government; and the international community. These echo many of the recommendations in the 2020 APPG report, which still stand. In addition, to better understand the scale and trajectory of the situation in Nigeria, all surveyed were asked the question: 'In the event of your recommended actions not being realised, what implications do you anticipate for the future of Nigeria and the wider region?'

The report concludes that the situation in Nigeria has significantly worsened since the publication of the last APPG report. The range and depth of responses and the supporting testimonies paint a disturbing picture of a country in which freedom of religion or belief is rapidly deteriorating. With FoRB being a foundation for so many other human rights and civil liberties, the report also illustrates a trajectory for Nigeria, which, when demographic projections are accounted for, has the potential for a vast humanitarian disaster in West Africa.

Unless the summary recommendations, which include a range of policy proposals and which prioritise security, are afforded serious consideration and actioned with urgency, a window of opportunity will be missed to alleviate expansive human suffering within and beyond Africa.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief have continued and intensified in Nigeria since the publication of the last APPG report. In the call for evidence for this report, no contributor claimed that the situation in Nigeria had improved between 2020 and the present, and the majority argued that the situation had worsened, with violence both increasing and spreading across the country.

Respondents both gave statistics on the numbers killed or abducted on account of their religion or belief in Nigeria and highlighted individual cases of human rights violations. Specific concerns included the added vulnerability created by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the increasing number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) and refugees who have fled violence.

Religion remains a key factor in the ongoing violence and other human rights violations in Nigeria. Several respondents to the current call for evidence emphasised how Nigeria is a deeply religious country, with many conflicts, therefore, being framed in religious terms. Religious division is often exacerbated by inciting and hateful speech from both political and religious leaders. In addition, some laws have a discriminatory impact on communities based on their religion or belief, particularly with regard to the application of laws against insulting another person's religion, which can effectively be used to punish blasphemy.

Respondents highlighted that religious identity remained the key motivator for violent extremist groups, which have increased their activity across the region and sought to seize land. Some respondents noted evidence of crossover between extremist groups' motives, tactics and ideology with some militant Fulani groups, who have become radicalised. In addition, regardless of motivation, many respondents argued that the violent attacks in Nigeria were demonstrably having a disproportionate impact on some communities based on their religion or belief.

Respondents were agreed that the security crisis in Nigeria was driven by a range of different factors, all of which interacted with religious identity, magnified the impact of violence and human rights violations in the country, or prevented an effective response. These include:

- **Poverty.** Sixty-three per cent of Nigerians experience multidimensional poverty, which fuels kidnap for ransom and other criminal activity. Poverty also leads to intercommunal resentment, deepening existing divisions.
- **Climate Change.** While this is often cited by figures in Government as an important factor, respondents noted that it had the effect of minimising the experience of victims of extremist violence within Nigeria itself. Overwhelmingly, our respondents ranked climate change as the least significant driver of the situation in Nigeria.
- **Tribal/Ethnic Tensions.** Nigeria has at least 250 different ethnic groups. To a large extent ethnic divides are closely associated with religious divides, with attacks targeting ethnic groups also impacting religious groups, given an overlap between the two. Several respondents concluded that ethnic tensions have also worsened in recent years.
- **Criminality and Corruption.** Respondents noted that a rise in criminal violence, along with a lack of access to justice for victims, made the situation even worse for those targeted based on their religion or belief. In addition, corruption persistently hampered effective government response.
- **Politics.** Religious divisions are often exploited for political gain. Respondents noted how political leaders

could use inflammatory rhetoric against religious groups and that some communities felt politically marginalised because of their minority religion or belief.

- **Flow of Weapons.** Some respondents raised the specific concern about the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which could fall into the hands of extremist groups.

With 'religious extremist ideology' identified by respondents as by far the most significant driver for violence, there was concern expressed among respondents that some of these factors were being used to obscure the role of religious identity in determining the targeting and impact of the violence.

The issue of misinformation or misreporting was cited frequently and has not improved significantly since the 2020 report. Some respondents cited concerns about the accuracy of reporting on FoRB violations and the role of misreporting in exacerbating religious or ethnic division. Others highlighted false narratives around the drivers of violence in Nigeria, which mischaracterise the conflict and have hindered appropriate assistance from the international community.

Those surveyed also noted that the Nigerian Government had yet to respond adequately to the crisis. Respondents noted that vulnerable communities were left with little or no protection and cited concerns about new legislation (such as the NGO Regulation Bill), which, far from addressing the crisis, risked having a further discriminatory impact. Respondents were clear that wise leadership and urgent action were needed from the incoming President, as an effective response to the security crisis must be led by the Nigerian Government.

Most of those surveyed believed that the situation in Nigeria had already worsened and would continue to do so. They noted the lost opportunities that had already resulted for Nigeria and the region in terms of development and economic growth. They also raised concerns about the deepening divisions of Nigeria along religious or ethnic lines, evidenced by inflammatory rhetoric and retaliatory attacks. Some even expressed fears for the survival of the Nigerian state; any such collapse would lead to even more people killed or displaced and would clearly be catastrophic for the wider region and continent.

Respondents were divided on the use of the term 'genocide' to describe what is happening to Christians in Nigeria. Some considered the term justified based on the number of those killed in the country, the tactics employed by perpetrators, and the perspectives of those on the ground. However, others noted that there was a high evidential bar to establishing genocide and that a misuse of the term could overshadow the complex dynamics of the conflict. In December 2020, the International Criminal Court (ICC) concluded that there was a reasonable basis to believe that Boko Haram and its splinter groups, as well as Nigerian Security Forces, had committed crimes against humanity and war crimes.

# FORB IN NIGERIA 2020-2023

1. Our survey found that violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief have continued and intensified in Nigeria since the publication of the last APPG report, and the security issues and deep divisions in the country remain critical. In the call for evidence for this report, not one contributor claimed that the situation in Nigeria had improved between 2020 and the present; the majority argued that the situation had worsened, and even those who concluded that there had been no change acknowledged the seriousness of the security crisis. Respondents highlighted the ongoing activities of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), as well as armed banditry and ongoing attacks in the Middle Belt. Respondents also noted the spread of attacks into the south of the country.
2. Some organisations provided data on the number of Christians and others killed in Nigeria on account of their religion in the past three years. For example, Open Doors UK & Ireland stated that in 2022, 5,014 Christians were killed in Nigeria, an increase from 4,650 the previous year. According to Open Doors, today, Nigeria accounts for 89% of all Christians killed worldwide. It also accounts for 89% of all Christians kidnapped or abducted worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Aid to the Church in Need noted the conclusion of its *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report, which cited one analysis that 7,600 Christians had been killed and 5,200 abducted in Nigeria between January 2021 and June 2022.<sup>2</sup>

## I Today, Nigeria accounts for 89% of all Christians killed worldwide

3. Respondents referenced a wide range of more specific recent incidents which highlight the ongoing violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria, a small selection of which is given below.
  - The musician Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a member of a Sufi Muslim group, was accused in Kano State of blasphemy, with protestors burning down his family home. On August 10 2020, Sharif-Aminu was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death, although a higher court in Kano State overturned the conviction in January 2021.<sup>3</sup>
  - On April 28 2020, the head of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, Mubarak Bala, was arrested, and later prosecuted, for causing a public disturbance in connection with allegedly blasphemous posts on Facebook. On April 5 2022, Bala was sentenced to 24 years in prison.<sup>4</sup>
  - On May 12 2022, Deborah Samuel, a Christian student in Sokoto State, was stoned to death by a mob and her body burned after being falsely accused of blasphemy in a WhatsApp group chat at her university.
  - On June 5 2022, Pentecost Sunday, St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church was attacked in Owo, Ondo State. At least 41 worshippers were confirmed dead in the attack, from both gunfire and improvised explosive devices.
4. Respondents gave details of many other attacks, including "sprees" of multiple attacks on religious buildings and groups. Several highlighted the prevalence of abduction and the insecurity of travel within the country. It was

<sup>1</sup> [media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2023-Advocacy-Report.pdf](https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2023-Advocacy-Report.pdf), p 6

<sup>2</sup> Aid to the Church in Need, written submission to APPG ForB Survey (April 2023)

<sup>3</sup> [uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/yahaya-sharif-aminu](https://uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/yahaya-sharif-aminu)

<sup>4</sup> [uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/mubarak-bala](https://uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/mubarak-bala)

noted that pastors and other religious leaders were particularly vulnerable to such abductions. For example, Aid to the Church in Need gave the example of Father Felix Fidson Zakari, the Pastor of St Ann's Catholic Church, one of 100 people abducted in Kaduna State on 24 March 2022. PSJ UK gave the examples of Father Udo and Father Philemon Oboh, abducted in Edo State in July 2022. Likewise, a number of respondents cited the ongoing practice of abducting women and girls, as happened to the Chibok girls and Leah Sharibu, for example.

5. Several contributors drew attention to the fragile security situation in the country and the Nigerian Government's inaction and failure to respond – an issue on which the 2020 APPG report raised concerns. For example, respondents noted the increase in attacks, and their spread across the country, as evidence that the crisis is far from being resolved and, indeed, is getting even worse. Other respondents cited systemic security problems, such as Nigeria's weak border security or the prevalence of small arms and light weapons, as factors which exacerbated the situation. Since the 2020 report, Nigeria has undergone a presidential election, and several contributors expressed misgivings about both the ability and the willingness of the new Nigerian Government to uphold the fundamental rights of its citizens rather than deepening existing religious and ethnic divides.
6. In addition, while not covered by the reporting period of the previous APPG report, respondents suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic significantly worsened the situation for already vulnerable communities. The 2022 APPG delegation to Nigeria was told by the British High Commissioner, Catriona Laing, that the security situation in the country had decreased drastically following the pandemic, as many had left the military at that time due to a lack of salary, and had then turned to violence. Also, Open Doors UK and Ireland cited reports of Christians being marginalised in aid distribution and of national lockdowns making Christian villages more vulnerable to attack by Fulani militants.<sup>5</sup>

**Nigeria's security challenges have the potential to threaten the 'very existence of the Nigerian state', and that the conflict in Nigeria had implications for the wider region and continent – with the country described as the 'pilot of the African plane'.**

7. Also, since the previous APPG report, the situation for Internally Displaced People has also worsened. According to the UNHCR, there were more than 2.2 million IDPs in Nigeria at the end of 2021.<sup>6</sup> The 2022 APPG delegation to Nigeria was able to visit Kuchingoro IDP Camp and meet survivors of violent attacks by Boko Haram. As the violence continues to worsen and spread across the country, it is expected that this statistic will grow. In addition, increasing numbers of Nigerians are living as refugees in neighbouring countries.
8. In 2022, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published its report *Lagos Calling: Nigeria and the Integrated Review*.<sup>7</sup> The Committee noted, as did the 2020 APPG report, various security challenges faced by the country, including Islamist extremist violence and banditry. Their report concluded that, taken together, Nigeria's security challenges have the potential to threaten the 'very existence of the Nigerian state', and that the conflict in Nigeria had implications for the wider region and continent – with the country described as the 'pilot of the African plane'.

<sup>5</sup> [media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2020\\_The Last in Line.pdf](https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2020_The%20Last%20in%20Line.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [reporting.unhcr.org/nigeria-2021-year-end-report-population-trends](https://reporting.unhcr.org/nigeria-2021-year-end-report-population-trends)

<sup>7</sup> [committees.parliament.uk/publications/22063/documents/163771/default](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22063/documents/163771/default) (see especially paragraphs 34-36)



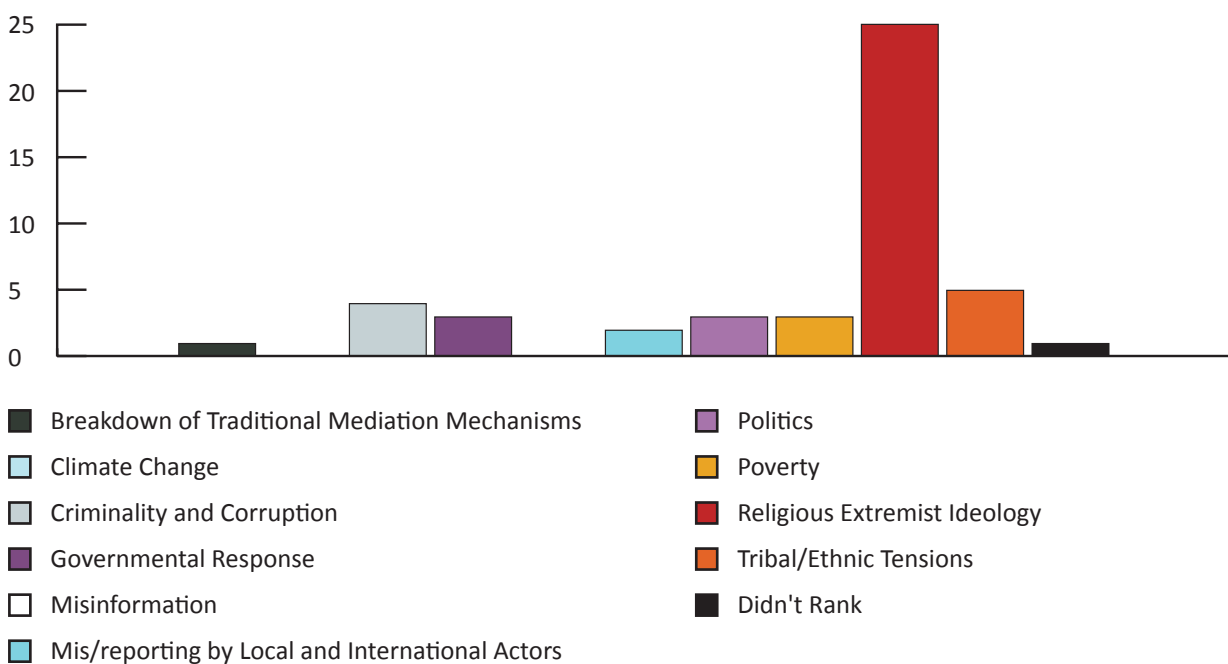
9. The *Lagos Calling* report also raised concerns about a perceived lack of interest in Nigeria from Westminster.<sup>8</sup> The Committee emphasised that Nigeria's security crisis matters to the UK, reducing opportunities for trade and allowing terrorism to foment. The Committee concluded:

*"We recommend continued, highly focused, support to the Nigerian military in tackling Islamist groups and armed organised criminal groups whilst maintaining the highest standards of human rights. We recommend that this effort continues to go hand-in-hand with targeted overseas development assistance and investment to tackle the underlying causes of the conflict."*<sup>9</sup>

The Committee also recommended that the Government set out 'concrete steps for how the UK Government will support the Nigerian Government in promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief, as well as preventing violence against women and girls, across their engagement activities in Nigeria.' In response, the Government described its current areas of focus for its official development assistance in Nigeria, highlighting that 'priority areas of current engagement and programming include: improving the human rights record of the Nigerian security sector; promoting the rule of law; supporting the rights of minority groups in Nigeria; and promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief.'<sup>10</sup>

10. The 2020 APPG report noted that: "The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognises a wide range of fundamental rights including the right to life, right to human dignity and right to freedom of conscience and religion. Nigeria is also committed to protect these rights through international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."<sup>11</sup> As Nigeria approaches its Universal Periodic Review in 2024 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a recognition of the widespread FoRB violations in the country is more vital than ever.

**FIG.1 – RESPONDENTS HIGHEST RANKED DRIVER**



<sup>8</sup> Ibid. (paragraph 8)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (paragraph 36)

<sup>10</sup> [committees.parliament.uk/publications/23036/documents/168809/default](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/23036/documents/168809/default)

<sup>11</sup> [appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf](https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf) (paragraph 1)

# THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

11. The 2020 APPG report set Nigeria's religious division in the context of the country's history. It noted that current violent attacks in Nigeria have been interpreted through the lens of historical conflicts between Muslim and Christian groups. Several respondents to the current call for evidence emphasised how Nigeria is a deeply religious country, with many conflicts, therefore, being framed in religious terms. This echoes the words of the former Attorney General of Nasarawa State, Suleiman Nchi, who said to the previous APPG inquiry, "The parties in a conflict may be carrying or expressing different religious identities. A simple argument between a Fulani-herdsman and a farmer from a community that is predominantly Christian over land, for example, may take on the tenor of a sectarian crisis since the Fulani herdsman is almost always a Muslim."<sup>12</sup>

## DISCRIMINATION AND HATE SPEECH

12. This problem is exacerbated by inciting and hateful speech by both political and religious leaders. This picture was reinforced clearly by submissions to the current call for evidence. The Humanist Association of Nigeria, for example, cited 'inciteful preaching in mosques by clerics' as a driver of conflict, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja noted the 'claim to religious superiority, hostile and intolerant attitude towards others who are derogatorily called 'infidels.' Search for Common Ground argued that 'hateful and inflammatory speech - whether by religious clerics or online - is a significant driver of FoRB incidents in Nigeria.'

13. In the context of the recent election, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, warned that, "The election season in Nigeria has witnessed a surge in the use of inflammatory language, hateful and divisive rhetoric. Such hate speech is amplified at an unprecedented rate by digital technology. Hate speech, especially if accompanied by policies and practices that discriminate against populations based on their identity, often results in hate crimes, discrimination, and violence and can be both a precursor and a trigger of atrocity crimes, in particular genocide."<sup>13</sup>

14. Several respondents also cited prohibitions on blasphemy as a major concern and a source of human rights violations. For example, PSJ UK argue that:

*"There have been multiple instances where their judicial application in Sharia courts and their extrajudicial implementation have resulted in serious FoRB violations. Mubarak Bala – President of Nigeria's Humanist Association – was sentenced to 24 years in prison in Kano after being found guilty of blaspheming Islam. Also, in Kano State, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a Sufi musician, was sentenced to death in 2020 for sharing audio messages on social media, which were later deemed as blasphemous towards the Prophet Mohammed. Outside of the courts, Deborah Samuel and Ahmad Usman were both brutally killed in Sokoto and Abuja, respectively, after claims of blasphemy. In each case, a mob brutally lynched and burnt the victims to death, regardless of the judicial process."*

<sup>12</sup> [appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf](https://www.appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf) (paragraph 55)

<sup>13</sup> [www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/OSA\\_Prevention\\_of\\_Genocide\\_Statement\\_Nigeria.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/OSA_Prevention_of_Genocide_Statement_Nigeria.pdf)

15. Such cases also come in a context of wider discrimination. For example, Open Doors UK and Ireland note that:

*"Christians in Northern Nigeria, especially those in states which have granted jurisdiction to Sharia courts, face discrimination and exclusion as second-class citizens. Christians with a Muslim background may also face rejection from their own families, pressure to renounce Christianity, harassment and often physical violence."*

Deep-rooted divisions manifest and are made worse through inflammatory rhetoric and ongoing legal discrimination.

## RELIGION AS MOTIVATOR FOR VIOLENCE

16. It is in this context that the growth of extremist ideology must be set. The previous APPG report noted that Nigeria's security crisis came in the context of growing Islamist extremist activity across West Africa and the Sahel. This trend has continued in the years following the APPG report. According to the Council on Foreign Relations' Global Conflict Tracker:

*"Experts attribute the expansion of violent extremism in the Sahel to persistently weak governance, characterised by corruption, democratic backsliding, legitimacy deficits, and human rights violations. Many countries in the region share similar internal dynamics of inequality — state power tends to be concentrated in southern, urban regions while rural, northern areas remain underdeveloped and ripe for exploitation by extremist groups."<sup>14</sup>*

Nigeria is no exception among countries in the region which are facing massive security challenges from Islamist extremist violence.

## | "It is essentially a land grab facilitated by ethnic cleansing."

17. Religious identity is a key motivation for attacks by extremist groups. According to PSJ UK:

*"In the north-east, extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) stage devastating attacks based on religious differences. Some reasons provided were to retribute against Christians for activities elsewhere in the world. Sometimes, moderate Muslims, Christians, and other minority religious groups are targeted for not ascribing to the terrorist's extremist orthodoxy."*

Several respondents noted the importance to extremist groups of seizing land from other communities. For example, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) argues that 'the terrorist franchises operating in Nigeria (ISWAP, Boko Haram, Ansaru) and their affiliates have always been clear about their desire to eschew democracy and create an Islamic State where all adhere to their strict dogmas. On occasion, some militiamen have also been clear about what drives them: it is essentially a land grab facilitated by ethnic cleansing.' And HART concluded that 'the conquest for territory, both economic and land grabbing, as identified by the Plateau State government in central Nigeria, is a major factor'. Nigerian Security Forces have been accused of not responding to attacks and of failing to protect communities.

18. As noted in the previous APPG report, it is important not simply to conflate attacks by groups such as Boko Haram

<sup>14</sup> [cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel](https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel)

and ISWAP with attacks against Christians by Fulani groups. However, several respondents gave evidence of crossover between the motives, tactics and ideology of extremist groups and some Fulani groups. For example, Aid to the Church in Need noted that 'there is growing evidence that Fulani Bandit groups are working with Boko Haram/ISWAP'. They added that "It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that at least some of the Fulani Bandit groups have become radicalised. In that case the attacks on Christians in the Middle Belt would, in a number of cases, have to be seen as an extension of the Boko Haram/ISWAP attacks in the north-east."<sup>15</sup>

19. Similarly, CSW note that:

*"Attacks on Christian farming communities in central states increased exponentially under the outgoing federal administration, as religion and ethnicity are either instrumentalised as rallying points or are the raison d'être of armed non-state actors of Fulani ethnicity, who have increasingly made common cause with terrorist groups from the north-east seeking to enforce an extremist interpretation of their creed."*

**"The severity of bloodshed and the mostly one-sided nature of the attacks indicates that these attacks require a deeper analysis of the real root-cause of these attacks."**

20. As a result, there was some dissatisfaction expressed with the unwillingness to consider religion as a driver alongside others in assessing human rights violations in the Middle Belt. For example, after considering the role of competition over resources and climate change in provoking inter-communal clashes in the Middle Belt, Ayo Adedojin of PSJ UK concluded: "While competition could result in minor forms of dispute, the severity of bloodshed and the mostly one-sided nature of the attacks indicates that these attacks require a deeper analysis of the real root-cause of these attacks."
21. The 2020 APPG report noted that the majority of reports presented to that inquiry concluded that there had been significantly more Christian casualties as a result of violence in the Middle Belt. This perspective has been reaffirmed by evidence presented to this inquiry. For example, the APPG's attention was drawn to a recent report from the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa, which calculated the number of Muslims and Christians killed between October 2019 and September 2022. The report found that more Christians were killed than Muslims in this period with a ratio of 2.8:1. Furthermore, the report argues that if the different sizes of the religious populations in the various states are taken into account, the true ratio may be 7.6:1.<sup>16</sup> Despite the difficulties in assigning a precise motivation to every attack, the security crisis is therefore having a disproportionate impact based on religion or belief.
22. It is clear that religious identity remains a key aspect across the varied conflicts and crises faced by Nigeria. This is true for historical reasons and is exacerbated by hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric by political and religious leaders, as well as by discrimination based on religion or belief. Religious identity is central to the actions of Islamist extremist groups in the country, as well as the wider region, and there is some evidence that aspects of the ideology and tactics of these groups are spreading beyond them. Finally, regardless of motivation, many respondents argued that the conflict is having a disproportionate impact on some communities based on their religion or belief. If this disproportionate impact is not recognised, solutions to the security crisis in Nigeria will remain incomplete and unlikely to succeed.

<sup>15</sup> [vanguardngr.com/2021/10/us-confirms-boko-haram-bandits-working-together-to-blackmail-buhari-regime](https://vanguardngr.com/2021/10/us-confirms-boko-haram-bandits-working-together-to-blackmail-buhari-regime); [punchng.com/kidnapping-iswap-boko-haram-training-bandits-says-nis](https://punchng.com/kidnapping-iswap-boko-haram-training-bandits-says-nis)

<sup>16</sup> [orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nigeria-Killings-and-Abduction-10-2019%E2%80%932021%E2%80%93final.pdf](https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nigeria-Killings-and-Abduction-10-2019%E2%80%932021%E2%80%93final.pdf)

## OTHER DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE

23. Respondents were also asked to consider the impact of other factors on the security crisis in Nigeria and whether these were significant drivers alongside religious extremist ideology. Responses on a selection of the drivers are given below, noting especially how these other factors may interrelate with religious extremism.

### POVERTY

24. CSW identified poverty as a significant driver of the situation in Nigeria: "The outgoing administration has not only overseen a critical decline in security; it has also overseen the emergence of an unprecedented situation whereby 63% of Nigerians experience multidimensional poverty, at a time when abduction for ransom has proved to be a low risk and potentially high gain enterprise, as perpetrators are rarely brought to justice."
25. Open Doors also linked poverty with increased criminal activity, noting that 'poverty from an inability to make a living from cattle rearing, have pushed members of the Fulani herder community to criminal activity to support themselves'. Similarly, a respondent from a Nigerian seminary and Search for Common Ground both identified high levels of poverty as being closely linked with unemployment.
26. Joseph Bature Fidelis from the Justice Development and Peace Commission in Maiduguri Diocese identified poverty as a key area that would worsen if action is not taken in response to the conflict. BAT Nigeria suggested that Nigerian leaders lacked the motivation to alleviate poverty as 'whilst the populace remain uneducated and impoverished', it is easier to 'manipulate' people. They stated that "The extremist northern elites (including clerics) use poverty as a tool to sustain these extremist ideologies."

### CLIMATE CHANGE

27. In recent years, there has been a tendency from certain Government leaders and departments to attribute the conflict in Nigeria to climate change. In June 2022, Bishop Jude Ayodeji Arogundade of Ondo responded to a statement issued by Irish president Michael Higgins after the 5 June massacre at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, southwestern Nigeria, in which Higgins linked the attack to 'the consequences of climate change'. Bishop Jude commented, "To suggest or make a connection between victims of terror and consequences of climate change is not only misleading but also exactly rubbing salt to the injuries of all who have suffered terrorism in Nigeria. The victims of terrorism are of another category to which nothing can be compared! It is very clear to anyone who has been closely following the events in Nigeria over the past years that the underpinning issues of terror attacks, banditry, and unabated onslaught in Nigeria and in the Sahel Region and climate change have nothing in common."

**"The UK Government must reconsider its narrative on the tragedies in Nigeria."**

28. Overwhelmingly, our respondents ranked climate change as the least significant driver of the situation in Nigeria, with many noting attributions to climate change as markedly unhelpful. Baroness Cox wrote that, "The UK Government must reconsider its narrative on the tragedies in Nigeria. It can no longer hold on to the narrative

of fighting for economic resources due to climate change." Similarly, Joseph Bature Fidelis from the Justice Development and Peace Commission in Maiduguri Diocese noted that, "Perpetrators confuse the narrative with other factors such as climate change, unfair treatment and marginalisation to hide under the cover and perpetrate crime."

29. Martin Parsons from the Lindisfarne Centre for the Study of Christian Persecution responded that, "It is important to distinguish between context and motivation. Whilst issues such climate change leading to increasing desertification are unquestionably a very significant part of the context, this does not mean that they are the core drivers of attacks on Christians. If they were, then one would, other things being equal, expect less asymmetry in the casualty figures, than the current situation where the overwhelming majority of victims are either Christians or adherents of African Traditional Religions."

**"Herder migration patterns are not a new phenomenon, historically these groups have encountered one another and remained peaceful."**

30. Likewise, commenting on the 'Farmer-Herder conflict' of the Middle Belt, Pastor Ayo Adedoyin from PSJ UK wrote, "Here, climate change is thought to have pushed pastoralist herding communities from the north into the Middle Belt, where conflict between them and farming villages has become commonplace. Such disputes centre around competition over resources, specifically the availability of land and access to key waterpoints. While competition could result in minor forms of dispute, the severity of bloodshed and the mostly one-sided nature of the attacks indicates that these attacks require a deeper analysis of the real root-cause of these attacks. These disputes are amplified between different ethnic and religious groups. The most obvious example occurs between the Fulani herdsmen, largely followers of Islam, which come into conflict with settled farming communities, predominantly Christian in faith. Attacks between these groups have escalated, causing many thousands of people to be killed since the return to civilian rule in 1999 and certainly many hundreds in the period under review. It is important to emphasise that herder migration patterns are not a new phenomenon, historically these groups have encountered one another and remained peaceful."

**TRIBAL AND/OR ETHNIC TENSIONS**

31. Nigeria has at least 250 different ethnic groups, and, to a large extent, ethnic divides are closely associated with religious divides, with attacks targeting ethnic groups also impacting religious groups, given an overlap between the two. GuardPost Nigeria gave the example of Southern Kaduna, which has 'a long history of fierce ethno-religious and political struggles over power, territory, economic opportunities, and agricultural resources'. They added that tribal groups 'have shaped their histories and identities around deeply held grievances and the perception of suppression, fear of ethnic cleansing and dislocation by the more politically powerful Hausa-Fulani people'.
32. Several respondents concluded that ethnic tensions have worsened in recent years. Julia Bicknell, a freelance journalist, assessed that 'Divisions based on ethnicity and religion seem to have intensified' over the past three years, 'not least fuelled by the disputed election result and the Muslim-Muslim tickets of the two leading parties, which overturned traditional precedent of running mates of different religions'. Similarly, PSJ UK submitted that attacks between Fulani herdsmen and settled farming communities have continued to escalate, 'causing many thousands of people to be killed since the return to civilian rule in 1999 and certainly many hundreds in the period under review'. They added that "It is important to emphasise that herder migration patterns are not a new phenomenon, historically these groups have encountered one another and remained peaceful."

33. PSJ UK also highlighted how ethnic divisions drive conflict in the north-west, particularly in Zamfara, where Fulani and Hausa communities resort to violence. They explained that, "Politicians and policymakers often stoke religious and ethnic tensions for political gain, demonstrated recently following gubernatorial polling. A recent statement by the British High Commission in Abuja announced their intention to sanction several public and political figures for 'inflammatory ethno-religious language'." CSW added that 'In the north-west, Hausa Muslim villagers have similarly been killed, raped, abducted and extorted by perpetrators.'" These include Fulani radicals from neighbouring countries like Niger.

**"In the north-west, Hausa Muslim villagers have similarly been killed, raped, abducted and extorted by perpetrators."**

### CRIMINALITY AND CORRUPTION

34. Criminality and corruption were identified as a core driver of violence and impunity in Nigeria. Search for Common Ground observed that 'violence as a whole is increasing, with criminality, banditry, and kidnapping becoming common occurrences.' In particular, they identified criminality and armed banditry as a predominant driver of the conflict in the north-west region. SBM Intelligence also thought that violence by criminal groups against clergy specifically had increased in recent years, and Ignatius Kaigama from the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja expected criminality to worsen if the Nigerian Government chose further inaction.
35. There was also an acute awareness among respondents of a severe lack of justice for victims and abundant impunity for perpetrators of violence, with several respondents noting the need for the Nigerian Government to accept responsibility for the corruption. PSJ UK submitted that the, "Nigerian Government must address widespread corruption throughout its political system and maintain a liberal rule of law by tackling prevailing impunity amidst its judiciary." They continued, "A culture of impunity is deeply ingrained throughout society, in which many believe that those perpetrators breaking the law rarely face justice."
36. Likewise, a respondent from ICSA stated that it was 'bribery and corruption and bad governance which has allowed this horrendous state of affairs to continue unabated for so long'. GuardPost Nigeria commented that, "The Nigerian Government is complicit in the killings because instead of arresting the killers, security agents arrest victims and their community leaders." There are concerns that corruption will continue to prevent victims of persecution from seeing justice.

**"The Nigerian Government is complicit in the killings because instead of arresting the killers, security agents arrest victims and their community leaders."**

37. Commenting on the recent elections, the International Committee on Nigeria observed that, "Recently concluded Presidential (and Congressional) Elections in Nigeria have exposed more corruption and concerns. The Christian population is suffering from insecurity due to Islamic terrorists and radical Muslim militants. They feel their voice was not heard during the elections." They cited voter intimidation in the form of verbal and physical threats and attacks as examples of this corruption.

38. Finally, the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto and GuardPost Nigeria identified nepotism as a particular driver within corruption. GuardPost Nigeria concluded that as a result of nepotism in the appointment of top positions in the armed forces and the police, "Officers are not working for the interest of the nation but their circumscribed groups and leanings."

## POLITICS

39. Politics was closely associated with the current FoRB situation in Nigeria. Several respondents noted the general corruption of political leaders, with some respondents also noting fundamentalist sympathies of politicians as a driver of conflict. Search for Common Ground identified that various leaders make use of 'narratives that fuel inter-religious tensions for political gain,' in particular, the 'other-ing' of certain groups. They added that politicians are particularly guilty of using hate speech, which further fuels conflict. A number of respondents raised specific concerns about former-Governor Nasir el-Rufai.<sup>17</sup> El-Rufai has been accused of using inciting language, such as a tweet that says that 'anyone, soldier or not that kills the Fulani takes a loan repayable one day',<sup>18</sup> or his statement that those who try and intervene in Nigeria 'will go back in body bags'.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, he has been accused of spreading divisive disinformation by alleging that some attacks on churches are perpetrated by Christians, posing as Boko Haram insurgents, to 'tarnish the name of Islam'.<sup>20</sup>
40. Several respondents also attributed a predominance of Muslim political leaders, and the side-lining of Christian ones, as a driver of FoRB violations in Nigeria. A respondent from a Nigerian seminary reflected that, "politics is played based on religion. In Borno State... a Christian has never been a governor or the deputy. Out of over 20 commissioners, one Christian is appointed." Echoing this sentiment, Joshua Jydson Danlami from Hausa Christians Foundation observed a 'disenfranchisement of political processes in many Christian communities across northern Nigeria'. Commenting on the recent election, GuardPost Nigeria criticised the All Progressives Congress for its 'clear violation of National Character Law and religious sensitivity of the people' by opting for 'a Muslim-Muslim ticket for the president and vice president, thereby causing many to believe that there is an agenda to Islamise the country'.
41. SBM Intelligence submitted that, "Muslim domination of the north and its politics makes it difficult for religious liberalism." They concluded that this has 'led to the introduction of Sharia and its police force – the Hisbah – which has also targeted non-Muslims', as well as 'anti-blasphemy violence that led to the killing of Deborah Samuel in Sokoto in May 2022 and the detention of Mubarak Bala – a Muslim turned atheist'.

## FLOW OF WEAPONS

42. SBM Intelligence noted concern over the flow of weapons, describing Nigeria as a country 'replete with freely flowing small arms and light weapons'. They warned that it was 'only a matter of time' before Islamists in Nigeria 'pick up arms against the State', citing Boko Haram as a past example.
43. Open Doors UK and Ireland urged that the 'Nigerian Government needs to address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons'. They recommended that this can be "addressed by strengthening border security and

<sup>17</sup> See for example: [csw.org.uk/2023/06/06/press/6011/article.htm](https://csw.org.uk/2023/06/06/press/6011/article.htm)

<sup>18</sup> [twitter.com/elrufai/status/224577000218689537](https://twitter.com/elrufai/status/224577000218689537)

<sup>19</sup> [saharareporters.com/2019/02/06/video-youll-go-back-body-bags---el-rufai-threatens-kill-foreigners-who-interfere-nigerias](https://saharareporters.com/2019/02/06/video-youll-go-back-body-bags---el-rufai-threatens-kill-foreigners-who-interfere-nigerias)

<sup>20</sup> [twitter.com/elrufai/status/508917550747774976](https://twitter.com/elrufai/status/508917550747774976)



by initiating programmes that focus on equitable disarming of the population. Collaboration in addressing all these issues can be improved with greater intelligence sharing between intelligence communities and trusted partners (e.g. NGOs)."

## CONCLUSION

44. Respondents were agreed that the security crisis in Nigeria was driven by a range of different factors, all of which magnified the impact of violence in the country or prevented an effective response. However, there was concern expressed among some respondents that some of these factors were being misused to obscure the role of religious identity in determining the targeting and impact of the violence. The APPG believes that a nuanced approach to the complex situation in Nigeria will require understanding the range of factors involved in the violence but will also acknowledge how religion or belief is central to the experience of many victims of violence in Nigeria and has the capacity to shape the impact of other factors in turn.

# MISINFORMATION AND INACCURATE REPORTING

45. As in the previous APPG report, concerns were raised by many respondents about the accuracy of reporting on the violence across Nigeria. Search for Common Ground reported that 'particularly sensationalistic or unsubstantiated reporting that leads to misrepresentation, mis/disinformation, and an overfocus on certain regions or groups above others' drive conflict in Nigeria. Victoria Ayator Iyange from St Joseph's Catholic Church in Nyuman, Makurdi, also noted that misinformation spread by religious leaders to their followers fuelled 'spite and vengeance' in Nigeria.
46. Search for Common Ground also highlighted that, "Many issues in the southern part are underreported, which leads to further uneven reporting. Similarly, the media plays a key role in fanning the flames of conflict, by identifying perpetrators of violence along religious or ethnic lines, sometimes inaccurately, compounding the sense of religious identity as the key fault line in conflict." They added that, "When it comes to media reporting, we need to see examples of local conflicts being resolved peacefully, as they still often are in rural areas, and we need to celebrate actors who are held up as media and political heroes, while having information shared in a nuanced and professional manner. Crimes must be reported by the name of the individual perpetrator, when known, and not by their ethnic or religious identity."
47. Misreporting was closely associated with misinformation by our respondents, particularly around narratives concerning the situation in Nigeria. In particular, the attribution of the conflict in Nigeria to climate change was deemed to be misreporting by multiple respondents. CSW reported that, "regarding misinformation, the continued clinging by key international actors to narratives that have been overtaken by events, such as the climate change/resource narratives, has hindered and delayed much needed international assistance and occasioned verbal and mental gymnastics on the part of the espousers when the facts manifestly do not match said narrative." Likewise, Luka Binniyat from Southern Kaduna Peoples Union identified climate change as a false narrative for the events in Nigeria, commenting that, "It is not true that climate change and all those academic theories are responsible for the mass murder and mass displacements of our people."
48. David Hundeyin from West Africa Weekly said the Nigerian Government was to blame for misreporting the situation in Nigeria. He reflected that, "not only is an active genocide occurring in Nigeria in full view of the world, but Nigeria's Government is actively attempting to mislead the whole world into ignoring it altogether or mischaracterising it as a series of 'communal clashes' between 'farmers and herdsmen' due to growing populations and 'climate change'." With all this in mind, respondents appear to agree that the issue of accurate reporting has not improved in the years since the 2020 APPG report and that this is an urgent need to better inform responses both in Nigeria and worldwide.

# RESPONSE OF THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

49. In 2020, the APPG noted that inaction by the Nigerian Government contributed to the spread of human rights violations in the country. The report covered alleged failures to investigate attacks, to protect vulnerable groups, and to prosecute offenders. Unfortunately, the picture presented by respondents today does not suggest that much has improved. Instead, a number of respondents expressed concern at the Nigerian Government's inadequate response to the ongoing situation.

**"The most significant driver of insecurity has been the inaction at federal and state level with regard to addressing attacks, particularly on Christian and Hausa areas."**

50. CSW submitted that, "the most significant driver of insecurity has been the inaction at federal and state level with regard to addressing attacks, particularly on Christian and Hausa areas. In this the Government of Kaduna State particularly stands out, as its negligence has turned the most garrisoned state in the nation into one of the top three most insecure states, where even the state capital is not entirely safe. Additionally, while soldiers are sent to deprive communities of anything that could serve as a means of defence, little is done to apprehend attackers or to protect areas when they are under sustained attack."
51. West Africa Weekly criticised legislation introduced by the Government for disproportionately discriminating against Christians. They wrote: "Since 2015, there have been no fewer than six separate legislative attempts to force or sneak through laws that seek to dispossess Christian Middle Belterers of their land under the guise of 'grazing routes' for itinerant Muslim herders, 'grazing reserves' for the same group, and – most obnoxious of all – a 'Water Resources Bill' that sought to forcibly expropriate land nationwide for the benefit of itinerant Muslim herders, by making them legally entitled to use of all water sources, public and private."
52. The NGO Regulation Bill has also contributed to ongoing FoRB violations. SBM Intelligence noted that, "The federal government's introduction of the NGO Regulation Bill in 2017 was seen as an attempt to curb the influences of certain church leaders." They explained that, "it was dismantled, reassembled, and passed under the CAMA Act of 2020. In 2022, the NGO bill was reintroduced to the National Assembly. The ostensible reason was to curtail the activities of NGOs the army has identified as inimical to its counterinsurgency operations in the north-east. It was later expanded to regulate finance sources for all non-governmental organisations."
53. An effective response to the security crisis in Nigeria must be led by the Nigerian Government itself. While the grave challenges facing the country are clear, the APPG is profoundly concerned by reports of ongoing inaction in the face of extremist violence and human rights violations. In addition, the impact noted by respondents on curbing the influence of NGOs, or on other legislative measures with a discriminatory impact cannot be ignored. The new President now faces grave challenges given past inaction, with the real risk of further deterioration to come. Wise leadership and deep political skill is now urgently needed to resolve the crisis. As the new Nigerian Government takes power, it is essential that the UK and other nations are proactive in urging the new Government to take action, and in offering all assistance possible.

# IMPLICATIONS OF DETERIORATION

54. The majority of respondents noted that the situation in Nigeria had already worsened over the past three years and that this was likely to continue. Respondents noted the particular vulnerability of Christians, Humanists and moderate Muslim communities. Open Doors UK & Ireland, for example, noted that Nigeria had risen significantly on its *World Watch List*. Likewise, the Humanist Association of Nigeria predicted worsening abuses linked to FoRB if the situation for religious minorities in Nigeria went unaddressed.
55. Many respondents described how the security crisis in the country had resulted in lost opportunities for Nigeria and for the region. In the words of The Most Rev'd Dr Henry Ndukuba, Anglican Archbishop of Nigeria, to the G20 Religious Forum meeting in November 2022, "Nigeria is a country with great natural resources to benefit its population and other countries. But it is held back from developing and sharing these for the good of all by the insecurity, uncertainty, fear, and distrust generated by religious conflict."<sup>21</sup>
56. Others noted the risk of progress in the country's development being set back by the violence, as well as trading opportunities being much reduced. A report from PSJ UK noted that, "Over the past decade, insecurity has become the biggest obstacle to Nigeria fulfilling its economic potential," adding that, "Nigeria's security crisis is having a calamitous economic impact, deterring foreign investment and undermining prospects for economic growth."<sup>22</sup>
57. At a national level, the rights violations taking place in Nigeria pose an existential threat to national unity. Respondents were particularly concerned about the increasing division of the country along ethnic and religious lines and the growth of inflammatory rhetoric used against other groups. These concerns were particularly visible in the context of the recent election.

## **Commodore Kunle Olawunmi describes the violence of extremist groups in Nigeria as a strategy of 'Talibanisation' – a deliberate, religiously motivated degrading of security and order in the country.**

58. A number of respondents noted that groups which have suffered attacks in the Middle Belt have begun to organise militias of their own and even to carry out reprisal attacks. Some respondents cited this danger of attacks by communities which have suffered atrocities as a tipping point as, if this were to become widespread, the security situation would be hard to retrieve. In addition, Search for Common Ground noted 'a recent spate of attacks on churches by traditional worshippers in Plateau State'.<sup>23</sup> Search noted that, "although members of ATRs have usually remained peaceful or been on the receiving end of FoRB violations, this shift towards violence further highlights the need to recognise and include minority belief groups in religious engagement work rather than focusing exclusively on Christians and Muslims."
59. The threat of terrorism was prominent in the minds of many who responded. It was noted, for example, that groups such as ISWAP could take advantage of the chaos in the country and use Nigeria as a base to launch attacks elsewhere. Professor of Global Security Studies, Commodore Kunle Olawunmi describes the violence

<sup>21</sup> [anglican.ink/2022/11/08/address-by-the-archbishop-of-nigeria-to-the-g20-religious-forum-meeting-in-bali-2-nov-2022](https://anglican.ink/2022/11/08/address-by-the-archbishop-of-nigeria-to-the-g20-religious-forum-meeting-in-bali-2-nov-2022)

<sup>22</sup> [psjuk.org/on-the-brink](https://psjuk.org/on-the-brink)

<sup>23</sup> [punchng.com/masqueraders-carted-away-n550000-after-attack-on-plateau-church-pastor](https://punchng.com/masqueraders-carted-away-n550000-after-attack-on-plateau-church-pastor)

of extremist groups in Nigeria as a strategy of 'Talibanisation'<sup>24</sup> – a deliberate, religiously motivated degrading of security and order in the country. One respondent noted a recent incident in which embassies in Abuja had raised their security threat level as a sign of further deterioration.

60. Several respondents had genuine concerns about the long-term survival of the Nigerian state, echoing the recent Foreign Affairs Select Committee report, which noted that the security challenges faced by Nigeria were 'existential'.<sup>25</sup> A 2020 report from CSW also highlighted Nigeria's security challenges, warning that 'this pivotal West African nation [was] close to failing'.<sup>26</sup>
61. Respondents were agreed that the implications of such a collapse would be absolutely catastrophic for the wider region. Nigeria is Africa's largest democracy and with a population of around 220 million. However, the region is already beset with instability, with coups in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso. There are also a growing number of people displaced by conflict, either as IDPs or as refugees. If security in Nigeria were to deteriorate further, more large-scale people movements would be a likely consequence, placing further pressure on neighbouring countries and potentially creating a refugee crisis with implications for the whole region and beyond.
62. With these wider risks in mind, it is clear that Nigeria's security situation is an urgent problem which must be addressed – not just for the sake of those suffering rights violations because of their religion or belief, but for all people in Nigeria and the wider region. Addressing these challenges will require action by the Nigerian Government and by international partners, not least the UK.

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<sup>24</sup> [youtube.com/watch?v=KyHowYHyAp8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyHowYHyAp8)

<sup>25</sup> [committees.parliament.uk/publications/22063/documents/163771/default](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22063/documents/163771/default) (paragraph 34)

<sup>26</sup> [csw.org.uk/2020/06/15/report/4689/article.htm](https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/06/15/report/4689/article.htm)

# GENOCIDE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

63. Respondents were divided on the use of the term 'genocide' to describe what is happening to Christians in Nigeria. Many felt that, given the sheer number of people being killed on account of their religion (see above paragraph 2) this was the only term appropriate to use. In support of this, they cited not only the numbers killed in Nigeria, but also other tactics used that indicate the attempt to exterminate entire communities, such as the deliberate targeting of women and children and the destruction of homes, food and livelihoods to displace Christians strategically.

## Nigeria's House of Representatives declared the ongoing attacks by herders in Plateau State to be a genocide.

64. Respondents also noted warnings from people based in Nigeria of the danger of the violence meeting the definition of genocide. For example, the previous APPG report described how, on 4 July 2018, Nigeria's House of Representatives declared the ongoing attacks by herders in Plateau State to be a genocide.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Aid to the Church in Need noted that in July 2019, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum stated that Fulani militants were 'deliberately committing genocide against the Nigerian people while disguising as cattle breeders'. They also note that Christian leaders, such as the Roman Catholic Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto Diocese, have said the same about the systematic attacks against Nigerian Christians by Fulani militants.

65. As well as the killings of large groups of people, several respondents also pointed to the consistent attacks and killings of smaller numbers, adding that while these attacks aren't as widely reported, their cumulative effect is one of 'genocide in slow motion' – in the words of the Archbishop of Nigeria.

66. However, many respondents also noted the difficulties involved in meeting the legal definition of genocide, which has a high evidential bar. Some, for example, considered that while the attacks on Christians by extremist groups such as Boko Haram or ISWAP could meet this legal definition, there remained insufficient evidence of genocidal intent in other areas, such as the Middle Belt. Some respondents suggested that in these areas, it may be easier to establish that crimes against humanity had been committed against Christians. Search for Common Ground warned against using terms such as genocide without the evidence to confirm that the legal conditions have been met, adding that the inappropriate use of the term risks overshadowing the complex dynamics of the conflict.

67. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, warned in February 2023 of the dangers of targeted attacks in Nigeria along religious and ethnic lines, as well as the worsening security situation. She later added, in the context of the Nigerian election:

*"The election season... has witnessed a surge in the use of inflammatory language, hateful and divisive rhetoric. Such hate speech is amplified at an unprecedented rate by digital technology. Hate speech, esp. if accompanied by policies and practices that discriminate against populations based on their identity often results in hate crimes, discrimination, and violence and can be both a precursor and a trigger of atrocity crimes, in particular genocide."*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> [appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf](https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/200615-Nigeria-Unfolding-Genocide-Report-of-the-APPG-for-FoRB.pdf) (paragraph 70)

<sup>28</sup> [un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/OSA\\_Prevention\\_of\\_Genocide\\_Statement\\_Nigeria.pdf](https://un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/OSA_Prevention_of_Genocide_Statement_Nigeria.pdf)

# INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT INVESTIGATION

68. In 2010 the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a Preliminary Examination of the situation in Nigeria with a focus on Boko Haram (and its splinter groups) and the Nigerian security forces. This examination concluded in December 2020 with the finding that the statutory criteria for opening an investigation had been met. The ICC announced that it would request authorisation from the Judges of the Pre-Trial Chamber of the Court to open investigations.
69. The preliminary examination found there was a reasonable basis to believe that Boko Haram and its splinter groups have, "committed the following acts constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes: murder; rape, sexual slavery, including forced pregnancy and forced marriage; enslavement; torture; cruel treatment; outrages upon personal dignity; taking of hostages; intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities; intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance; intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to education and to places of worship and similar institutions; conscripting and enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed groups and using them to participate actively in hostilities; persecution on gender and religious grounds; and other inhumane acts."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in the assessment of the ICC, the alleged crimes committed in Nigeria are motivated by a desire to persecute gender and religious minorities.

**Therefore, in the assessment of the ICC, the alleged crimes committed in Nigeria are motivated by a desire to persecute gender and religious minorities.**

70. Additionally the examination found that there was a reasonable basis to believe Nigerian Security Forces, "committed the following acts constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes: murder, rape, torture, and cruel treatment; enforced disappearance; forcible transfer of population; outrages upon personal dignity; intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such and against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities; unlawful imprisonment; conscripting and enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces and using them to participate actively in hostilities; persecution on gender and political grounds; and other inhumane acts."<sup>30</sup>
71. Since the conclusion of the Preliminary Examination the establishment of 'investigations' has stalled. Nigerian authorities have asked the ICC to resource domestic accountability efforts in relation to crimes committed by non-State armed groups associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Al-Qaida, and Boko Haram before agreeing to a formal agreement with the Office of the Prosecutor for a formal Investigation.<sup>31</sup> The current focus on domestic accountability appears to be excluding accountability for Nigerian Security Forces.

<sup>29</sup> [icc-cpi.int/nigeria](https://www.icc-cpi.int/nigeria)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> [icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-05-annual-report-of-the-office-of-the-prosecutor.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-05-annual-report-of-the-office-of-the-prosecutor.pdf)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

72. Respondents to the current call for evidence also submitted recommendations for the Nigerian Government, the UK, and the international community on responding to violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria. Many of these recommendations echo those given in the 2020 APPG report, which are still valid. However, the recommendations below may serve as a supplement to the previous report in light of the further deterioration that has taken place. This section also includes recommendations made in the course of the 2022 APPG delegation visit to Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

73. The Nigerian Government is a signatory to many international conventions and agreements which guarantee human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, to all citizens. The new Nigerian Government must ensure that it fulfils its obligations under these agreements, engaging fully with accountability mechanisms such as the upcoming Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council.
74. Above all, the Nigerian Government must ensure the security and safety of vulnerable citizens. Many respondents to this inquiry highlighted the current lack of basic security and the widespread fear of violence. Prioritising security will include such measures as securing the country's borders and reducing the prevalence of small arms and light weapons. In addition, an independent panel should review the implementation of Nigeria's National Security Strategy and provide workable solutions where implementation has not been as desired.
75. It is of vital importance that all Nigerian citizens feel able to access equal treatment regardless of faith or belief, especially in seeking justice following attacks. The Nigerian Government must therefore ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations are held accountable swiftly in the justice system and that public figures who incite violence and those who fund terrorist activities are also prosecuted. It should also refrain from passing legislation which may be seen as having a discriminatory impact based on religion or belief.
76. Many people in Nigeria have been displaced or even abducted following violence against their communities because of their faith or belief. The Nigerian Government must provide more support to those in both official and unofficial IDP camps and should prioritise the safe return of those who have fled to the lands from which they have been removed. In addition, the Government of Nigeria must continue efforts to secure the release of those still held as hostages, including the Chibok girls and Leah Sharibu.
77. Recognising the key role played by religious divisions and extremist ideology, the Nigerian Government should support dialogue between faith or belief groups, including minorities such as African Traditional Religions and Humanists. In addition, given the vital role of education in addressing radicalisation, such dialogue and deradicalisation efforts should be included in the religious education curriculum.
78. Given the role of misinformation identified by many respondents, the Nigerian Government should take the lead in ensuring accurate reporting of rights violations committed in the country. It should therefore support credible means of incident tracking and conduct its own research into religious attitudes and other drivers of conflict in the country.
79. Accusations of blasphemy have been the cause of many prominent rights violations by both state and non-state actors in Nigeria. The Nigerian Government should consider repealing blasphemy laws where they exist, and



review criminal legislation which may be misused to effectively punish blasphemy. At the very least, it should hold those accountable who make false accusations, abolish the death penalty sanction for blasphemy cases, and ensure that those accused have access to legal representation. With regard to specific cases, it should also ensure that the Supreme Court is free to make a ruling in the case of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu without external pressure and should urgently review the sentencing of Mubarak Bala.

80. Given the findings of the International Criminal Court, the Nigerian Government should ensure that domestic accountability efforts also investigate crimes committed by Nigerian Security Forces as well as those committed by non-state actors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UK GOVERNMENT

81. The UK should raise the issue of Freedom of Religion or Belief and human rights violations in Nigeria with the new Nigerian Government as a matter of urgency. It should offer specific support to Nigeria in dealing with its security crisis and in implementing the recommendations outlined above and in the previous APPG report. Violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief must be raised regularly by the UK in bilateral meetings with the Nigerian Government.
82. The human rights violations in Nigeria have a clear religious dimension which is not sufficiently acknowledged by the UK Government. The UK should acknowledge this and increase support for FoRB programmes and research in Nigeria. In addition, the UK should require an annual report on the state of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria from the UK High Commission in the country. The UK should also investigate the claim that the violence in Nigeria may be considered to be genocide or crimes against humanity, supporting the resumption of the ICC investigation into the situation in Nigeria.
83. The security crisis in Nigeria, and its implications for the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in the country, is highly relevant to the UK-Nigeria Defence and Security Partnership. This partnership should be used to address the security concerns of groups which have been attacked. For example, the UK could encourage the Nigerian Government through this partnership to prioritise the safety of farmers to prevent food insecurity. Given the grave concerns around the Nigerian Government's response to the security crisis, the Defence and Security Partnership should also be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.
84. The UK should take steps to support education programs which may counteract religious division and misunderstanding of the conflict. It should, for example, support religious literacy training for civil servants and diplomats and training for faith leaders to identify and combat hateful inciting speech. In addition, to counteract misinformation about the conflict in Nigeria, the UK should support training for British and Nigerian journalists to ensure accurate reporting.
85. The UK should urgently increase its support to those in official and unofficial IDP camps, including targeted programs for those who have suffered persecution on the grounds of their faith or belief. The UK should also consider how its asylum policy can accommodate those in Nigeria who have suffered severe human rights violations on account of their religion or belief, such as those accused of blasphemy.
86. The UK should urge the Nigerian Government to allow independent bodies to investigate claims of atrocities and support an international fact-finding commission to investigate Nigeria's security crisis and its implications for religious minorities.

87. The UK should take strong action against those implicated in committing human rights violations, inciting violence, or funding terrorism in Nigeria. These actions should include targeted sanctions under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations and the refusal of visas, where relevant.
88. The UK should work with Nigerian authorities to support legal reform and build capacity of lawyers to advocate for Freedom of Religion or Belief with a focus on protecting individuals accused of blasphemy or apostasy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

89. The international community should recognise the urgent threat faced by many groups in Nigeria on account of their religion or belief. States and international organisations should take steps to hold the Nigerian Government to its human rights obligations through processes such as the Universal Periodic Review, which Nigeria will undergo in early 2024.
90. The international community should provide all support possible for Nigeria to overcome its security threats, including security assistance and training and support for civil society. At the same time, states and international bodies should urge Nigeria to prioritise the security of the most vulnerable in the country, raising violations of human rights swiftly with their Nigerian partners.
91. Given the issues with reporting and misinformation around the conflict in Nigeria, the need for accurate and authoritative reporting of human rights violations in the country has never been greater. Therefore:
  - A UN fact-finding commission should be formed to investigate Nigeria's security crisis, particularly as it gives rise to violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.
  - The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief should work with other relevant UN Rapporteurs (e.g. on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions) to produce accurate information on the human rights situation in Nigeria.
  - Given the urgency of the crisis, the UN should also consider appointing a special envoy for Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.
92. The international community should continue to assess the growing number of voices claiming that genocide and crimes against humanity are being committed against Christians and others in Nigeria on account of their faith or belief. Should the relevant legal standards be met, the perpetrators must be held to account swiftly, including through the International Criminal Court, which should resume its investigation.
93. Given the high numbers of people internally displaced in Nigeria or refugees in neighbouring countries, many of whom are displaced due to their religion or belief, further support is needed to assist such groups and to allow them to return. Even more support will be required if the security situation deteriorates further. International organisations should ensure that those who have been displaced due to their religion or belief receive specific support while they are refugees or IDPs and that they are afforded the means to return in safety.

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