

The Honorable  
Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
Washington D.C. 20520



May 19, 2022

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Last November you visited Nigeria to bolster the United States' strategic partnership with what you called "Africa's largest democracy." You rightly gave special attention to Nigeria. It has, as you have noted, the largest and fastest growing population in Africa, one that is multi-ethnic and multi-religious. It also has enormous economic power and the potential to influence the shape of sub-Saharan Africa in the coming decades.

In his testimony before Congress last March, the Commander of US AFRICOM, Gen. Stephen Townsend, unambiguously identified the principal goal of American diplomatic-military policy in Africa in terms of gaining "access and influence," while obstructing the efforts of adversaries – especially China, Russia, the Islamic State, al-Qaida and other anti-American Islamist terror organizations – to do likewise. Gen. Townsend's testimony points to a new "scramble for Africa", with many of the same characteristics that characterized the imperial competition that led to the continent's colonization in the runup to World War I.

The question increasingly asked in Africa is whether the United States will continue to work principally in partnership with authoritarian regimes, corrupt elites, and politically pliable Muslim supremacist networks as it pursues its strategic objectives, or pursue policies more in keeping with its public rhetoric regarding the promotion of democracy, human rights and religious freedom.

A signal was given on the eve of your visit to Nigeria. You then honored the Nigerian government's request for the country to be removed from the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern regarding violations of religious freedom. This concession was granted within months of an atheist blogger being charged with "blasphemy," a deadly attack on Shi'ite Muslim protestors by Nigerian security forces, a Muslim teenager being forced to flee the country after being detained for five months on "blasphemy" charges, a massacre of 38 Christian villagers in Kaduna State, and the jailing of a Christian journalist who wrote about it.

Your decision was, as the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom stated, "unexplainable."

Despite a chorus of protests from human rights defenders, CSI among them, you have not reinstated Nigeria on the list of Countries of Particular Concern. This conveys a message to perpetrators and victims alike, that crimes driven and legitimized by religious ideology, in particular the various strands of Muslim supremacism, remain of no particular concern to the State Department. This message nourishes a culture of impunity. Since this concession to Nigeria's rulers was made, religious persecution has gained momentum on many fronts.

This grim reality was highlighted last week by the video-recorded lynching of Deborah Samuel Yakubu – a 25-year-old Christian student – by a mob of Muslim supremacists in Sokoto, the historic center of Nigeria's Fulani Caliphate. She was hunted down, beaten and set on fire in broad daylight, undefended by the security officers who were present. Deborah died because of a rumor that she had insulted Islam. As is well known, this is a capital offense according to the traditional Sharia, which Sokoto and eleven other northern Nigerian states have adopted as their criminal code, in defiance of the Nigerian constitution's guarantees of secularism and freedom of religion.

Scarcely less disturbing than this deadly hate crime was the response of Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari. While President Buhari criticized Deborah's murderous assailants for taking the law into their own hands, he refused to say that Deborah did not deserve to die. Instead, he warned that "Muslims all over the world demand respect for [Islam's] Holy Prophets." Meanwhile, violent demonstrators in Sokoto lent muscle to their president's menacing message by desecrating churches and attacking Christian-owned businesses, while demanding the release of two of Deborah's suspected killers.

While the lynching of Deborah was captured on camera and fleetingly caught the attention of mainstream media, she was far from the only Christian murdered since your visit to Nigeria. Over 900 Christians were killed by Boko Haram, the Islamic State (West Africa Province) and Fulani Muslim militias during the first three months of this year, according to the International Society for Civil Liberty and the Rule of Law (Intersociety). These murders are hate crimes, driven and legitimized by Muslim supremacism.

For years, CSI has been receiving reports every few days from Nigerian human rights defenders of indigenous Christians being killed or displaced in religious cleansing exercises by Fulani terrorists, especially in the Middle Belt. Already in January 2020, this evidence compelled CSI to issue a Genocide Warning for Nigeria. Great weight was given to this Genocide Warning by the 2020 report of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, aptly entitled: *Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide*.

President Biden has recently declared that the world now stands at an inflection point, out of which will emerge a "new world order" under American leadership. The world, and especially Africa, is watching to see whether the United States will lead the Nigerian power structure with which it has a strategic partnership towards respect for human dignity and religious freedom, or continue to sacrifice powerless Nigerians, and Nigeria's vulnerable Christian communities, in pursuit of its goals in the current scramble for Africa.

As immediate, small first steps to place the United States on the side of democracy, human rights and religious freedom, CSI urges you to:

- 1) Return Nigeria to the U.S.'s Countries of Particular Concern list.
- 2) Post on the State Department's website the suppressed testimony presented to you in person by the Rev. Joseph Hayeb during your meeting with civil society representatives in Abuja on November 19, 2021.
- 3) Declare that no one should die for exercising their right to free speech.
- 4) Undertake a campaign – diplomatic or otherwise – to bring Deborah Samuel Yakubu's killers and their accomplices, many of whom identified themselves on video, to justice.
- 5) Dispatch the Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, Rashad Hussain, to Nigeria to offer condolences to the family of Deborah Samuel Yakubu, and the victims of the many other religiously-motivated hate crimes committed in Nigeria.
- 6) Begin to impose material consequences on the United States' strategic partners in Abuja in response to the ill-treatment of Christians, Shi'ite Muslims, atheists, and others.

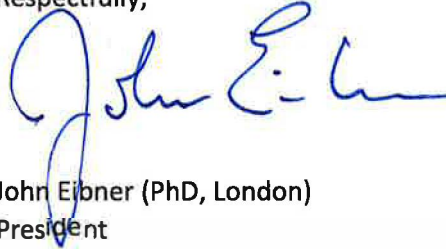
Much more will, of course, need to be done to steer Nigeria away from autocracy and religious oppression, and toward genuine democracy and respect for human rights. But these will be important first bilateral steps. Regarding multilateral steps, I repeat the appeal made by CSI when the

Genocide Warning was first issued. The United States should exercise leadership by urging the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council to take appropriate action to prevent genocide in Africa's largest country.

I conclude by citing the words of the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Dr. Samson Ayokunle, as he called for the Nigerian government to be held accountable for escalating inaction in the face of escalating violence and its culture of impunity:

*Christians have become an endangered species in their own country. We once again call on the international community and the developed world like the U.S., the UK, Germany, Israel and others to please come to the aid of Nigeria, especially the Nigerian Church, so that we might not be eliminated one by one.*

Respectfully,



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President

Christian Solidarity International (CSI-USA)