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Subject: Dr. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim - Nigeria Religious Freedom Policy Document
Date: Wednesday, November 11, 2026 at 11:35:36 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: Ted Trippi
To: michael.mccabe@mail.house.gov, sophie.jones@mail.house.gov
CC: Garcia Mavinga Sozinho
Attachments: Olawepo-Hashim Policy Brief - House Africa Subcommittee and USCIRF (final).pdf

Hello Michael and Sophie,

I am reaching out on behalf of Dr. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim, the Accord Party's presidential candidate for the January 2027 presidential election in Nigeria. Dr. Hashim would like to submit the attached policy document ahead of the House Africa Subcommittee hearing tomorrow on religious violence in Nigeria. Thank you for your consideration of the concerns and recommendations raised in the attached policy brief.

All the best,
Ted

Ted Trippi
Vice President of Government Relations
Moran Global Strategies, Inc.
Cell: (847) 894-6297



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POLICY BRIEF

Religious Freedom for Conflict Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria

For Consideration by

United States House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa; and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

Submitted by

Dr. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim, 2027 Presidential Candidate, Accord Party, Nigeria

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1. Purpose

This brief builds on the strategic engagement with USCIRF on November 6, 2026, where concerns were raised over religious persecution, ethnic discrimination, insecurity, and the continued displacement of vulnerable communities across Nigeria. I wish to thank the United States Congress and USCIRF for their concern and follow-up action to assess ongoing efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to protect Christians from persecution and secure the Middle Belt.

This brief presents a concrete policy proposal to address those concerns through the adoption of a religious freedom for conflict prevention and countering violent extremism approach. It is submitted for consideration ahead of the House Subcommittee on Africa hearing on November 12, 2026.

2. The Problem – A Wrong Diagnosis Leads to a Wrong Cure

Christians in northern and central Nigeria face persecution. Churches have been burned, villages destroyed, and pastors killed. This is real. But the crisis is broader: Shia Muslims are also being persecuted for their faith; minority sects within Islam are excluded and attacked; Hausa Muslim communities face discrimination in parts of the north, where ethnicity shapes religious acceptance; Hausa cultural activist Maisango has been unlawfully detained; 11 villages were burned in Shanga, Kebbi State, in April 2026; 3.68 million Nigerians are internally displaced (UNHCR, Oct 2026); and terrorists and bandits exert influence over rural communities in 17 of 19 northern states. *Framing Nigeria as Christian versus Muslim divides Nigeria. Framing it as all victims versus violent extremism unites Nigeria.*

3. Core Argument – Religious Freedom for Conflict Prevention

Religious freedom should be viewed as a path toward conflict prevention, not only as a human rights issue. When people cannot worship freely, they feel excluded from the state. When killers are not punished, impunity grows. When impunity grows, communities form militias. When militias grow, extremists recruit from them. Protecting a church in Plateau, a Shia mosque in Kaduna, and a Hausa cultural center in Kebbi is not only human rights work. It is how extremism is prevented before it takes root.

4. The Proposal: Religious Freedom for Conflict Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism

The core of this proposal is to seek regional and international partnership and cooperation to develop and facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive National Policy Framework through the adoption of a Religious Freedom for Conflict Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism approach in Nigeria – hereafter referred to as “the National Framework.”

The plan is to ensure the National Framework is developed, adopted, and implemented as follows:

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Develop – Within 90 Days: Convene a National Religious Freedom and Conflict Prevention Summit with CAN, NSCIA, Shia leaders, Hausa cultural leaders, traditional leaders, women, youth, IDPs, and civil society. The policy will be drafted in public, with victims at the table.

Adopt – Within 180 Days: The Federal Executive Council will adopt the Framework. It will be submitted to the National Assembly as the Religious Freedom, Conflict Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism Act. It will criminalize persecution, hate incitement, and forced displacement; guarantee due process; require a Religious Freedom Desk in every state; and be funded through a dedicated budget line.

Implement: Establish an Independent National Commission for Religious Freedom, Conflict Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism, with offices in all 36 states and the FCT. The Commission will receive complaints, investigate attacks, publish monthly reports, and refer cases for prosecution. It will report to the National Assembly, not the Presidency**.**

End Impunity: Every attack will be investigated within 30 days and the findings made public. A Special Prosecution Office for Religious Violence and Mass Atrocities will be established. A National Victims Register will be published, and victims will receive compensation.

Reform Security: Create a National Guard – positioned between the military and the police – to protect rural communities, farms, schools, and places of worship. It will be recruited from all regions and faiths and trained in human rights and religious freedom.

Return and Rebuild: Launch a National IDP Return, Resettlement and Reconciliation Programme, providing security, housing, schools, clinics, farms, and trauma support. Shanga and all burned villages in Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, and Borno will be rebuilt. Community dialogue and early warning systems will be funded in every Local Government Area (LGA).

Regional Leadership: Nigeria will lead ECOWAS and the African Union to adopt a Continental Framework on Religious Freedom for Conflict Prevention, including intelligence sharing, training, and early warning.

5. The 2027 Elections: Religious Freedom, Conflict Prevention and Human Rights Issues

The 2027 elections must be linked to religious freedom, conflict prevention, and human rights. They must be free, fair, transparent, and credible. Free, fair, transparent, and credible means no religious violence, no intimidation, no incitement, and no rigging linked to elections.

- No religious violence – no attacks on candidates, voters, churches, mosques, or rallies because of faith
- No intimidation – no threats against voters, journalists, observers, or candidates
- No incitement – no religious hate speech or preaching that calls for violence against another faith or ethnic group

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- No rigging – no manipulation of results, no falsification of polling-unit results, no voter suppression

Political violence is already rising ahead of 2027. The recent attack on Omoyele Sowore in Ekiti State is a warning. Election rigging is itself a threat to religious freedom, conflict prevention, and human rights. When results are manipulated, citizens lose faith in democratic institutions. When citizens lose faith, they turn to ethnic and religious mobilization, protests turn violent, and extremists exploit the crisis to recruit. A rigged election does not just steal votes – it steals peace.

If the 2027 presidential election is marred by religious incitement, political intimidation, rigging, or attacks on candidates and voters, extremists will exploit the resulting loss of legitimacy.

Ask of the United States:

The United States should assist Nigeria in delivering a 2027 presidential election that is:

- Free – voters can vote without fear
- Fair – all candidates compete on equal ground
- Transparent – results are published polling-unit by polling-unit, in real time
- Credible – results are believed because the process is open and accountable
- Accountable – political violence, religious hate incitement, voter intimidation, and election rigging are investigated and prosecuted, whoever commits them

This is not a request for the United States to choose Nigeria's leader. It is a request for the United States to help Nigerians choose their own leader, free from religious and political violence, intimidation, and rigging.

The United States can assist through:

1. Immediate and sustained engagement with Nigeria to support an independent, impartial, transparent and accountable electoral commission;
2. Election observation with unhindered access;
3. Technical support to INEC on transparency and results transmission;
4. Support for civil society, media, and early warning systems against election violence; and
5. Clear, consistent messaging – before, during, and after the election – that the United States stands with the Nigerian people for a peaceful, transparent, and credible process.

A credible election in 2027 is conflict prevention. A violent or rigged election in 2027 is a source of recruitment for extremists.

6. **Ask of Congress and USCIRF on Religious Freedom**
   I. Do not frame Nigeria as Christian versus Muslim. Frame it as all victims versus extremism
   II. Support policy, institutions, and the rule of law – not only security and military assistance

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III. Hold all actors accountable – including for political violence, as seen in the recent attack on Omoyele Sowore in Ekiti State
IV. Engage Nigeria on religious freedom as conflict prevention, not only as a human rights report
V. Support Nigeria to counter violent extremist groups that perpetuate religious violence and persecution – including Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaru, and bandit-terror networks – through a comprehensive strategy that combines political, prevention, stabilization, and security measures
VI. Support the National Framework development and implementation process
VII. Support intelligence sharing, early-warning systems, and border security to disrupt extremist networks
VIII. Support DDR and other programmes for the handling and treatment of individuals disengaging from extremist groups – and prosecution, not impunity, for perpetrators of religious violence.
IX. Support community-based prevention, de-radicalization, and reintegration programmes that respect human rights and religious freedom
X. Condition security and military assistance on accountability, civilian protection, and respect for religious freedom.
XI. Partner with Nigeria to convene an international conference on Security in Nigeria and the Sahel – bringing together ECOWAS, the African Union, the United States, the European Union, and other international partners – to develop a joint strategy on religious freedom, conflict prevention, intelligence sharing, border security, and countering violent extremism.

Religious freedom cannot be protected while violent extremist groups operate with impunity. Countering violent extremism is religious freedom protection.

Contact:

1. Office of Dr. Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim, No. 40 Inuwa Wada Street, Utako, Abuja FCT, Nigeria

2. Phone: +234-905-555-5650

3. Email: gbengahashim16@yahoo.com

This material is distributed by Moran Global Strategies, Inc. on behalf of Dr. Joel Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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