



26 November 2018

**VIA OVERNIGHT DELIVERY SERVICE**

HE Adama Dieng  
Special Adviser to the Secretary-General  
on the Prevention of Genocide  
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 600  
New York, New York 10017

*RE: Request for Recognition of Atrocities Against Christians in Nigeria and for  
Appropriate Action*

Your Excellency:

As you may recall from our previous correspondence, the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international not-for-profit organisation located in Strasbourg, France, dedicated to protecting human rights and religious freedom in Europe and around the world. The ECLJ holds Special Consultative Status as an NGO before the United Nations and has submitted both written and oral statements to the United Nations Human Rights Council on this very subject. The ECLJ submits this correspondence on behalf of its members and over 752,000 persons, including persons residing in 191 nations and territories, who are deeply concerned about attacks against Christians and the spread of genocide.

First, we should like to thank you for your thoughtful letter dated 12 September 2017 in response to our request for action in the ongoing genocide against Christians in Iraq and Syria as well as for all of the actions that you have taken in furtherance of that goal.

Today, we write to you regarding the rapidly deteriorating situation for Christians in Nigeria. Christians are increasingly the targets of religiously motivated violence, and immediate action must be taken to ensure that their plight does not rise to the level of their fellow Christians who have suffered so greatly in Iraq and Syria.

Nigeria is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south. Within the southern regions, Christians experience religious freedom; however, in the northern and central regions, Christians face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram and increasingly from Fulani herdsman, a group of Islamic nomadic herders<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>*Nigeria*, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/> (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

It is estimated that since May of 2011 Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people, displaced 2.4 million, and created 228,000 refugees<sup>2</sup>. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnapping to instill fear and to intimidate<sup>3</sup>. They target Christians and anyone else whom they see as a threat to the establishment of an Islamic State.

Additionally, reports indicate that since 2013 Boko Haram has abducted approximately 1,000 children in northeast Nigeria<sup>4</sup>. These attacks and kidnappings have been carried out when children are at school and should feel safe. However, it is estimated that Boko Haram has killed over 2,000 teachers and destroyed more than 1,400 schools<sup>5</sup>. Boko Haram routinely attacks girls' boarding schools in order to kidnap female students.

In February of 2018, Boko Haram insurgents abducted 110 students from a girls' boarding school. Of those, five were killed while being held captive. Ultimately, 104 of the schoolgirls were released, but Boko Haram still holds 15-year-old Leah Sharibu prisoner because she refuses to bend to Boko Haram's demands that she renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam<sup>6</sup>.

Now, reports have surfaced that Boko Haram has issued an ultimatum threatening that, if their demands are not met, they will make Leah a slave for life<sup>7</sup>. Even worse, according to Leah's father, Nathan Sharibu, 'The terrorist[s] threatened to kill Leah . . . if they don't get any response to their demands. Time is running out, that is why I am calling on the government to keep talking to them'<sup>8</sup>. Time is indeed running out. It is imperative that the government of Nigeria work quickly to bring Leah home safely. Action must be taken now for her freedom before it is too late and so that no other school girls face the same dire situation as Leah.

In addition to the deadly attacks by Boko Haram, there are reports of growing conflict in the central regions of Nigeria between the predominately Muslim Fulani herdsman and the predominately Christian farmers. The Fulani herdsman have begun attacking Christian farmers, destroying homes, churches, and even kidnapping Christian school girls in order to marry them to Muslim men<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>*Boko Haram in Nigeria*, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker?marker=19#1/conflict/boko-haram-in-nigeria>, (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

<sup>3</sup>Joe Sommerlad, *Boko Haram: Who are the Nigerian Jihadist Insurgents and How are They Funded?*, INDEPENDENT (30 Aug. 2018, 8:20 AM), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/boko-haram-who-nigeria-jihadi-terror-group-west-africa-girls-insurgents-sharia-law-a8513921.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan Winsor, *Boko Haram has Abducted over 1,000 Children, Killed More Than 2,000 Teachers*, ABC NEWS (14 Apr. 2018, 9:10 AM), <https://abcnews.go.com/International/boko-haram-abducted-1000-children-killed-2000-teachers/story?id=54442518>.

<sup>5</sup>*Id.*

<sup>6</sup>*Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home*, BBC NEWS (25 Mar. 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43535872>.

<sup>7</sup>Ahmad Salkida, *Boko Haram Executes Another Red Cross Worker, Says Leah will Live as Slave*, THE CABLE (15 Oct. 2018, 8:59 PM), <https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-boko-haram-executes-another-aide-worker-says-leah-will-live-as-slave>.

<sup>8</sup>Bukola Adebayo, *'Our Daughter is Facing a Death Sentence,' Parents of Leah Sharibu Cry Out*, CNN (4 Oct. 2018, 12:53 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/04/africa/nigerian-girl-boko-haram-ultimatum/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup>Ewelina U. Ochab, *Trump may not be Wrong on the Fulani Herdsmen Crisis in Nigeria*, FORBES (4 May 2018, 10:16 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/05/04/trump-may-not-be-wrong-on-the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria/#6b34945555ef>.

In April of 2018, Fulani herdsman carried out an attack during Mass at a Catholic Church located in Central Nigeria. The attacks resulted in the death of two priests and 17 parishioners<sup>10</sup>. Community resident Terhemem Angor described the horrific scene:

People started scampering and wailing, 19 persons, including Reverend Fathers Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, who were gunned down in cold blood, while many sustained injuries, including bullet wounds. After attacking the church, the invaders descended on the community and razed over 60 houses, farmland, food barns, after carting away what people had in their barns<sup>11</sup>.

A few days later, vicious radical Islamists wearing camouflage and carrying AK-47s – described as ‘herdsmen’ – pillaged Christian villages and burned down as many as 160 homes. The terrorists left a trail of at least 39 murdered Christians in their wake<sup>12</sup>. These were not random attacks. Scores of innocent people were murdered because of their Christian faith within a couple of days.

The President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, condemned these attacks stating, ‘[v]iolating a place of worship, killing priests and worshippers is not only vile, evil, and satanic, it is clearly calculated to stoke up religious conflict and plunge our communities into endless bloodletting’<sup>13</sup>.

Clearly, horrific acts of aggression are violating the peaceful lives of Christians in Nigeria. In order to prevent further loss of life, avoid a massive humanitarian crisis, and end increasing religiously motivated violence, we must act now. The U.N. Charter calls on the U.N. to *remove* threats to peace, and the Genocide Convention calls on the U.N. to *prevent* acts of genocide, not merely to respond to genocide. We have seen in Iraq and Syria what happens when the U.N. fails to take preventive measures when it is clear that mass atrocities are being carried out against a particular group of people. This is the only the beginning. If meaningful action is not taken now, the problem in Nigeria will worsen. ISIS and ISIS affiliate groups, like Boko Haram, have shown their resiliency time and time again. When they are forced out of one area, they flee in order to regroup and fight another day<sup>14</sup>.

As you are well aware, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is to ‘act[] as a catalyst to raise awareness of the causes and dynamics of genocide, to alert relevant actors where there is a risk of genocide, and to advocate and mobilize for appropriate action’<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>Kate Sheelnutt & World Watch Monitor, *Nigerian Mass Becomes a Massacre: Herdsmen Kill 18 Worshipers, Adding to Hundreds of Victims*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (25 Apr. 2018, 12:34 PM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/nigeria-fulani-attack-catholic-church-benue-boko-haram.html>.

<sup>11</sup>*Id.*

<sup>12</sup>Stoyan Zaimov, *Some 39 Nigerian Christians Massacred, Houses Burned Down In Violent Rampage*, CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER (27 Apr. 2018, 7:06 AM), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/some-39-nigerian-christians-massacred-houses-burned-down-in-violent-rampage-223425/>.

<sup>13</sup>*Nigeria's President Decries 'Satanic' Massacre of 18, Including Two Priests, in Catholic Church*, SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, (25 Apr. 2018, 2:20 PM), <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2143261/nigerias-president-decries-satanic-massacre-18-including-two>.

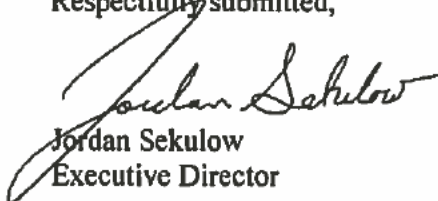
<sup>14</sup>Tyler Hicks, *Resilience of ISIS and Its Branches*, NEW YORK TIMES (27 Oct. 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/world/africa/boko-haram-isis-nigeria-niger.html>.

<sup>15</sup>*Mandate*, GENOCIDE PREVENTION & THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT, <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/office-mandate.html> (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).


Further, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is to 'make[] recommendations to the Security Council, through the Secretary-General, on actions to prevent or halt genocide'<sup>16</sup>.

We, therefore, respectfully and solemnly urge you, as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, to call for all United Nations bodies to recognise that the ongoing atrocities committed by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsman against Christians in Nigeria pose 'a risk of genocide' and to work immediately to put an end to the violence. Action must be taken to not only stop the spread of violence and 'prevent . . . genocide' against Christians within Nigeria, but also the spread of such violence throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Boko Haram has in fact already begun carrying out attacks in neighbouring Chad<sup>17</sup> and Cameroon<sup>18</sup>. We further request that you work closely with the government of Nigeria to encourage Nigeria to protect the people who are vulnerable to being attacked by preventing further attacks, prosecuting those who are responsible for these brutal atrocities, and providing aid and assistance to the victims.

Respectfully submitted,



Jordan Sekulow  
Executive Director



Robert W. Ash  
Senior Counsel

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<sup>16</sup>*Id.*

<sup>17</sup>*Nigeria's Boko Haram Militants Attack Chad for the First Time*, BBC NEWS (13 Feb. 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31453951>.

<sup>18</sup>*Suspected Boko Haram Fighters Kill 11 in Cameroon*, ALJAZEERA (25 Aug. 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/suspected-boko-haram-fighters-kill-11-cameroon-170825145004120.html>.