

December 7, 2021

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing today as a coalition of concerned individuals who care deeply about the well-being of the Nigerian people and the right of all Nigerians to live out their faith freely without fear. We urgently request that the Biden administration redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) on religious freedom.

On Monday, December 7, 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that Nigeria would be, for the first time, declared a CPC by the U.S. government.¹ This decision was applauded worldwide by parliamentarians, humanitarian organizations, religious ministries, secular and faith-based NGOs, and others who have been troubled for many years by the increasingly deadly human rights violations in Nigeria.

Following Sec. Pompeo's announcement, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) published a statement titled "USCIRF welcomes the State Department's Designation of Nigeria among World's Worst Violators of Religious Freedom." It observed:

*We are gratified that the State Department has named 10 countries as CPCs. We particularly welcome Nigeria's designation for the first time as a CPC for tolerating egregious violations of religious freedom, which USCIRF had been recommending since 2009. Nigeria is the first secular democracy that has been named a CPC, which demonstrates that we must be vigilant that all forms of governments respect religious freedom.*²

How can it be, less than a year after that significant designation, that Nigeria's CPC designation has been dropped without a public explanation? The ongoing violence, killing, and displacement against Christians and others have only increased. In fact, during 2021, massacres happen almost nightly, while by day, young boys are killed in the fields. Pregnant women are brutally dismembered, their babies mutilated before their eyes. And now, an entire church congregation has been abducted and held captive.³

¹ Laura Kelly, "Nigeria joins State Dept list of violators of religious freedom," *The Hill*, December 7, 2020, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/529121-nigeria-joins-state-dept-list-of-violators-of-religious-freedom>.

² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Welcomes the State Department's Designation of Nigeria among World's Worst Violators of Religious Freedom," press release, December 7, 2020, <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-welcomes-state-departments-designation-nigeria-among-worlds>.

³ Anugrah Kumar, "Over 60 members of Baptist church kidnapped in Nigeria," *Christian Post*, November 6, 2021, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-60-members-of-baptist-church-kidnapped-in-nigeria.html>.

In recent months, gangs of Fulani militants, Boko Haram terrorists, and other armed radicals have become even more brazen, torching entire villages and farms, ambushing, and killing innocent people in gory, unspeakable ways. Sadly, the victims are often targeted because of their religious identity. Mass killings—the kind that used to be sporadic—are now a national emergency. *Catholic News Agency* reported in July, “an estimated 3,462 Christians have been killed in Nigeria in the first 200 days of 2021, according to a new study. This equates to 17 Christians being murdered every day in Africa’s most populous country.”⁴

In addition to the rampant violence all too often directed toward religious communities and churches, blasphemy laws enforced by state-sanctioned Shari’a courts are utilized against humanists and others. Accusations of blasphemy for insulting the Prophet Muhammad could be met with a death sentence.⁵

For years, the Nigerian government has done virtually nothing to stop this violence. In order for Nigeria to have been removed from the key list of Countries of Particular Concern, it ought to have demonstrated substantial progress in protecting religious communities from attacks and affirming the right of all people to practice their faith freely. This did not happen, and the removal of Nigeria’s CPC designation is unjustified and sends the wrong message to governments around the world who engage in or tolerate egregious violations of religious freedom.

If America ignores what’s happening in Nigeria, it will only excuse leaders who choose to turn a blind eye to such travesties, in Nigeria and around the world. International pressure is one of the most significant weapons the world has to stop the slow-motion war unfolding in Nigeria.⁶ American leaders must not turn their backs and walk away.

We, the undersigned, are writing on behalf of the communities in Nigeria where more Christians are currently being killed than anywhere else on the face of the earth. We implore you to immediately redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern. Failing to do so rewards the Nigerian government for tolerating and engaging in egregious, systematic, and ongoing religious freedom violations and sends a message to extremists that their actions will go unpunished.

If you decline to act, people of faith in Nigeria will bear the fallout of this decision. That is unacceptable.

Sincerely, the undersigned organizations and individuals,

⁴ “Report: 17 Christians killed every day in Nigeria in first half of 2021,” *Catholic News Agency*, July 31, 2021, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/248547/report-17-christians-killed-every-day-in-nigeria-in-first-half-of-2021>.

⁵ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Annual Report 2021 – Nigeria Chapter,” accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Nigeria%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf>.

⁶ Bernard-Henri Lévy, “The New War Against Africa’s Christians,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2019, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-war-against-africas-christians-11576880200>.

Organizations:

Family Research Council
Alliance Defending Freedom International
International Christian Concern
Jubilee Campaign
ChinaAid
The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)
Frontline Missions International
New Wineskins Missionary Network (Anglican)
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Prayer Pioneers
Saint Nicholas Freedom Group
Religious Freedom Coalition
Anglican Persecuted Church Network
Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) Suffering Church Network
Katartismos Global

Individuals:

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Samuel Brownback
Former Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom

Baroness Cox
Founder & President, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)

David Alton
Lord Alton of Liverpool

Mariam Ibraheem
Co-founder and Director of Global Mobilization, Tahrir Alnisa Foundation

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Special Advisor on Religious Freedom, Family Research Council

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Anglican Bishop of Jos

Dr. Gloria Puldu Samdi
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President, Red Eagle Enterprises, Chair of the Africa Working Group IRF Roundtable

Lauren Homer
President, Law and Liberty Trust

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Co-Founder/Chairman, The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)

Jenny Noyes
Executive Director, New Wineskins Missionary Network (Anglican)

Father John Anderson
President, Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

William J. Murray
President, Religious Freedom Coalition

Faith J. H. McDonnell
Director of Advocacy, Katartismos Global

Obianuju Ekeocha
Founder and President, Culture of Life Africa

cc:

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The Honorable Chuck Schumer
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The Honorable Mitch McConnell
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