

April 29, 2020

Hon. David Perdue
United States Member of Congress
455 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Perdue,

As concerned citizens, constituents, and members of the Nigerian diaspora in the United States, we write to call your attention to the volatile and violent situation in Nigeria in which minority groups and those with dissenting views, including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), are being victimized and persecuted with impunity while the Buhari government stands silently by – and in some instances participates. Without urgent attention and the assistance of the international community, conditions will continue to deteriorate, compromising U.S. interests in the region and repeating the atrocities and bloodshed the world has witnessed far too often in this part of the globe.

Over the past five years, there has been a sharp increase in criminality and spreading insecurity; widespread failure by the federal authorities to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, even for mass killings; and a generalized break down of the rule of law. This has been exacerbated by the proliferation of small and military-grade weapons made readily available as a result of regional instability and originating from as far north as the Libyan conflict.

Despite this recognized humanitarian crisis, the Nigerian government has increasingly dismissed religious and human rights concerns, and continued to perpetrate violations of its own. There are many documented incidences of violence led by state security actors, but no mechanisms by which to hold the Administration accountable. In its 2018 Nigeria Human Rights Report, the U.S. Department of State found that impunity remained widespread at all levels of government and that “the government did not adequately investigate or prosecute most of the major outstanding allegations of human rights violations by the security forces or the majority of cases of police or military extortion or other abuse of power.” Moreover, Amnesty International’s recent 2019 report titled *Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda* is essentially a twenty-page indictment of human rights violations by “state and non-state actors,” but with an emphasis on the state security services.

Most concerning to us in particular as Biafrans is the massacre of Christians by Fulani extremists – a group that the 2019 Global Terrorism Index estimates is deadlier than Boko Haram – that has gone largely unacknowledged by the West. While atrocities are being committed regularly based on long simmering ethnic tensions and disputes over resources, the United States should not ignore this aspect of the conflict, which some have concluded is reminiscent of Rwanda in the 1990s, Darfur and South Sudan in the 2000s.

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At the height of the war in 1969, 12,000 people a day starved to death in Biafra at that hands of the Nigerian government. More than 50 years later, the violent persecution of Biafrans and other minority groups by the Nigerian state continues unabated. The UN has identified the IPOB as one group that is specifically targeted, repressed and arbitrarily killed by state actors stating “the security response is dangerously quasi-prospective, with individuals, communities and associations actively targeted for what they may have done decades ago, or for what they may do or may become, rather than for what they are doing or have done.” The conflict in the Middle Belt and Southern States where the IPOB reside constitutes a major security challenge. In 2018, the conflict was six times deadlier than the Boko Haram insurgency and has displaced over 300,000 people. We fear without intervention, history may repeat itself.

To shed light on the human rights violations being committed, last month the Indigenous People of Biafra submitted materials to Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions at the United Nations, chronicling the human rights abuses perpetrated against Biafrans in Nigeria. Special Rapporteur Callamard will review these materials for possible inclusion in a UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report on Nigeria, which is expected to be released later this year.

These human rights violations have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. According to the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Nigerian security forces have killed at least 18 people since the start of the outbreak during violent enforcements of government lockdown protocols. The NHRC emphasized that “most of the violations witnessed during the period arose as a result of excessive or disproportionate use of force, abuse of power, corruption and non-adherence to national and international laws, best practices and rules of engagement.” These extrajudicial killings have also been condemned by Dr. Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan, President of the Senate of Nigeria, and Okezie Ikpazu, Governor of Abia State, who has called for immediate investigations into the attacks.

When the United States speaks, the world listens. As such, we respectfully request that you and your colleagues in Congress call attention to the humanitarian crisis taking place in Nigeria and put pressure on the Nigerian government to adhere it its international human rights obligations and constitutional commitments to its citizens. We also ask that you sign a letter being circulated by Senator Joni Ernst calling on President Donald Trump to stop violence against vulnerable religious groups in Nigeria – including Christians – by appointing a Special Envoy to the Lake Chad region, utilizing Global Magnitsky Act sanctions against illicit actors, and tying military and economic aid to Nigeria to human rights reforms. A stable Nigeria is in the best interest of the international community and the violence that is worsening each day has a profoundly destabilizing effect on the country and region.

Sincerely,

Mazi Uche Nwokenkwo
IPOB Georgia State Coordinator