

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500



December 1, 2021

Mr. President,

Christian Solidarity International (CSI) joins the Committee for the Protection of Journalists in calling for the immediate release of Luka Binniyat, an incarcerated Nigerian freelance journalist and pro-democracy campaigner, and for the dropping of all legal proceedings against him. We write to urge you to use the Summit for Democracy you will host on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of December to ask Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, for Mr. Binniyat's release.

Nigerian authorities arrested Mr. Binniyat on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, two weeks before Secretary of State Blinken arrived in Nigeria on the second stop of his "Build Back Better World" tour of Africa. The arrest followed the journalist's reporting on the Nigerian security establishment's consistent failure to either halt genocidal assaults carried out by Fulani Muslim militias against the Christian communities of Nigeria's Middle Belt, or to arrest the perpetrators of those assaults. President Buhari is a prominent member of the Fulani tribe, who has previously called for the "total implementation" of sharia law in Nigeria.

Mr. Binniyat's portrayal of the surging ethno-religious violence in the Middle Belt is in harmony with the findings of *Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?*, a report published in 2020 by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and with a resolution passed by the House of Assembly of Nigeria's Plateau State in 2018, which declared the killings in their region to be a "genocide." The extent of the ethno-religious cleansing in the Middle Belt prompted CSI to issue its own Genocide Warning for Nigeria in January 2020.

Secretary Blinken missed an opportunity to effect Mr. Binniyat's release when he chose not to meet with the political prisoner on his recent visit to Nigeria, as requested by CSI. On the same visit, Secretary Blinken encountered several civil society representatives, one of whom raised Mr. Binniyat's case with him; the State Department chose not to include their remarks in its record of the event. Concurrent to Secretary Blinken's visit, the State Department announced that Nigeria would be removed from the

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U.S.'s religious freedom watchlist. These decisions will have negative consequences. They will:

- 1) Give the Nigerian authorities further encouragement to persecute non-violent political dissidents;
- 2) Embolden the perpetrators of atrocity crimes against Christians and other non-Muslims; and
- 3) Undermine many worthy efforts at interreligious and interethnic peace through dialogue.

As Rev. John Hayab, one of the civil society representatives Secretary Blinken met with in Abuja on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, has said, the removal of Nigeria from the U.S.' religious liberty watchlist is tantamount to "telling a sick man to go home and die."

The message delivered to President Buhari at the Summit for Democracy will be a litmus test of the United States' resolve to promote democracy in authoritarian countries with which the United States has strategic partnerships.

Most Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Eibner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Dr. John Eibner  
International President