

May XX, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear President Trump:

The violence against Christians across Nigeria is rapidly escalating. We are writing to request that you implement the following tools, currently at your administration's disposal, to help end the genocide. First, we are asking you to consider the appointment of a United States special envoy to Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Second, we ask that you direct the U.S. Department of Treasury to utilize the full range of sanctions available under the Global Magnitsky Act. Finally, we ask that before the Nigerian government receives any additional aid from the U.S. they display good faith efforts at improving human rights in their nation.

Nigeria is one of the largest Christian countries in the world and they are seeing a rapid increase in religiously motivated attacks against the Christian population. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), approximately 3,200 fatalities have been reported in Nigeria at the hands of radicalized Fulani militants since 2018. ACLED has also recorded over 40,000 fatalities tied to Boko Haram in Nigeria since 2008. In 2015, Boko Haram swore allegiance to ISIS, rendering them even more lethal to Christians in Nigeria.

Innocent women, children, and men are being slaughtered across the country and many of these attacks have specifically targeted Christians. Over Christmas, according to the New York Times, Boko Haram released a video of terrorists beheading ten Christian prisoners. The terrorists declared it a "message for Christians" in light of the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Silent Slaughter campaign has already recorded over 650 deaths by Boko Haram and Fulani militants in 2020 alone. This is in addition to over 300 abductions and over 2,500 individuals displaced from their homes due to the escalating violence.

We are thankful and applaud the Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria, specifically leaders of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, for coordinating a response to COVID-19 in the country. It is encouraging to see religious groups put aside their differences, communicate and advocate for peace as nations address and recover from this harrowing pandemic. Unfortunately, we are also receiving horrific reports that the coronavirus has not stopped Islamic extremists from murdering Christians who are staying in their homes due to the disease.

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It is for these exact reasons we must not lose sight of the long-term threats to Christians in Nigeria and ensure that Nigerian leaders do not use the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to ignore killing of religious minorities in their country.

In April of 2018, you met with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. At the end of your meeting, you asked President Buhari to stop the killing of Christians in Nigeria. Your directive went viral and the killings stopped for six months. This demonstrates that your leadership can stop the violence and save lives.

Regardless of whether these killings are happening for religious purposes, land acquisition purposes, or any other purpose, they must be stopped. We strongly urge you to consider appointing a United States special envoy to Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, utilize sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act, and tie all economic and defense assistance to the Nigerian government to human rights reforms. Utilization of these tools will send a clear message to the Nigerian government and its people that the U.S. is committed to stabilizing the country and protecting innocent lives. We not only have an obligation to national and global security, but we have a moral obligation to protect the religious freedoms of those that cannot protect themselves.

Sincerely,

Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator