

**Nigeria Testimony: Subcommittee on Africa and Global Affairs
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Wilson Chair in Religious Freedom, Baylor University
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I would like to thank Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Karen Bass, and the Members of the Subcommittee for having this hearing today. I would also like to begin by saying that these are my personal observations- however, a detailed trip report will be released by the 21st Century Wilberforce next month.

I, along with Randel Everett (President of 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative), Elijah Brown (Executive Vice President), and Lou Ann Sabatier (Director of Communications), travelled to Nigeria in late February of this year. We arranged our itinerary and did not travel with the US State Department. We travelled to three states with representatives from the Stefanos Foundation, a Nigerian non-profit that has worked for 14 years in relief, restoration and rebuilding lives and communities ravaged by violence and persecution in northern Nigeria.

We met with representatives from nine states in the north who traveled to spend several hours with us, sharing stories and documentation of persecution. Much of our time was spent in Jos and the surrounding area, often referred to as the Middle-Belt. We listened to hundreds of individuals in small villages, and remote areas miles off the main roads. We talked to tribal leaders, pastors, mothers and fathers as well as government officials and our own Embassy personnel. We heard about the pain, suffering, and agony that the people in Northern and Central Nigeria have faced, and continue to face. Many believe the world is not concerned with their problems and I agree. As a result, it is clear that the crisis plaguing Nigeria is multi-faceted, but one that must be addressed by the Nigerian government, our government, and the international community.

CORRUPTION:

One significant issue is corruption. It is in the government at the federal and state level. It is in businesses. It is in the military. One cannot enter the country without corruption raising its insidious head. Transparency International ranks Nigeria 136th out of 168 countries. That is in the bottom 20% of all nations. Given their population size and economic output, this means that a vast number of people have to suffer the costs and injustice of corruption.

POVERTY:

Despite the fact that according to the latest available data from the World Bank, Nigeria is the richest country in Africa yet there is immense poverty. Unemployment is a huge issue.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics it has been increasing since 2005 and now stands at above 20%. The falling oil prices are hitting the economy broadly. The percentage of people living in poverty at less than \$1.90 a day is 53.6% as of 2009 when the latest data is available.

TERRORISM:

According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index:

- More than half (51 percent) of all global deaths attributed to a terrorist group were committed by either Boko Haram or the Islamic State.
- Nigeria has experienced the largest increase in terrorist deaths (more than 300 percent) from 2014-2015, with 7,512 fatalities in 2015.
- Nine of the top 20 most fatal terrorist attacks in 2014 occurred in Nigeria.
- The deadliest terrorist organizations in the world according to number killed:
 - Boko Haram (northeastern Nigeria),
 - Islamic State (Iraq/Syria),
 - Al-Shabab (Somalia) and
 - The Fulani herdsmen (central Nigeria).

BOKO HARAM:

Terrorism and violence continues from the well-known Boko Haram terrorist group whose name means “Western education is forbidden.” According to the Global Terrorism Index 2015 from the Institute of Economics and Peace at the University of Maryland, Boko Haram killed 6,664 Nigerians in 2014- more than ISIS elsewhere in the world. That makes them the single most deadly terror organization in the world. In a recent report by Refugees International, they indicate that reportedly 20,000 have been killed in total as a result of the insurgency. In 2015 Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS. This affiliation means that Boko Haram is now part of that organization’s declaration of war against both the Nigerian Government AND the American Government.

Boko Haram attacks villages, conducts drive by shootings, and uses young girls as suicide bombers. They target politicians and clerics for assassination, focusing on the symbols of Western advancement such as schools, hospitals, and churches, but also Mosques. While no one has an exact number, thousands of young girls have been abducted by Boko Haram. According to the *Washington Post*, young girls and women who have been raped, but released, by Boko Haram face extreme stigmatization from their communities where many label them as “Boko Haram wives” and fear that they have been radicalized and will be potential attackers.

Just last month, we commemorated the two-year anniversary of the kidnapping of the Chibok Girls, and despite the loud protests in the West and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign championed by First Lady, Michelle Obama, it is extremely doubtful that any of the girls have been released. One counselor with whom we spoke on the ground told us that the girls who have been captured may never return without a major concerted effort by the Nigerian government and the West, and if they do they will have been the victims of sexual violence, and are often times pregnant and will have been forced to convert to Islam.

FULANI HERDSMEN:

Unfortunately, Boko Haram is not the only violent organization that plagues Nigeria- who I had heard very little about before visiting Nigeria. The Fulani Herdsmen are a large tribal grouping that stretch over many northwestern African countries and follow migratory grazing patterns. Some of these herdsmen adhere to more radicalized versions of Islam and this is having a significant and devastating impact on the predominantly Christian farming communities in the Middle Belt. The Global Terrorism Index has identified them as the fourth most deadly terror organization in the world. (That means that Nigeria has the first and fourth most dangerous terror groups in Africa.)

While we were in Nigeria, the Agatu village was attacked. 200-300 were killed over a sustained 2-3 day attack and the attackers did not move on, but rather occupied homes within the village. And the reports from on the ground indicate that sophisticated re-supply systems were used- including helicopters and boats. Attacks like this go beyond “settler-herder” conflict. There has been an obvious increase in violence- in 2013, the Fulani militants killed 63; in 2014, they killed 1,229.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE: (IDP’s)

Due to the violence from groups like Boko Haram and the Fulani Militants, there are thousands of Internally Displaced People scattered around the country. According to recent estimates there are 2.1 million people who are internally displaced and more have fled to neighboring countries. Unofficially, however, there are about 5 million who have been displaced. We have been told that 90% of IDP’s are dispersed among villages and are outside of official camps, therefore they are unable to access even limited government services. In the Refugee International report, a senior UN official was quoted as stating, “Nigeria is our biggest failure.” This aligns with the stories we heard on the ground.

Given all of the challenges, Recommendations:

Strategic, geopolitical, and national security interests are at stake. Many organizations, including local groups like the Stefanos Foundation, and international ones, such as MercyCorps are doing vital work. However, much more is needed.

- Congress should encourage aid to IDP camps, and support efforts at distribution in novel ways for those IDPs who are not, for various reasons, in camps. The types of aid should not only include food, and medicine, but also psycho-social services for the rehabilitation of victims as well as for former members of Boko Haram who are attempting to reintegrate into their communities.
- Groups like International Justice Mission or Shared Hope, which have done an excellent job with regard to counseling/rehabilitation of women and girls, could provide invaluable training to groups and individuals on the ground.

- Congress should also investigate the connection between ISIS and Boko Haram and integrate strategies as appropriate to deal with them.
It is my understanding that the NSC has internally designated Boko Haram as a part of ISIS, if this is indeed the case there should be increased funding available for security purposes.
- While I generally support the Leahy law, and I realize that the Nigerian military has some serious problems with corruption and human rights abuses, I do believe that it would be beneficial to find a way in which the US could provide vital human rights training to the Nigerian military and security forces.
- We need the Church in the West to be engaged with the Nigerian Church- Catholic to Catholic, Baptist to Baptist, Anglican to Anglican- in order to help the local congregation.

SPECIAL ENVOY:

I believe that a Special Envoy for Nigeria and the Lake Chad region could be of strategic benefit since many of the problems involve Nigeria as well as the surrounding countries. Such a position could be modeled after the one held by Sen. Danforth, formerly the Special Envoy to Sudan, or Knox Thames who is the special advisor on Religious Minorities in the Middle East and South Central Asia. I understand that there is a coordinator on Boko Haram within State Department- perhaps this position could be elevated to that of a Special Envoy and expanded to include all terrorism (including the Fulani militants), human rights, refugee assistance, etc.

There are a lot of good people working on these issues within our own government, however, a special envoy would provide those seeking assistance with one stop, while also coordinating with the Embassies in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Benin and Niger on the various issues facing the region. The issue of Boko Haram and the Fulani Herdsmen are not localized to Nigeria, but transcend the bordering countries. A Special Envoy could help coordinate necessary assistance throughout the region.

CONCLUSION:

The challenges that face Nigeria are great. However, it is my firm belief that the United States and other Western nations have a vested interest in confronting one of the worst crises of our current day. Nigeria has been fractured and forgotten and it is my hope that this hearing may light the spark that is needed to elevate this crisis to the place it deserves.