



Rehman Chishti MP
Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

6 August 2020

Dear Rehman,

We write following the publication of the report by the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, '*Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?*', which raises serious concerns about the scale of human suffering and the need for an urgent response.

Attacks led by Islamist militia continue in northern and central-belt states, with reports of escalating violence in the south-east:

- While the precise death toll is unknown, conservative estimates suggest that, since 2000, Fulani herdersⁱ have killed 19,000 people (primarily Christian farmers) while Boko Haram have killed 43,000 people (the vast majority women and children.)ⁱⁱ
- Human rights group Intersociety report that 300 Christians in Southern Kaduna were massacred in the first 200 days of 2020. They estimate that, across the country, as many as 12,000 Christians have been killed – and 2,000 churches burned – since June 2015.
- A new report by UK-based Igbo Councillors cites evidence of attacks against Christians and Igbo people (one of the three major tribes in Nigeria) in south-eastern states. As of May 2020, 350 Igbo villages have reportedly been occupied by Fulani herders, as well as by Shuwa Arab mercenaries.

In July 2018, the Nigerian House of Representatives declared killings in predominantly-Christian villages in Plateau State to be a 'genocide' and called on the Government of Nigeria to establish orphanages in areas affected by violence. Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, has since acknowledged that Boko Haram and ISWAP "have started targeting Christians and Christian villages for a specific reason, which is to trigger a religious war and throw the nation into chaos... they seem to now have a deliberate policy of attacking Christians."

According to the Bishop of Truro's review, whose recommendations the FCO have agreed to implement in full: "Some of the most egregious persecution of Christians has taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa... the most widespread and violent threat came from societal groups, including many with a militant Islamist agenda... Reports consistently showed that in Nigeria, month after month, on average hundreds of Christians were being killed for reasons connected

with their faith... Those worst affected included Christian women and girls abducted, and forced to convert, enter forced marriages, sexual abuse and torture.”

However, there are now widespread concerns that some attacks take place with the state’s connivance, and that the Nigerian Government only occasionally investigate or prosecute those responsible for such crimes. Amnesty International report that the Nigerian armed forces have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations during their operations, including: extrajudicial executions; indiscriminate attacks; torture and other ill-treatment; arbitrary detention; and sexual violence. The Nigerian army’s former Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Theophilus Danjuma, says the armed forces are “not neutral; they collude” in the “ethnic cleansing in... riverine states” by Fulani herders. He insists that villagers must defend themselves because “depending on the armed forces” will result in them dying “one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop”.

Over £2 billion of UK bilateral aid was given to Nigeria between 2011 and 2018, an equivalent of £800,000 every day. However, we share growing concerns over how the funds are spent; and how it could be better spent – especially in relation to the protection of those most at risk of attack and the need to bring perpetrators to justice. The UK is also one of the largest donors to the World Food Programme’s emergency operation in north-east Nigeria, but it “does not currently provide humanitarian assistance in the middle belt states”, despite this being one of the worst-affected regions.

For the UK merely to “emphasise the importance of mediation and inter-faith dialogue” trivialises the scale of persecution. It is too simplistic for the UK Government to label atrocities committed by Fulani herders as driven by desertification, climate change or competition for resources. Protracted attempts to address these (albeit important) longer-term factors will not stop the current rate of killings.

We therefore urge you, as you spearhead FoRB initiatives for the UK Government, to urgently consider how you can shine a light on these mounting crimes against humanity, undoubtedly predicated by a hatred of people who refuse to renounce their religious beliefs. We would also ask you to request the Foreign Secretary to use our seat at the UN Security Council to prioritise these concerns, to seek a resolution which significantly enhances the security given to communities at risk of attack, and for signatories of the 1948 Genocide Convention – including the UK – to fulfil their obligations to prevent and protect.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Alton of Liverpool
Baroness Cox

ⁱ We recognise the importance of making a distinction between the Fulani in general (a diverse group of millions of people with hundreds of clans) and the sub-group of well-armed, radicalised Fulani who carry out attacks.

ⁱⁱ International Committee On Nigeria (ICON) and International Organisation on Peace-building & Social Justice (PSJ), *Nigeria’s Silent Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, July 2020