

**Testimony of
Bishop Chikpa Wilfred Anagbe, CMF
Subcommittee on Africa
February 14, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. 2200 Rayburn HOB**

Honorable John James, Members of the Subcommittee and Distinguished guests...

I am honored to be invited to give testimony about the situation of persecuted Christians in Nigeria. I am grateful for your willingness to hear about these egregious violations of human rights, which are worsening by the day in Nigeria.

I am from the Makurdi diocese of Benue state, Nigeria. The violent persecution and numerous massacres in my diocese have increased exponentially since I was appointed as Bishop in 2014 and continue to increase (since the last presidential election).

In Benue there are 6 million inhabitants who are mostly subsistent farmers living on ancestral farmland; 99% are Christian, 80% of which are Catholic. At this time, more than 2,225,000 (two million two hundred and twenty-five thousand) have been brutally driven from their land by militant Fulani and now live in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, in makeshift shanties that are unfit for animals, let alone human beings.

Population

What is occurring in Benue and elsewhere in Nigeria is an organized, systematic, and brutal cleansing of Christians by militant Fulani terrorists who

are killing countless innocent men, women and children and displacing millions from their ancestral homes.

They are unable to fend for themselves and rely on free-will donations. In most communities, children of school age are displaced forcing them to drop out of school while the livelihoods of their parents are destroyed. Such conditions make children increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking, child labor, and organ harvesting.

Every day the population of widows and orphans grows, creating a new generation of traumatized and uneducated Nigerians, who will have few options for their future.

The living conditions in the IDP camps are inhumane and unfit for animals. As I visit the camps where people are suffering such inhumane conditions, causing further desolation and health problems, I am at a loss. I do not know what to preach or how to console them. It is difficult to offer hope, but I will not abandon them.

Religious

Terrorists have especially targeted our Christian churches and religious as well. On February 3rd, Fathers Kenneth Kanwa and Jude Nwachukwu, two priests

from my religious order of Claretian missionaries were kidnapped. Indeed, every time a religious is kidnapped, it has the same effect as a terrorist attack because the villagers flee after losing their leader. Between 2021 and 2023 over 100 religious sisters and priests were kidnapped in Nigeria, some never returned even after high ransoms were paid for their release. We are told that the violence happens to Muslim and Christian alike, but I ask you - How many imams have been kidnapped or killed and how many mosques have been destroyed as compared to Christians and Christian Churches?

What exacerbates these injustices against humanity is the glaring absence of justice. In none of these attacks have known that perpetrators been brought to justice.

The militant Islamists attack most especially on our holiest feast days with utter impunity. This past Christmas, a large-scale massacre of more than 200 Christians and hundreds more injured took place during simultaneous attacks in 20 plus villages in the Plateau State.

Last Easter, on Holy Saturday, militant Fulani terrorists attacked an IDP camp in my diocese killing 50 and injuring scores as they prepared to celebrate our holiest days of the year. What can be done to give them comfort? It is a daunting task, but I refuse to sit silently. This is why I have traveled here from Nigeria, and I speak to you on Ash Wednesday when my calendar at home is full of important Church obligations.

I appeal to you to use all means available to your office to protect those persecuted for their faith. We cannot let fear and political correctness hinder us from speaking out.

As Africa's most populous country and its largest economy, Nigeria wields considerable influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. By allowing religious persecution to proliferate within its borders, Nigeria is compounding already heightened regional insecurity.

May the Lord Jesus bless all those present here today and all people of goodwill.