

Overview of Recent Commentary on Biafra

“Since 2015, members of IPOB have faced arbitrary arrests, torture and extrajudicial executions, predominantly in the context of demonstrations. Between 2015 and 2016, it is alleged that law enforcement officials **killed at least 100 IPOB members** in different events in Aba (Abia State), and Awka and Onitsha (Anambra State). On 29 and 30 May 2016, during a demonstration, the Nigerian military opened fire on IPOB members and bystanders in Onitsha. At least 60 persons were killed and over 70 injured, mainly shot in the back. The exact number of deaths remains unknown.”

“During my visit, I met with several survivors of various security attacks and witness to killings. I have received a large number of allegations of killings by the Military Forces in 2017, 2018 and 2019. In addition, a number of those arrested are allegedly held incommunicado before being detained without charges. When charges are finally made, they include membership to a terrorist organisation, unlawful gathering and in some cases kidnapping.”

- Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions [September 2019]

[In Nigeria] federal and state governments frequently ban public events perceived as threats to national security, including those that could incite political, ethnic, or religious tension. Rights groups have criticized federal and state governments for prohibiting or dispersing protests that are critical of authorities or associated with controversial groups like the IMN and the separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

- Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019 Report

“This deadly repression of pro-Biafra activists is further stoking tensions in the south east of Nigeria. This reckless and trigger-happy approach to crowd control has caused at least 150 deaths and we fear the actual total might be far higher. The Nigerian government’s decision to send in the military to respond to pro-Biafra events seems to be in large part to blame for this excessive bloodshed. The authorities must immediately launch an impartial investigation and bring the perpetrators to book.”

- Makmid Kamara, Interim Director of Amnesty International, Nigeria [June 2016]

“People shouldn’t be killed for taking part in peaceful protests and processions. The use of extreme force by government forces appears to be fueling the transformation of non-violent activities into bloody clashes. **Nigeria’s leaders should focus on providing basic rights to their people who bear the brunt of the country’s economic downturn. Attempts to shrink the space for people to hold government accountable are unhelpful and may be counter-productive.**”

- Maudi Segun, Senior Nigeria Researcher, Human Rights Watch [January 2017]

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“The continuing and menacing presence of armed soldiers at several checkpoints in the five states of southeastern Nigeria which has created an atmosphere of fear that many more IPOB members (including Nnamdi Kanu – if he is alive) could be shot at sight pursuant to their having been declared terrorists. The Commission respectfully requests Your Excellency [Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari] not to take any further action so as to avoid irreparable damage to the Victim, IPOB and its Members, pending the decision of the Commission on this Communication.”

- Soyata Maiga, Chairperson, African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights [March 2018]

I am not aware of any steps taken to implement the ACHR interim decision at the time of writing these preliminary observations.

- Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions [September 2019]

“Since August 2015, the security forces have killed at least 150 members and supporters of the pro-Biafran organization IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) and injured hundreds during non-violent meetings, marches and other gatherings. Hundreds were also arbitrarily arrested.”

“Hardly any allegations of crimes under international law and human rights violations by the Nigerian security forces, and in particular the military, are investigated. If an investigation is carried out, there is no follow up. Because no one has been seen to be held to account for serious human rights violations, an already pervasive culture of impunity within the military has been further strengthened.”

“Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the government of Nigeria to initiate independent and effective investigations into its evidence of crimes under international law committed by the military, especially in the context of the conflict in northeast Nigeria. In response, President Buhari has repeatedly promised that Amnesty International’s reports would be looked into. However, no concrete steps have been taken to begin independent investigations. **As a result of the apparent lack of political will to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of such crimes, the military continues to commit human rights violations and grave crimes with impunity.”**

- Amnesty International Report, “Nigeria: ‘Bullets Were Raining Everywhere’ – Deadly Repression of Pro-Biafra Activists [November 2016]

“In 2018 alone, **deaths attributed to Fulani extremists are estimated to be six times greater than the number committed by Boko Haram.** According to ACLED data, nearly 1,700 violent deaths have been attributed to Fulani extremists from January to September 2018. An estimated 89 per cent of those killed were civilians.”

- Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2018

Growing concerns about intolerance of dissent and a heavy-handed response to protests dominated Nigeria’s human rights landscape in 2016. In the southeast, police killed at least 40 pro-Biafra members of the separatist Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) during protests and processions in February and May 2016. **No security agent has been prosecuted for the killings.**

- Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Disturbing Intolerance of Dissent [January 2017]

Inspired by Boko Haram's impunity, Muslim Fulani militants in the northeastern part of Nigeria have undertaken a campaign of mass slaughter against Christians, Shia Muslims, and traditional tribal religious groups. **Fulani militant attacks and reprisals are responsible for more than 60,000 deaths since 2001.** That, combined with the thousands more killed by Boko Haram, and the tens of thousands of Nigerian women and girls kidnapped and trafficked as sex slaves, and **you have a genocide on your hands.**

- Frank Wolf, Former Republican U.S. Representative from Virginia [September 2019]

"Opening fire on peaceful IPOB supporters and bystanders who clearly posed no threat to anyone is an outrageous use of unnecessary and excessive force and resulted in multiple deaths and injuries. In one incident one person was shot dead after the authorities burst in on them while they slept. These shootings, some of which may amount to extrajudicial executions, must be urgently and independently investigated and anyone suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice."

- MK Ibrahim, Country Director Amnesty International Nigeria [June 2016]

"Nnamdi Kanu has been unlawfully imprisoned by Nigeria's Department of State Services, despite the fact that all criminal charges against him were dropped and a court order has been issued for him to be released on bail. Chapter 4, Section 39 of the Nigerian constitution says that every person should be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and freedom to receive and impart information without interference. I therefore call upon the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to uphold his country's constitution to ensure Nnamdi Kanu's immediate and safe release. **The Nigerian government must guarantee the freedom of expression of all Nigerian citizens, including their right to protest without intimidation and end violence toward those that identify as Biafran.**"

- Julie Ward, Member of European Parliament

End Notes

1. Agnes Callamard, "End of visit statement of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her visit to Nigeria" September 2, 2019 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24934&LangID=E>
2. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2019 Report: Nigeria" <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/nigeria>
3. Amnesty International, "Nigeria: At Least 150 Peaceful Pro-Biafra Activists Killed in Chilling Crackdown" November 24, 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/11/peaceful-pro-biafra-activists-killed-in-chilling-crackdown/>
4. Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Disturbing Intolerance of Dissent" January 12, 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/12/nigeria-disturbing-intolerance-dissent#>
5. Amnesty International, "Nigeria: 'Bullets Were Raining Everywhere': Deadly Repression of Pro-Biafra Activists," November 24, 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/5211/2016/en/>
6. Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2018" <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>

7. Frank Wolf, "Africa's Gathering Storm" September 21, 2019

<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/462458-africas-gathering-storm>

8. Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Killing of Unarmed Pro-Biafra Supporters By Military Must Be Urgently Investigated" June 10, 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/06/nigeria-killing-of-unarmed-pro-biafra-supporters-by-military-must-be-urgently-investigated/>

9. Julie Ward, "Julie Ward MEP Calls for the Release of Nnamdi Kanu & An End to Violence Against Supporters" October 4, 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUXps9eOmNg&fbclid=IwAR0JPWVL3dgz0lw7nSa0SS0Hk81DYcX7IdmScsBWP8X7ptVTfhCZoNHDAJ4>