



The Crisis of Christian Persecution in Nigeria

February 2021 Edition

by Lela Gilbert

Key Points

Since 2015, over 12,000 Christians have been killed in Nigeria. Countless more believers have been gravely injured, displaced, kidnapped or have simply disappeared.

Despite rampant terrorism, incompetent and corrupt political leadership in Nigeria has taken little action to stop what has been widely described as a slowly unfolding genocide.

Hard-hitting sanctions, such as the Global Magnitsky Act, cuts in foreign aid, and other firm demands for religious freedom and human rights should be used to move Nigeria from talk to positive action.

Summary

Since the dawn of the 21st century, and with horrifying acceleration in recent years, verified reports of murders, rapes, mutilations, and kidnapping of Christians in Nigeria have persistently increased. These attacks are frequently accompanied by the torching of homes, churches, villages, and agricultural fields. A July 15, 2020 headline reports that 1,202 Nigerian Christians were killed in the first six months of 2020.¹ This is in addition to 11,000 Christians who have been killed since June 2015.² Such violence has reached a point at which expert observers and analysts are warning of a progressive genocide—a “slow-motion war” specifically targeting Christians across Africa’s largest and most economically powerful nation.

“Just like the early church, we are being persecuted. When I became bishop years ago I inherited a persecuted church. I had no intention then to let the church lose steam, and I don’t want that happening now. We must not be afraid or lose confidence, but plow ahead with mission in the midst of persecution. Courage only comes from God. Outside of Jesus, your own courage will fail you. When you see the gospel at work saving lives, you count your suffering for nothing.”

– Benjamin Kwashi, Archbishop of the Province of Jos, Nigeria

News stories about the shocking and relentless violence in Nigeria are rarely reported in mainstream media outlets. Instead, they are generally found in newsletters and websites sponsored by Christian organizations. For this reason, the genocidal intentions of radical Islamist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Fulani jihadis have not gained sufficient attention to alert global powers and authorities. To make matters worse, when these incidents are reported, they are regularly explained away as effects of climate change, local feuds, or internecine religious wars for which both sides bear equal responsibility.

The following survey is intended to cast light and increase focus on these relentless attacks on Nigeria’s Christians, to provide insights into the perpetrating groups, and to offer evidence of their Islamist intentions. Meanwhile, it is necessary to spotlight the disastrous leadership of Nigeria, beginning with its presidency and flowing unabated through its military and local politicians and police—all of whom continually fail to protect and defend millions of innocent Christian women, men, and children.

Finally, gleaned from local experts, NGOs, diplomats, religious freedom activists, and Nigerian clergy, some insights and recommendations are offered. They’re intended to redirect the course of present discussions, to define the actual dynamics of these outrageous injustices, and bring to an end—once and for all—the continuing bloodshed and devastation.

Background on Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's largest nation, is located on the continent's western coast.³ Nigeria's population of 219,463,862 (July 2021 est.) is comprised of some 250 ethnic groups speaking more than 500 languages and customs. This makes for a colorful tribal tapestry and an intriguing cultural milieu. It also makes for unimaginable conflicts.

On January 1, 1900, the British Empire created the Southern Nigeria Protectorate⁴ and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate.⁵ During this colonial period, the English language became the common tongue, and British missionary efforts and education took root. This was particularly true in the south of the country, and is still reflected in the country's religious patterns.

Nigeria was under British rule from 1900 until 1960, when independence was declared.

Religiously, the population is approximately 53 percent Muslim and 47 percent Christian—including both Protestants and Catholics. The Muslim community is primarily located in the country's northern states, while the Christians generally reside farther south. But both religious groups are scattered across the land.

Not only is Nigeria geographically immense, it is also an economic front-runner in Africa. Yet despite the profitability of Nigeria's large petroleum reserves and the country's extensive global enterprises, World Bank reports that Nigeria faces significant economic challenges:⁶

Growth is too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. The weakness of the agriculture sector weakens prospects for the rural poor, while high food inflation adversely impacts the livelihoods of the urban poor. Despite expansion in some sectors, employment creation remains weak and insufficient to absorb the fast-growing labor force, resulting in high rate of unemployment (23% in 2018), with another 20% of the

labor force underemployed. Furthermore, the instability in the North and the resulting displacement of people contribute to the high incidence of poverty in the North East.

In May 2020, an Al Jazeera article reported:⁷

Forty percent of people in Nigeria live in poverty, figures published by the statistics office on Monday showed, highlighting the low levels of wealth in a country that has Africa's biggest economy.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in a report about poverty and inequality from September 2018 to October 2019, said 40 percent of people in the continent's most populous country lived below its poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) a year. It said that represents 82.9 million people.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has struck a cruel blow to the already-stressed Nigerian population. *The New York Times* has explained that the country's leadership is not facing reality, according to Dr. Usman Yusuf, a hematology-oncology professor and the former head of Nigeria's national health insurance agency:⁸

"The leadership is in denial," said Usman Yusuf, a hematology-oncology professor and the former head of Nigeria's national health insurance agency. "It's almost like saying there is no Covid in New York." He said he thought a significant portion of the population was probably infected in Kano, a city with an estimated five million people (though there has been no census since 2006).

"If Kano falls, the whole of northern Nigeria falls. The whole of Nigeria falls," Dr. Yusuf said. "It spreads into the whole of West Africa and the whole of Africa."

Interestingly, a similar comment was made nearly four years ago by an unlikely commentator: Bono, of U2 fame. As a human rights activist, Bono has invested considerable time in Africa. He told *The New York Times* in September 2016:⁹

There's so much strategic importance in Nigeria — that's why it's odd that there's not more focus on what's happening. It's pathetic. If Nigeria fails, Africa fails. If Africa fails, Europe fails. And if Europe fails, America is no longer America.

Of course in 2016, Bono wasn't speaking about COVID-19 and the danger it poses today. He was in Maiduguri, Nigeria, trying to draw attention to the Boko Haram massacres that were shattering the country. He was meeting with local government officials and touring encampments for people who had fled their villages as Boko Haram closed in.

The New York Times reporter remarked, "Getting the world to focus on the Boko Haram crisis will not be easy."

She was certainly correct. And today, it's not just Boko Haram that is doing the killing. Now another violent group of invaders—Fulani jihadis—is adding to the unbelievable amount of bloodshed Nigeria is enduring. The primary victims of both groups are targeting Nigeria's poorest and least protected Christian populations. And the world's greatest and most powerful nations are doing virtually nothing to stop the carnage.

Sources of Conflict

In recent months, two large reports on Nigeria have been published.

- "Nigeria's ~~Silent~~ Slaughter: Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community" published by the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON)¹⁰
- "Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?" An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief¹¹

Both of these reports focus on violent attacks by terrorist groups in Nigeria. They specifically emphasize religious freedom and the targeting of Christians by radical Islamists. Both reports also use

the word “genocide” in their titles. It may seem like a logical choice of words to those who follow reports about Nigeria’s turmoil, but among scholars, global leaders, and Islamist apologists, the bloodshed in Nigeria continues to be described in less profound and far less accurate terms (more about that later).

It is noteworthy, by the way, that a movement of Biafran separatists—the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)—is seeking a peaceful withdrawal from Nigeria, and has been doing so for half a century, since a horrendous civil war in the 1960s cost more than 2-3 million lives. “IPOB was proscribed and declared as a terrorist organization by an Abuja high court in September 2017. But the United States has said it does not see the movement as a terrorist organization, as its protests have been largely peaceful, although Washington has maintained that it is committed to a united Nigeria.”¹² The present concerns with Christian persecution are also important to this Biafran movement, as many of its activists and followers are Christian.¹³

Meanwhile, two vicious groups have perpetrated enormous levels of death and violence to Christians in Nigeria.

One is Boko Haram, which includes a splinter group that has affiliated itself with Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). Their attacks have primarily taken place in Nigeria’s northeast states, especially in Borno, Yobe, and Gombe. But they are not limited to that area and have afflicted other states as well.

The other group is best known as Fulani tribesmen or herders. More specifically, and particularly to Christian activists, they are referred to as Fulani militants or jihadis. Their attacks have principally taken place in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, but not exclusively so.

The Evolution of Boko Haram into a Terrorist Group

Boko Haram originated in 2002. BBC described their beginnings:¹⁴

Since the Sokoto caliphate, which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria, Niger and southern Cameroon, fell under British control in 1903, there has been resistance among some of the area's Muslims to Western education. Many still refuse to send their children to government-run "Western schools," a problem compounded by the ruling elite which does not see education as a priority. Against this background, charismatic Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf formed Boko Haram in Maiduguri in 2002. He set up a religious complex, which included a mosque and an Islamic school.

Although violence against Christian communities by Muslim attackers was recognized well before the founding of Boko Haram, it became much more intense and frequent after 2009, after Mohammed Yusuf was killed by Nigerian authorities. At that time, the group—along with other smaller jihadi sects—became more murderous. Following Yusuf's demise, Abubaker Shakau became the designated leader of the group.

Boko Haram initially stated that their mission was to attack and eliminate "Western education." At first, they functioned as a socially withdrawn cult that primarily attracted disenfranchised young men. But as time passed the group declared its ambition to overthrow the Nigerian government and to create a Shari'a (Islamist law observant) state. And their attacks multiplied.

In 2011, Al Jazeera reported that a series of church bombings had taken the lives of 40 worshippers in the Abuja area:¹⁵

Boko Haram, an extremist group that advocates the enforcement of strict Islamic law in Nigeria, claimed responsibility for Sunday's church bombings. Abu Qaqa, a spokesman for the group, claimed responsibility for the bombings in a statement to the journalists' association of Maiduguri, capital of the group's heartland. The Nigerian government also blamed Boko Haram for the attacks. "The latest mindless and cowardly attacks by Boko Haram members specifically directed at churches were pre-meditated," Owoye Azazi, Nigeria's national security advisor, said in a statement. Jos was the site of a string

of explosions targeting churches on Christmas eve last year. Those bombings were also claimed by Boko Haram.

Even before their name was recognized in the west, it became apparent, in the years that followed, that Boko Haram terrorist attacks increasingly focused on Nigeria's Christian churches and communities. In 2014, the Boko Haram "brand" became broadly recognizable in the U.S. after their kidnapping of 276 girls from a Chibok school. At that time, Michelle Obama launched a #bringbackourgirls hashtag campaign to draw attention to their plight.

In March of the following year, according to a United Nations Security Council statement, Abubakar Shekau's group Boko Haram "pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant [ISIL], listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115), and changed the group's name to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). ISIL accepted the pledge the same month, as ISIL spokesman Abou Mohamed al Adnani released an audio message directing individuals who could not enter Iraq or the Syrian Arab Republic to travel to West Africa."¹⁶

In August 2016, ISIL leadership recognized and appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the de facto leader of ISWAP, but Abubakar Shekau refused to accept the decision. "Due to infighting, ISIL-West Africa split into two factions, al-Barnawi's faction (ISWAP) and Shekau's faction (Boko Haram). It is estimated that ISWAP has approximately 3,500-5,000 fighters."

Today the carnage continues. According to a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report released in February 2021, estimates suggest that conflict with groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province has resulted in the deaths of more than 37,500 people since 2011, and there is a reasonable basis to believe that these groups have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Nigerian church leaders and other observers were fully aware that Christian villages, churches, and homes were being intentionally targeted by jihadi groups. But of the total numbers killed and displaced, religion sceptics wanted to know whether those targeted were specifically Christians. Were they really intentionally kidnapped, enslaved, and slaughtered simply because of their faith?

In one well-known incident, a 14-year-old Christian girl was abducted by Boko Haram in February 2018. Leah Sharibu has been in captivity ever since.¹⁸

Leah and her classmates were rounded up during an attack on Dapchi, a small village in Yobe State. When Boko Haram shot its way into town, panic ensued, and everyone fled. Days later, once the scattered students had returned to their classes, a roll call revealed that 110 girls were missing—including Leah.

Although the Muslim girls who survived the attack were eventually released, Leah refused to deny her Christian faith. She remains in captivity to this day, enslaved and reportedly having given birth to the child of one of her captors.

Addressing those who deny the attackers' religious motives, the genocidal intentions of groups who target Christians in Nigeria are increasingly noted. Scholar Ewelina Ochab writes in *Forbes*:¹⁹

On November 18, 2010, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a preliminary examination into the situation in Nigeria. The preliminary examination followed several communications received by the Office of the Prosecutor (the OTP) which suggested that mass atrocities had occurred, involving Boko Haram militants based in Nigeria.

Thousands have been affected by the litany of mass atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram. However, among the staggering statistics, the fates of those suffering are lost. The fate of people like Leah Sharibu get lost among the suffering of thousands of people...

Attacking women and girls is a signature tactic of Boko Haram. Boko Haram subjects women and girls to physical and mental abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced labor and much more. However, among its atrocities, those that are of a religious nature are significant too and cannot be neglected.

Indeed, it has become increasingly clear that, in Ochab's words, "the atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram are not the only mass atrocities in Nigeria that require urgent attention." The activities of Fulani tribesmen who target Nigerian Christians also require increasing attention and analysis. Ochab goes on to say:

... Amnesty International estimate that between January 2016 and October 2018 "at least 3,641 people may have been killed, 406 injured [and] 5,000 houses burnt down. Local groups, such as the Christian Association of Nigeria, report higher figures: between January and June 2018, over 6,000 people were killed by Fulani herders." Fulani militia continue to perpetrate mass atrocities in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Their crimes continue to go unreported.

Fulani Herdsmen and their Jihadi-style Attacks on Christians

Initially, Fulani violence against Christians was attributed to climate change. It has been widely reported that due to drought and the receding of pastures for their flocks, desperate Fulani migrant herders began to confiscate land on which to graze their animals. However, due to ever-increasing evidence of rampant bloodshed, outrageous brutality, and Islamist chants and declarations during attacks, the Fulani marauders' jihadi intentions have been exposed.

Open Doors reported in June 2018 that Fulani terrorists had completely destroyed a dozen Christian villages in a four-day massacre. "Most of the victims were in their homes sleeping when the attacks began ... when Muslim Fulani militant herdsmen began their killing spree... In only days, a dozen villages in Nigeria's Plateau state were wiped out... As many as 200 Christians had been killed, however, some residents fear the death toll may be even higher, as more bodies are yet to be recovered, while others were burned beyond recognition."²⁰

According to ICON's recent publication, between January 2000 and 2020, Fulani militants have killed nearly 19,000 during their assaults on farms and villages in the middle and south of Nigeria.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) report goes into some detail regarding the identities of the groups in question and their religious orientation. The following paragraphs, quoted directly from the report, include the group's sources:²¹

Several submissions to the APPG inquiry conflated ISWAP, Boko Haram and Fulani herders without evidence to connect the groups and their actions beyond their shared religious identity. Others described the Fulani, a group of millions of people with hundreds of clans and many different lineages spread across the huge geographic terrain of Nigeria and the Sahel, as one homogenous group – a tendency which is not exclusive to Nigeria.²²

It is necessary to avoid conflating these groups, not least because Fulani herders in the North who do not adhere to Islamist ideology have been victims of Boko Haram. According to Dr Adam Higazi and Dr Oliver Owen, “Well over 1,500 pastoralists have been killed by Boko Haram in Borno State alone and tens of thousands of cattle and sheep have been stolen by the insurgents during the conflict.”²³

Notwithstanding these important distinctions, the APPG received evidence²⁴ to suggest many Fulani herders in Nigeria do adhere to an extremist ideology. They adopt a comparable strategy to Boko Haram and ISWAP and demonstrate a clear intent to target Christians and potent symbols of Christian identity. As the Bishop of Truro concluded in his report for the FCO, “the religious dimension is a significantly exacerbating factor” in clashes between farmers and herders and “targeted violence against Christian communities in the context of worship suggests that religion plays a key part.”

The debate about Fulani attacks on Christians has deep political implications, both in Nigeria and in the realm of international human rights and religious freedom. The Fulani tribe is one of Nigeria's largest, and in fact stretches beyond Nigeria into several surrounding countries. It is important to note that although the tribe is primarily Muslim, it is not entirely radicalized. Still, tribal loyalties cannot be

overlooked.

In 2015, Muhammadu Buhari, a member of the Fulani tribe himself, was elected president of Nigeria. He has done virtually nothing to address the behavior of his fellow tribesmen in the Middle Belt and in the south of the country. Even after President Donald Trump publicly confronted him about violent attacks on Nigerian Christians, Buhari has not offered a substantive response to the crisis.

However, according to the APPG report, concerned Christian organizations are increasingly speaking out about the Fulani attacks on Christians. For example, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) led by Baroness Caroline Cox has repeatedly visited some of the worst-affected areas many times, reporting in 2019:²⁵

...growing numbers of Fulani have adopted a new land-grabbing policy – motivated by an extremist belief system and equipped with sophisticated weaponry – which has led to the massacre of thousands of people and to the permanent displacement of vulnerable rural communities. While tensions between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders have existed for centuries, recent attacks suggest a worrying trend: the Fulani’s military capability and ideological fervour are increasing.

Aid to the Church in Need UK drew similar conclusions: “While not necessarily sharing Boko Haram’s vision of a Muslim caliphate in northern Nigeria, the evidence suggests the Fulani herdsmen are as committed as Daesh (ISIS) affiliates to eliminating Christians in a region where the Church has grown fast.”²⁶

The Nigerian organization Stefanos Foundation submitted to the APPG that “the violence is primarily for Islamic territorial expansion and the advancement of Sharia (Islamic law).” They argue that “the perpetrators of the violence are Muslim extremists who cannot submit to any other law apart from Islamic law.”²⁷

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria has condemned the federal Government for failing its primary duty of protecting the lives of citizens and has lamented that the “*culture of death is becoming embedded into our daily lives.*”²⁸ In addition, Nigerian Bishops clearly expressed that the ongoing violence, in reference to the Fulani herdsmen, “can no longer be treated as mere clash between pastoralists and farmers.”²⁹

In a stunning December 2019 article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, Bernard-Henri Levy—French philosopher, filmmaker, journalist, and public intellectual—described a recent trip to Nigeria during which he privately investigated Fulani attacks on Christians. Levy begins his account:³⁰

A slow-motion war is under way in Africa’s most populous country. It’s a massacre of Christians, massive in scale and horrific in brutality. And the world has hardly noticed...

In his must-read account, Levy documents his visits to devastated communities and conversations both with victimized Christians and defiant Fulani Muslims. He concludes:

...A postcard vendor joins the group and offers me portraits of Osama bin Laden and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He agrees the Christians will eventually leave and Nigeria will be “free.”... I have the terrible feeling of being carried back to Rwanda in the 1990s, to Darfur and South Sudan in the 2000s.

Will the West let history repeat itself in Nigeria? Will we wait, as usual, until the disaster is done before taking notice? Will we stand by as international Islamic extremism opens a new front across this vast land, where the children of Abraham have coexisted for so long?³¹

Why the International Inaction?

My work as an author, writer, and religious freedom spokesperson has involved many years and innumerable discussions about Nigeria. In fact, my first conversation about the anti-Christian attacks

there took place in 2004 with Baroness Cox—life peer in the House of Lords. Even then, violent raids were nothing new. I've since discussed the situation with other colleagues and friends in the U.S., U.K., Israel, and beyond. The following observations reflect what I've gleaned about the seemingly intractable situation after many conversations.

Repeated appeals from Nigerian clergy—Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant—as well as NGOs, and an array of international human rights advocates, continue to demand decisive action from the Abuja government to stop the destruction and bloodshed in Nigeria's Christian communities. This is powerfully reflected in the two documents cited at the beginning of this report. And of course, we applaud denominational cooperation at every level, because the violence has affected all Christian faith groups—Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and Pentecostal.

Yet in the face of these joint Christian appeals, little progress has been made in Nigeria.

Many informed observers describe Nigeria's political leadership as both incompetent and corrupt. But that's only part of the problem. Not only are they almost entirely Muslim in their religious affiliation (while the country's population is roughly half Christian), as previously noted, several governmental leaders—beginning with President Muhammadu Buhari—belong to the Fulani tribe, as do numerous military and police officials. This is seen as one of the major roadblocks to reform, particularly with regard to the Fulani jihadi massacres.

Meanwhile, a number of religious freedom organizations, Christian activists, legislators, and parliamentarians in the U.S., the U.K., and Europe have been demanding action from their own governments against Nigerian governmental negligence or, worse, complicity with the killers. Yet, beyond declarations of concern in speeches, articles, and tweets on social media, so far no observable concrete action has been taken. However, efforts are presently underway to seek financial sanctions on Nigerian leadership.³²

On December 7, 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement:

The United States is designating Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, the DPRK, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan as Countries of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, for engaging in or tolerating “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.”³³

Shortly after Pompeo’s announcement, USCIRF published a statement headlined, “USCIRF Welcomes the State Department’s Designation of Nigeria among World’s Worst Violators of Religious Freedom.” The commission applauded the decision—one that many international observers, activists, and victims of Nigeria’s violence have long demanded:

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) praised the State Department’s announcement that it has named 10 “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPCs), including Nigeria for the first time, and placed four countries on its “Special Watch List” (SWL) for severe violations, pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).

“We are gratified that the State Department has named 10 countries as CPCs. We particularly welcome Nigeria’s designation for the first time as a CPC for tolerating egregious violations of religious freedom, which USCIRF had been recommending since 2009. Nigeria is the first secular democracy that has been named a CPC, which demonstrates that we must be vigilant that all forms of governments respect religious freedom,” said Chair Gayle Manchin.³⁴

Despite that important step by the U.S., there is reason to believe that other significant conflicts are in play in international Nigeria impasses. These have to do with worldview—including the deeply secular perspective of many diplomats, intelligence analysts, and media talking heads. These secularists greatly diminish or utterly overlook the role religious faith plays—for better or for worse—in the world. And this particularly influences how delicately government officials tread when addressing matters regarding Islam and Islamist agendas and activities.

More than a few policy-makers and media voices are convinced that religion simply amounts to cultural norms or a picturesque assortment of traditions rather than deeply held beliefs. Thus, they insistently

overlook foundational religious beliefs—particularly the demands of strict Shari’a law—and instead persistently promote “dialogue,” even in the face of deadly religious violence.

Specifically, when faced with fierce attacks on Christian communities by Islamist radicals, diplomats, ambassadors, and policy makers attempt to initiate “reconciliation meetings,” in which both parties are expected to bear equal responsibility for bloodshed. Needless to say, this is a grave insult as well as a nightmare scenario for Christian victims of unprovoked violence.

On the other hand, more realistic participants who understand the deeply religious roots of jihadi violence sensibly dismiss calls for futile negotiation. Instead, they demand better policing, practical means of protection, and even armed defense forces appropriately deployed to protect threatened communities.

Likewise, the interests of trade and corporate businesses—such as the highly profitable petroleum industry in Nigeria—might incur considerable losses if a hard line is drawn diplomatically due to continuing terrorism. Economic considerations invariably affect diplomatic decisions at the national level.

And along similar financial lines, questions about foreign aid arise: Is U.S. aid simply a generous gift from an altruistic country to a poor one? Or is foreign aid conditional upon specific demands, such as governmental curbs on deadly attacks? These are philosophical and moral questions as well as financial ones.

Yet another major obstacle in the way of security specifically regards the Fulani attacks on Christian farmers: the overly simplistic explanation that climate change is the reason for “herders vs. farmers” violence. While drought most certainly exists in the Sahel and there are indeed water-related challenges facing nomadic herders and shepherds, this does not suffice to explain bloodthirsty attacks on farms and villages. It is a particularly inappropriate justification for the cries of *allahu akbar* that accompany the killing and mutilation of villagers, the burning of homes and churches, the murder of men, rape of women, and kidnapping of boys and girls.

And finally, on the part of major powers including the U.S., U.K., and E.U., there is a failure to identify, trace, and push back against foreign-funded Islamist radicalization in Nigeria. There are indications in various reports—such as Bernard-Henri Levy’s article cited previously—that internationally-infused money is driving the development of radical mosques and madrassas. These influences, in turn, inflame local passions through sermons, youth movements, broadcasts, and literature.

Such unaddressed infiltration, often by Middle Eastern Islamist mosques, organizations, and even countries—and the virtual turning of a blind eye—is too often motivated by the dread of so-called “Islamophobia.” In fact, fear of Islamic violence is an everyday experience for millions of Nigerian Christians. Such fear is hardly “phobic.” It indicates a very real and increasing danger that cannot be overlooked. And such danger should not be ignored by those who have the power and means to confront and contest it.

Recommendations

With regard to Nigeria’s particular threats, there are several specific issues that affect the way those concerns are addressed by diplomats, analysts, and lawmakers. They deserve immediate attention and, where possible, action.

Today, there is well-intentioned but inconsistent documentation of violent incidents across Nigeria, which are too often dismissed by authorities as unreliable. Standardized templates for reporting need to be developed and training provided so that facts appear in a consistent format—documenting attacks, deaths, arson, kidnappings, rapes, property destruction, and whatever information is deemed relevant. Once such information is made known, it will be more difficult for the U.S. Embassy, ambassadors, and other American representatives who serve in West Africa—not to mention Foggy Bottom—to ignore it.

Related to the documentation, former Congressman Frank Wolf is tirelessly lobbying for the appointment of a Special Envoy for Nigeria, similar to the assignment of Senator John Danforth, who successfully served as envoy to Sudan and Darfur in 2001. The Special Envoy for Nigeria—a role which should be created and filled promptly—would be tasked with making sure that reports are accurate and are not lost somewhere between the incident sites, the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, and the corridors of power in Washington, D.C.

Hard-hitting sanctions against President Buhari and his henchmen are essential and appropriate. The U.S. Country of Particular Concern declaration provides the option of applying the Global Magnitsky Act and other religious freedom and human rights tools that can help move these concerns from talk to positive action. Cuts in foreign aid should also be under consideration.

International media also play a role in the ignorance of the American public when it comes to Nigeria's bloodbath, along with other religiously-inflamed conflicts. Because many reporters and others in the media often operate from a secularist worldview, religious concerns are frequently overlooked by ill-informed commentators and analysts. Worse yet, far too many incidents remain unreported altogether. This lack of reporting is occurring while one of the twenty-first century's worst atrocities unfolds before us. Appropriate attention and pressure on media networks and corporations to simply cover these horrific stories could be a helpful tool to encourage balanced and accurate coverage in North American, British, and European countries.

Conclusion

In a recent statement, Baroness Cox decried the weak response of the U.K government to the Nigerian crisis. Her concerns echo ours in the United States:³⁵

In every village, the message from local people is the same: "Please help us! The herdsmen are coming. We are not safe in our homes." Yet time and again, we have turned a deaf ear to their cry for help.

Despite reports from The Global Terrorism Index which classify Fulani militants as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world (with only Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabab being accounted deadlier) and despite the fact that most of their attacks begin with shouts of ‘Allahu Akbar,’ the UK Government continue to insist the “situation” has little to do with religion or ideology. It is far more palatable, it seems, to refer to the insurgency as “ethnic riots,” “land and water disputes” or “tit-for-tat clashes between farmers and herders.”

Such a characterization of the insurgency is an insult to those who have suffered so much. The causes of violence are, of course, complex. But given the escalation, frequency, organization and asymmetry of attacks against predominantly Christian communities, is it not time for our politicians to revisit their narrative?

Yes, Lady Cox. It is past time for both U.K. lawmakers as well as those in the U.S. and Europe to reconsider the ominous threat of another genocide taking place in Africa even now. All too well we remember Rwanda, where we failed to stop a genocide in which one million were slaughtered.³⁶ Not too long ago, we finally recognized that a genocide took place in Iraq—several years too late.³⁷ May this not happen again. May our international Christian communities continue to work together to inspire and cajole our governments to bring this terrible carnage to an end—once and for all. And may our prayers—as well as demands—continue for immediate international action to stop the bloodshed.

***Addendum: Further Information About the Nigerian Crisis**

For more details, below are links to articles I’ve written about the Nigerian violence over the past three years. Perhaps they’ll bring to life some real people, illuminate their faces and stories, and add important details to the tragic scenario that I’ve sketched out in this analysis.

- “Africa’s Christians Targeted by Islamic Terrorists,” *Newsmax*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.newsmax.com/lelagilbert/africa-christians-islamism-isis/2017/08/04/id/805932/>

- “Former Rep. Frank Wolf: Time to End Nigeria Terror Infestation,” *Newsmax*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.newsmax.com/lelagilbert/frank-wolf-africa-terror-nigeria/2018/03/07/id/847444/>
- “Religious War Looms in Nigeria as Christian Body Count Climbs,” *Newsmax*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.newsmax.com/lelagilbert/nigeria-christians-religious-war/2018/05/21/id/861631/>
- “Anti-Christian Slaughter Escalates in Nigeria,” *Newsmax*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.newsmax.com/lelagilbert/christians-nigeria-killings-trump/2018/08/17/id/877487/>
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Lela Gilbert is Senior Fellow for International Religious Freedom at Family Research Council.

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