



**PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

**STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED  
STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA**

Hearing Titled:

**President Trump's Re-designation of Nigeria as a  
"Country of Particular Concern—CPC": A  
Serious, Well-Founded Wake-Up Call**

Submitted by:

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The National Assembly of Nigeria expresses sincere appreciation to Chairman Christopher Smith, Ranking Member Sara Jacobs, and Members of the Subcommittee on Africa for convening this important dialogue. As the legislative arm of a diverse, democratic, and sovereign nation—home to Christians, Muslims, and minority faiths—we welcome this opportunity to present our perspective grounded in constitutional duty, democratic accountability, and shared strategic interests with the United States.

We stand as the elected representatives of a richly plural nation of over 200 million citizens—Christians and Muslims, animists and atheists, other believers in God and agnostics—united not by creed, culture, or geography, but by the binding covenant of Nigerian citizenship. Our solemn mandate is to safeguard liberties, protect lives, and ensure that power—especially the power entrusted to us—is exercised with justice, restraint, and full accountability.

It is in this spirit that the National Assembly grounds its work on three core responsibilities that shape our response to insecurity and the defense of religious freedom:

1. **Legislation:** Enacting laws that strengthen national security and guarantee equal protection for every citizen, regardless of faith or belief.
2. **Oversight:** Holding executive agencies, defense institutions, and security operations to the highest standards of transparency, efficiency, and constitutional compliance.
3. **Representation:** Giving voice to all Nigerian communities—especially those who have endured loss, trauma, or displacement at the hands of violent non-state actors—and ensuring that their concerns translate into meaningful action.

We make this submission with humility, empathy, truth and a firm commitment to factual accuracy.

To begin, it is important to reaffirm that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of religion, prohibits discrimination on religious grounds, and ensures equality before the law for all Nigerians. These protections apply fully to Christians, Muslims, and minority faith groups across our federation. Yet constitutional guarantees alone cannot capture the gravity of recent attacks on religious groups by violent non-state actors. The National Assembly openly acknowledges that Christian communities in several regions, but in many instances, Muslim communities, have experienced deeply painful incidents—killings, abductions, and the destruction of property. The trauma endured by these families is real and profound. The Nigerian government stands in solidarity with their grief and pledges to implement lasting solutions to bring relief to these religious communities. No Nigerian—Christian, Muslim, or traditional believer—should ever live in fear because of how they worship or where they come from.

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At the same time, a full understanding of the nature of violence is essential for any meaningful policy response. Nigeria's security challenges are driven by a complex interplay of terrorism, banditry, organized criminality, climate-induced farmer-herder tensions, illegal mining, and localized disputes over land and authority. These factors often overlap in ways that defy simple categorization. In some instances, these communities are facing violence only because they occupy resource-rich areas and are home to both Christians and Muslims.<sup>1</sup> While some violent actors deliberately target Christian communities, others attack Muslim and traditional communities as well. Credible international analysis has underscored this complexity. For example, data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), as cited in the U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom reporting, show that although Christians constitute roughly half of Nigeria's population, explicitly religion-targeted attacks on Christians accounted for only a small fraction of all civilian-targeting incidents, and that jihadist violence has claimed large numbers of Muslim victims as well.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a 2024 research briefing of the United Kingdom House of Commons Library, drawing on ACLED and other independent sources, cautions that much of the conflict "may be more about the availability of resources rather than ethnic or religious differences," and stresses that violence is escalating and actors are diversifying rather than fitting a single narrative.<sup>3</sup> Recent reporting that synthesizes findings from international media and analysts, including the Associated Press and other observers, similarly highlights that both Christians and Muslims have been killed and displaced, and that the drivers of violence include geography, land disputes, insurgency, and criminality—not a state-directed campaign against any one faith.<sup>4</sup>

### **Legislative Actions to Curb Insecurity and Protect Religious Freedom**

Over the past decade, the Senate and House of Representatives have advanced a series of landmark laws and statutory measures designed to stem violence, weaken terrorist infrastructure, and safeguard vulnerable communities. Among the most significant are:

- **The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act**

A comprehensive framework that strengthens the investigation and prosecution of terror financiers, extremist recruiters, and perpetrators of mass violence—including attacks on churches, mosques, clerics, and unarmed civilians.

<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria (Research Briefing CDP-2024-0024, Feb. 1 2024), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0024/>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, Nigeria: International Religious Freedom Report (2023), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/>

<sup>3</sup> UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nigeria (Research Briefing CDP-2024-0024, Feb. 1 2024), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0024/>

<sup>4</sup> "Fact Sheet: Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians | ACLED". acleddata.com. 2024-03-15. Retrieved 2025-11-04



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- **The National Security Agencies Amendments Act**  
Reforms that enhance coordination among defense, police, intelligence, and civil authorities, enabling more rapid and integrated responses in high-risk and conflict-prone areas.
- **Victim Support and IDP Protection Measures**  
Budgetary allocations and statutory mandates to assist internally displaced persons—Christians and Muslims alike—and to rehabilitate communities shattered by extremist assaults.
- **Increased Defense and Security Appropriations**  
Through the Appropriation Acts, the National Assembly approved substantial funding increases for counterterrorism operations, modern military equipment, and expanded police deployments in Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, Borno, and other severely affected states, including Christian-majority regions.
- **Legislation Against Hate Speech and Incitement**  
Strengthening penalties for incendiary rhetoric and religiously motivated violence, while upholding constitutional guarantees of free expression and lawful dissent

#### **Oversight: Holding the Executive to Account**

While the Executive prosecutes the battle at the frontlines, the Legislature bears an equally indispensable charge: to question, to examine, and to insist. We acknowledge that the current administration has demonstrated real resolve—rescuing captives, disrupting terror networks, and strengthening vulnerable communities. Yet admiration has never displaced scrutiny, nor have we ever mistaken partnership for the surrender of our oversight duty.

Accordingly, the National Assembly—by constitutional duty—monitors, audits, and interrogates every strand of our security effort. To this end:

- Joint Committees on Defense, Army, Air Force, Navy, Police Affairs, and National Security have conducted hearings with service chiefs and police leadership on attacks affecting churches, mosques, and faith communities
- The National Assembly has demanded prosecution updates, particularly on atrocities in Plateau, Southern Kaduna, Benue, Borno and others.
- Field inspections and investigative visits have been conducted to areas affected by religiously-linked violence





- The Senate and House have required quarterly reporting from security agencies to ensure transparency and accountability.

This sustained oversight has made one reality unmistakable: there is no federal policy—overt or covert—that targets any religious group. On the contrary, security agencies have consistently rescued, sheltered, and defended Nigerians of every faith, often at great personal risk and with no regard to creed, denomination, or doctrine.

In addition, Nigeria’s constitutional and legal framework actively permits all religions to flourish. The 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Section 38)<sup>5</sup>, freedom of expression (Section 39)<sup>6</sup>, and prohibits discrimination on religious grounds (Section 42)<sup>7</sup>. The Constitution expressly ensures that no law or provision can criminalize belief or expression in ways that violate these rights. State-level penal or Sharia provisions that purport to criminalize “blasphemy” are subject to judicial review and courts regularly strike down unconstitutional provisions. In practice, this means that all religious communities: Christian, Muslim, traditional and others, can freely practice their faith throughout Nigeria.

This constitutional and legal protection is reinforced by observable facts about Nigerian society and government. Christians in Nigeria serve at every level of government, in the civil service, in the judiciary and throughout the armed forces. In the military, Christians have held the commanding heights, including as Heads of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or Service Chiefs, reflecting their leadership roles in the defense of the nation. These facts are irreconcilable with any assertion of state-driven persecution. Historically, Nigeria has had five Christian heads of state, including Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the only surviving president to have served both in military uniform and under a democratic regime, as well as the late Muhammadu Buhari. Nigeria has also had nine Christians serve as Vice Presidents, demonstrating consistent Christian participation in the highest levels of governance. In addition, Nigerian has elected six Muslim presidents. These realities, coupled with broad legal protections, make any claim of state persecution of Christians factually inaccurate.

Nigeria is home to the largest Christian population in Africa, with significant representation across all denominations.<sup>8</sup> The country leads the continent in the number of dioceses for major four orthodox churches, including the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran Churches. Nigeria also ranks among the highest in Africa, if not globally, in the number of independent Christian

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Decree No. 24 of 1999, § 38

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Decree No. 24 of 1999, § 39.

<sup>7</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Decree No. 24 of 1999, § 42.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, The Countries With the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations (Apr. 1, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/>





denominations. These facts underscore that Nigeria is not a country that suppresses religious expression: rather, it is a country where diverse faiths thrive.

Nigeria is also a party to international human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These treaties affirm freedom of religion and expression and require the state to protect individuals from discrimination based on belief. Nigeria consistently aligns its domestic jurisprudence with these obligations, further reinforcing the legal and institutional safeguards that prevent religious persecution.

Additionally, the United States International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998, section 402, states that a country can be designated as a country of Particular Concern, where a foreign government has engaged in or tolerated especially severe violations of the religious freedom of its citizens. We respectfully state here that these assertions are inaccurate. There is no federal blasphemy law in Nigeria and federal officials cannot enforce a non-existent law. And where state-level laws exist, judges act independently. The fact is that the higher courts can overturn and have overturned unconstitutional applications. There is even the opportunity to explore the ECOWAS Court of Justice which has been exercised successfully in Nigeria. Suggesting that the Nigerian government tolerates religious violence is similarly inconsistent with reality. Consistently, security forces actively combat extremist and criminal groups and have repeatedly rescued civilians of all faiths from Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. In fact, In 2025, Nigerian Security forces captured two wanted terror leaders, Mahmud Muhammad Usman (aka Abu Bara'a) and Mahmud al-Nigeri (aka Mallam Mamuda), who led the Ansaru group an international terrorist, which elicited commendation from the United States and UK.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern on this basis would mischaracterize the nature of Nigeria's internal conflicts, punish officials for upholding judicial and constitutional processes and risk undermining vital U.S.-Nigeria cooperation in counterterrorism and regional security. Moreover, such a designation could be inadvertently reinforcing extremist narratives by framing Nigeria as hostile to particular faiths, despite clear evidence to the contrary. Rather than this designation, the United States and Nigeria can better advance shared goals by focusing on addressing the root causes of conflict, including resource disputes and security challenges, supporting governance and judicial reforms, promoting intercommunal and interfaith dialogue and continuing robust cooperation against violent extremist organizations. In light of this, Nigeria respectfully submits that a credible and responsible approach requires acknowledging all victims. A narrative that focuses exclusively on Christian as sole victims is incomplete, while a narrative that overlooks Christian suffering is unjust. Nigeria

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Embassy Nigeria, X (@USinNigeria), "Full text of tweet here," X (Jan. 2025), <https://x.com/USinNigeria/status/1957423949442105754>



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therefore encourages the Subcommittee to adopt a balanced, evidence-driven framework—one that considers all sides and all communities—so that our nations can work together on solutions rooted in accuracy, compassion, objectivity and moral clarity.

Despite the scale of the challenge, Nigeria has taken measurable steps to reduce violence and strengthen protection for vulnerable populations. The Nigerian Government has neutralized more than 13,500 militants and armed criminals since May 2023, over 17,000 suspects have been arrested in connection with terrorism and communal attacks, and more than 11,200 captives and hostages have been rescued through coordinated operations across multiple states.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the government has deployed military and police units to protect churches and Christian-majority villages in Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa, particularly during religious services and holiday seasons. Several suspects implicated in previous attacks on Christian communities are currently facing prosecution under anti-terrorism statutes. Joint investigative panels have been activated to improve transparency and strengthen accountability. These actions are complemented by broader security operations against Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa, which continue to threaten all Nigerian communities, and by intensified efforts to dismantle kidnapping and bandit networks that prey on civilians regardless of religious affiliation.

Nevertheless, the National Assembly recognizes that more work remains. Response times in rural areas must improve. Prosecutions sometimes encounter challenges related to evidence, terrain, and logistics. Data collection remains inconsistent across certain states. In isolated cases, local-level negligence has been identified and addressed. Nigeria's willingness to acknowledge these gaps is not a sign of weakness or indifference. Rather, it reflects our government's commitment to continuous improvement, institutional strengthening, and honest engagement with our international partners including the U.S, as a trusted ally. It also reflects our understanding, echoed by the United Nations and other international actors, that sustainable peace requires both security operations and serious efforts to combat impunity and support victims among other non-kinetic measures of engagement, deradicalization, reorientation, disarmament demobilization, dialogue, negotiation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, empowerment, education and development. The Nigerian judiciary has been instructed by the Tinubu administration to fast-track prosecution against those who are responsible for the heinous attack at the U.N. headquarters in 2011.

As part of our forward-looking reforms, Nigeria is expanding the reach of the National Inter-Religious Council, establishing early-warning and rapid-response hubs in high-risk zones, enhancing security for worship sites, proposing fast-track courts for mass-violence crimes, and implementing new community-resilience strategies to reduce resource tensions in rural communities. These initiatives demonstrate Nigeria's determination to protect every citizen—

<sup>10</sup> Daka, Te-remb-ha, "13,500 Terrorists, Criminals Neutralised Since 2023 – NSA," \*The Guardian\* (Nigeria), 22 May 2025, [<https://guardian.ng/news/13500-terrorists-criminals-neutralised-since-2023-nsa/>]





Christian, Muslim, and minority—without fear or favor. They also reinforce Nigeria’s global reputation as a nation that values religious harmony and rejects extremism in all its forms. At the same time, Christian and Muslim leaders are working together through joint delegations and interfaith initiatives, including efforts facilitated by international church organizations, to respond to violence affecting both communities and to prevent the conflict from being framed as a war of religion.<sup>11</sup>

In reflecting on this issue, it is equally important to highlight Nigeria’s longstanding cooperation with the United States in counterterrorism and security. For more than two decades, our nations have worked shoulder to combat Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, and other extremist threats. The United States has provided training, equipment, and advisory support to Nigerian armed forces; Nigeria has served as a key security partner in West Africa, participating in regional initiatives and joint operations aimed at dismantling terrorist networks and protecting civilians.<sup>12</sup> Together, we have pursued terrorist designations at the United Nations, coordinated humanitarian responses for displaced populations, and strengthened border and maritime security. This history underscores a fundamental truth: Nigeria and the United States are not adversaries in this struggle—we are partners. Our shared values and mutual interests position us to advance security and stability together, as equal sovereign nations committed to peace.

Before concluding, the National Assembly wishes to speak directly to faith leaders—especially Christian pastors, ministers, and religious workers—who may be listening to this hearing or reading this testimony. We understand that you carry the pain of your congregations. We respect your voices and your advocacy. And we affirm, without ambiguity, that Christian lives are precious to the Nigerian state. Protecting human life is not only a constitutional responsibility; it is a profound moral obligation. At the same time, we ask faith leaders to join us in nurturing unity, resisting divisive narratives, and helping communities understand the full complexity of this conflict. Peace will not emerge from fear-based labels or oversimplifications, but through truth-telling, empathy, and partnership across faith lines.

In closing, the National Assembly reiterates, with clarity and conviction, that there is no government policy, directive, or sanction that targets Christians or any other religious group. Furthermore, the National Assembly reiterates that it is of top priority for the government to implement lasting solutions to bring relief to Christian religious communities and other religious groups. We welcome serious dialogue. We embrace accountability. And we stand ready to deepen cooperation with the United States. We invite Members of Congress, religious leaders, civil-

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<sup>11</sup> Wirtschafter, Jacob, “Faith Leaders and Foreign Critics Clash Over Nigeria’s Religious Violence Narrative,”

\*Jerusalem Post\* (Israel), Nov. 12 2025, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-873599>

<sup>12</sup> U.S., Dept. of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Nigeria” Jan.23, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-nigeria>





society partners, and human-rights advocates to visit Nigeria, meet with affected families, examine our data, and see firsthand both the challenges we confront and the progress we are making in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect.

The National Assembly respectfully urges the Administration to reconsider and rescind our designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act. We make this request not to avoid scrutiny, but because the designation, as currently framed, does not fully reflect the complexity of the violence, the fact that both Christians and Muslims have suffered greatly, or the significant steps Nigeria has taken and continues to take to protect all communities and to hold perpetrators accountable. Moreover, maintaining this designation risks sending an unintended signal that Nigeria is an adversary rather than a crucial partner in addressing terrorism, mass displacement, and instability in West Africa—challenges that have clear implications for regional and global security.

A recalibration of this designation, grounded in updated data and balanced analysis, would affirm our shared commitment to religious freedom, acknowledge Nigeria's ongoing reforms, and strengthen the foundations for deeper, more effective cooperation between our two nations working side by side to protect life and dignity.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, GCON**  
President of the Senate & Chairman of the National Assembly  
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