

**Testimony of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield,
Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs**

before the

House Foreign Affairs Committee

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Human Rights, and
International Organizations

and

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

“Countering the Threat Posed by Boko Haram”

November 13, 2013

Chairman Smith, Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Bass, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to update you about U.S. policy on Nigeria and specifically our efforts to help Nigeria counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and associated violent extremist groups.

Chairman Smith and Chairman Poe, instability in Nigeria is of direct concern to the United States. Nigeria is one of our most important partners in Africa. It is home to an estimated 170 million people, making it the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. Nigeria is the twenty-second fastest-

growing economy in the world, the thirteenth-largest supplier of oil to the global market, and the second largest destination for U.S. private investment in Africa. Nigeria is also the second-largest African contributor to UN peacekeeping operations around the world and we welcome Nigeria's participation on the U.N. Security Council beginning in January.

The significant mutual interests we share with Nigeria have led us to build a robust bilateral relationship, which we have deepened and broadened through the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission. We meet regularly with senior Nigerian officials. President Obama met with President Jonathan on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September. Under Secretary Wendy Sherman led a large interagency U.S. delegation to Abuja in mid-August to discuss civilian security with senior Nigerian civilian and military leaders, including President Jonathan and National Security Advisor Dasuki. Additionally, we have welcomed the travel of Congressional partners like Chairman Smith who visited Nigeria September 21-24 to meet with Nigerians affected by Boko Haram violence. It is through these engagements that we are able

to translate our partnership into mutual action to advance opportunities and address threats.

Boko Haram and associated violent extremist groups, such as the faction known as Ansaru, pose a threat to Nigeria's stability. These groups attack the Nigerian government, military, and ordinary citizens of all walks of life, including numerous Christians and an even greater number of Muslims. Their actions have increased tensions between ethnic communities, interrupted development, frightened investors, and alarmed Nigeria's neighbors. Boko Haram and associated groups can strike Nigeria's neighbors and target foreigners. Their unspeakable violence has killed too many Nigerians, as we saw during September, when attacks in Benisheikh shot more than 160 people and in Yobe, where more than fifty innocent students lost their lives. In August 2011, a suicide bomber from Boko Haram attacked the United Nations headquarters in Nigeria's capital Abuja. On February 19 of this year, Boko Haram kidnapped seven French tourists in Cameroon. Although Boko Haram has directed most of its violence and rhetoric at Nigerian

targets, reports of linkages between Boko Haram and Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, are worrying.

The ongoing violence in northern Nigeria has multiple causes. These include Boko Haram's ideology, which opposes Western culture and education and seeks to overthrow the Nigerian state and replace it with a regime enforcing strict shari'a law. Boko Haram has exploited religious rhetoric in an attempt to justify its violence, casting the state as hopelessly corrupt and un-Islamic. Regional and socioeconomic disparities have also contributed to the group's ability to recruit. Northern Nigeria has long lagged behind the south in education and economic development. In 2011, Nigeria's national unemployment rate was 24 percent, but the unemployment rate in six of the twelve far northern states exceeded 30 percent. In 2010, Nigeria's rate of absolute poverty was 62 percent, but in eight of the twelve far northern states the figure exceeded 70 percent. Of Nigeria's estimated 10.5 million children who do not attend school, 92 percent are estimated to be in the north. Boko Haram's activities call our attention not just to violence, but also to poverty and inequality in Nigeria.

Boko Haram's violence also comes at a time of uncertainty and tension for Nigeria. Preparations for the country's 2015 elections have already begun, and political realignments are adding to existing tensions. In the oil-producing Niger Delta region, thieves steal at least 100,000 barrels of oil per day and perhaps much more. This theft reduces government revenues, fuels corruption and international crime, and contributes to environmental degradation. In Nigeria's ethnically and religiously diverse Middle Belt, communal violence occurs in tragic cycles, overwhelming civilian authorities and stoking regional tensions. Corruption hinders the country's efforts to enforce the rule of law, generate electricity, attract investment, and expand infrastructure. Despite its tremendous wealth and vast human resources, Nigeria struggles to reduce poverty; despite its oil exports and agricultural riches, the country imports gasoline and rice. Good governance, healthy political competition, and equitable economic growth would go a long way to address all of these challenges. The strategy for countering Boko Haram should be, in other words, holistic. The government needs to not only stop Boko Haram's attacks, but address longstanding grievances of

law-abiding northern Nigerians about government corruption and unfairness that attracts disaffected youth to Boko Haram.

The United States is committed to helping the Nigerian government and people counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and associated violent extremist groups. In recent years, we have worked to help isolate Boko Haram's leaders. In June 2012, the State Department designated Boko Haram's top commanders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224. In June 2013, the State Department added Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's official leader, to our Rewards for Justice Program and offered up to \$7 million for information leading to his location.

I am pleased to inform you that the United States has recently taken additional steps to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and Ansaru. Earlier today, the State Department designated both as Foreign Terrorist Organizations under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224. We took this step after careful consideration. We anticipate that this designation will

empower U.S. law enforcement and the Treasury Department with additional tools to pursue these violent extremist organizations. We believe this designation is an important and appropriate step, but it is only one tool in what we believe must be a comprehensive approach toward addressing the Boko Haram threat. It is also our sincere hope that the Nigerian government and people will see this as a gesture of support in their fight against Boko Haram. We are committed to assisting Nigeria in bolstering its law enforcement capabilities and ultimately shifting to an integrated civilian-security-focused strategy to counter Boko Haram and Ansaru in a manner that adheres to the rule of law and ensures accountability.

The United States has also sought to enhance the capacity of Nigeria and its neighbors to detect, disrupt, respond to, investigate, and prosecute terrorist incidents. Through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, we build military, law enforcement, and civilian capacity and resilience across the Sahel and Maghreb regions to counter terrorism. We continue to train and equip Nigerian law enforcement units to strengthen leadership, improve crisis management,

enhance investigations and forensics, and counter improvised explosive devices. The State Department also funds a Legal Adviser to help the Nigerian government strengthen its anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing regime.

Military and law enforcement efforts are necessary, but they alone are insufficient to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and associated violent extremist groups. In the long run, reducing Boko Haram's ability to recruit is just as important as degrading its capabilities. In addition to the imperatives of improving governance and fostering equitable development, Nigeria must protect civilians, guarantee human rights, and ensure accountability in instances where government officials and security forces violate those rights. Nigeria must demonstrate that government can be the sole, trusted arbiter of justice in the country.

The United States recognizes that the Nigerian government and security forces face a difficult challenge in countering the Boko Haram insurgency. Both ordinary citizens and security forces have suffered. Still, we are concerned by reports that some Nigerian security forces

have committed gross human rights violations in response to Boko Haram. We have raised this concern with the Government of Nigeria at the highest levels. While northern Nigerians, Muslims and Christians alike, largely reject Boko Haram's vision and violence, Boko Haram has exploited local resentment of these violations and other long-standing grievances against the central government to attract recruits.

The United States is committed to helping Nigeria shift to a strategy that focuses on protecting citizens. Such a strategy would diminish Boko Haram's appeal and legitimacy. We support civil society-led efforts in Nigeria that counter Boko Haram's narrative and its violent extremist message. We also seek to increase outreach with youth leaders in northern Nigeria, and to promote better relations between these leaders and Nigerian government officials. We maintain an American corner in Kano, Nigeria, although its outreach activities have been limited by the security situation.

Nigeria's prosperity and stability matter to all of Africa. The United States is committed to several Presidential initiatives in partnership with Nigeria, including the Young African Leaders Initiative

and Power Africa, as well as significant programs for health and economic growth. Nigeria's success is important to us. We must continue to help our Nigerian partners develop an effective, multi-faceted strategy toward Boko Haram. Overcoming the challenges posed by Boko Haram will not be easy, but we believe it is possible with leadership and creativity. We appreciate Congress' interest in this issue, and we are ready to work with you in the months ahead. I look forward to your questions.