

Senior Bureau Official for African Affairs Ambassador Jonathan Pratt
Testimony for Subcommittee on Africa
on “President Trump’s redesignation of Nigeria as a ‘Country of
Particular Concern—CPC’: a serious, well-founded wake-up call”
November 20, 2025, 11:00 a.m.

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Administration’s redesignation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act.

In June of this year in Benue State, Nigeria, Fulani militants armed with guns and machetes set homes and food stores ablaze and locked families inside burning buildings, killing over 200 Christians. Witnesses reported assailants shouting “Allahu Akbar” as they assaulted St. Joseph’s Church. The Fulani militants targeted Christian farmers, many of them internally displaced persons (IDPs), already seeking refuge from previous violence. Benue State Governor, Hyacinth Ali, recently warned that his state is “under siege” and being attacked by terrorists and bandits, highlighting the Nigerian government’s failure to intervene. The scale and brutality of violence facing Christian communities is tragic and unacceptable. It represents a serious failing on the part of the authorities.

Similarly, on December 23, 2023, a series of coordinated attacks began and continued into Christmas morning in Plateau State. The attacks resulted in hundreds of victims, many were women, children, and elderly unable to flee. At least eight churches were destroyed. Plateau State communities are still reeling today from the overt religious-based violence of those attacks and their unanswered calls for help. The Nigerian government must do more to protect its Christian citizens who are being targeted and killed.

The Situation in Nigeria

Terrorists, separatists, bandits, and criminal militias in Nigeria wreak havoc throughout the country, with ongoing attacks often deliberately targeting Christian communities. In addition to the violent Islamic extremism and banditry experienced in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, there has been a surge of violent attacks across Northern Nigeria by violent extremist organizations

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like ISIS-West Africa, ISIS-Sahel, Boko Haram, JNIM, al-Qa'ida affiliate Ansaru, and Lakurawa. In Northern Nigeria, Christians live under constant threat from these terrorist organizations. Compounding this unacceptable level of violence against vulnerable Christian communities, Nigeria continues to prosecute blasphemy cases, which my colleague will discuss in more detail.

The ongoing violence is a problem of prioritization for the Government of Nigeria. Although its military and police are engaged and taking significant losses in their counterterrorism efforts in the North East, the Nigerian government has not done enough to effectively combat violence in Middle Belt, protect Christian communities, or hold perpetrators accountable. The intent of the Administration's approach is to raise the protection of Christians to the top of the Government of Nigeria's priorities – especially in the Middle Belt. This will require Nigeria to allocate resources accordingly and live up to its constitutional commitment guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience, and worship for all Nigerians. The current situation is unacceptable and cannot continue.

Diplomatic Engagement

Nigeria is a key regional partner, Africa's largest democracy, and most populous nation, with whom we share economic and security interests. It is in the United States' interest to work with the Nigerian government on a plan of action to strengthen security for at-risk Christian communities and Nigerians of all faiths whose ability to practice their faith is put in jeopardy by endemic violence and terrorism. We welcome Nigeria's willingness to cooperate following the CPC designation. We look forward to seeing these commitments put into action.

The Trump Administration is developing a plan to incentivize and compel the Nigerian government to better protect Christian communities and improve religious freedom. This plan will consider U.S. State and Treasury engagement on sanctions, as well as possible Department of War engagement on counterterrorism and other efforts to protect religious communities. Secretary Rubio and Deputy Secretary Landau have engaged with members of the Nigerian government on the importance of addressing the violence facing Christians in the Middle Belt. There will continue to be high-level

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engagement from State Department officials to press their Nigerian counterparts to take concrete steps to prevent attacks and hold perpetrators accountable. As a part of this effort, we are reviewing assistance resources that could be allocated to bolster protection of communities in the Middle Belt. We will also continue to work with the Nigerian government to stem the flow of weapons, fighters, and funding to violent Islamist extremists. Our hope is that our efforts will push the Nigerian government to take measurable steps that will improve security, accountability, and religious liberty.

Commitment to Promoting Religious Freedom

Ultimately, the President's decision underscores the Administration's commitment to promoting religious freedom as a universal right and a fundamental freedom. The levels of violence and atrocities committed against Christians and communities of all faiths in Nigeria are appalling and threaten this universal right. We remain open to working together with the Nigerians, but we also expect the Nigerian government to deliver results on the ground as proof of their commitment to this universal right.

Thank you for your attention. I welcome your questions.