



H.E. Muhammadu Buhari
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
The State House
Abuja
Nigeria

Zurich
23 September 2020

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Dear Mr. President,

I write to express grave concern about the rising tide of sectarian and ethnic based violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt, and the concurrent persecution of brave human rights defenders who expose and resist atrocity crimes.

The emerging pattern of atrocity crimes in the Middle Belt, coming on top of Boko Haram's long-running acts of terror in the Northeast, compelled Christian Solidarity International (CSI) to issue a "Genocide Warning" at the beginning of this year.

In June, the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Freedom or Belief also raised its voice regarding sectarian and ethnic based atrocity crimes by publishing a well-documented report entitled Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide. The magnitude of the atrocities has become so alarming that the International Criminal Court (ICC) has launched investigations into the role of both state and non-state actors in crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In recent weeks, two prominent human rights defenders have been threatened and harassed by local security services after voicing uncomfortable truths about the ongoing attacks by Fulani militias on Christian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

On Monday 21 September, a journalist in Plateau State named Masara Kim was summoned for interrogation by the Department of State Services. The summons followed an article Mr. Kim published on 18 September, in which he reported that a recent meeting of Fulani leaders in the area had resolved to continue attacks on Christian farming communities in Plateau State, raised funds for these attacks, and rewarded those involved in previous attacks.

Similarly, Dr. Obadiah Mailafia, the former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, has been subject to a campaign of official harassment and death threats since 10 August, when he openly discussed the factors driving the violence in the Middle Belt. Dr. Mailafia, a native of Kaduna State, rejected the commonly held narrative that the attacks represent a conflict over land usage by "farmers and herdsmen". Instead, he affirmed that the attacks were part of a political project driven by the ideology of *jihad*, a project to exterminate local Christian communities and seize their land for the Fulani. He added that it was clear that the attackers were receiving support from elements in the security services.

Since that interview, Dr. Mailafia has been summoned for interrogation three times by the Department of State Services and the police. He has also received numerous credible death threats. Out of fear for his life, he has been forced to take extraordinary security measures to assure his safety and that of his family.

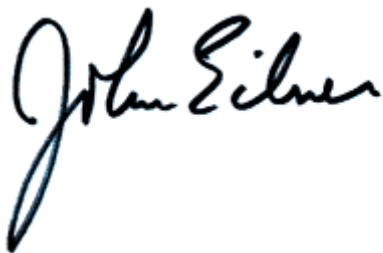
The intimidation of human rights defenders escalated dramatically two days ago, when the Paramount Chief, Da Bulous Chwang Gyang was shot and hacked to death by unidentified assailants. The Chief was well known for leading his people in resistance to the atrocity crimes about which Dr. Mailafia and Masara Kim dared to speak.

It would appear from these examples, Mr. President, that certain elements in the security services in the Middle Belt are intent on suppressing human rights defenders who speak the truth about the crisis in the Middle Belt, and discouraging others from coming forward and speaking out.

When Nigeria ended military rule and established its Fourth Republic twenty years ago, it did so with a Constitution that guarantees fundamental freedoms that are compatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments. They include the Right to Life, the Right to Human Dignity, the Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, and the Right to Freedom of Expression and the Press. The framers of this civilian Constitution understood that these fundamental freedoms are the best guarantees for social harmony in a country as complexly multi-religious and multi-ethnic as Nigeria – an aspiration that CSI shares with the wonderful people of Nigeria regardless of their religious and ethnic identities.

With respect for your office and with love and admiration for the people of Nigeria, CSI urges you to do everything in your power to protect Nigerian citizens from the genocidal violence that threatens Nigeria's Middle Belt. We furthermore trust that the Nigerian Presidency will use its authority to protect the fundamental rights of human rights defenders and civil society actors in the Middle Belt, in particular Dr. Obadiah Mailafia and Mr. Masara Kim.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Eibner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Dr. John Eibner
International President,
Christian Solidarity International