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May 13, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Sam Brownback
Ambassador at Large
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo & Ambassador Brownback

I am concerned about a rise of communal violence in Nigeria that disproportionately affects Christians in the country, particularly in the Northeast and throughout the Middle Belt.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of over 214 million, 46% of whom self-identify as Christians.¹ As Nigeria's population grows, Christians have faced considerable violence from Islamist militants, most notably from the ISIS-affiliated group Boko Haram.

2020 attacks against Christians in Nigeria are gaining increased international attention, especially following the kidnapping and public beheading of Pastor Lawan Andimi on January 20, 2020, by ISIS militants.² Alongside this persistent threat from Boko Haram, growing land-use conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt between Muslim Fulani and Christian farmers have exacerbated existing ethnic and religious conflicts.³

The Trump administration has incorporated international religious liberty as a key pillar of its foreign policy. Innovative U.S.-led efforts such as the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom have brought increased attention to the importance of protecting the God-given right to practice religion free from coercion and persecution.⁴

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

² <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/people/nigerian-pastor-lawan-andimi-executed-terrorist-group>

³ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/2019-ministerial-to-advance-religious-freedom/>

I applaud the administration's efforts to combat the persecution of Christians in Nigeria by placing the country on the State Department's Special Watch List on December 18, 2020, and the State Department's continued support of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs in Nigeria.

Given increased violence against Christians in Nigeria throughout the first half of 2020, I would appreciate your answers to the following questions regarding this important issue:

1. Numerous NGO's have advocated for the appointment of a Special Envoy to Nigeria to address the crisis faced by Christians and other religious minorities in the country. Is the State Department considering the appointment of a special envoy?
2. What action is the State Department undertaking to increase high-level U.S.-Nigerian cooperation on the issue of religious violence in Nigeria?
3. What efforts are being executed at a regional level across the Lake Chad Basin to reduce inter-ethnic and religious conflict?
4. How is the State Department evaluating the Nigerian government's efforts to reduce religious conflict in the country?

Ensuring that Christians and other religious minorities in Africa's most populous country are safe from persecution is important in preventing the further destabilization of the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, and is consistent with our nation's values and interests.

I look forward to your response and insights in how this problem can be better addressed going forward.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator
