Opening Statement

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Frank Garcia

House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Africa — November 12, 2026

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am grateful to Secretary Rubio for his confidence in me on this issue, and to this Subcommittee for its sustained attention on Nigeria at a critical moment.

As this Subcommittee is aware, on October 31, 2025, President Trump announced the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act, citing the scale of violence and persecution directed against Christian communities. This designation reflects the seriousness with which this Administration views the targeting of Christians. Since that designation, the Department has treated this issue as a top priority, working intensively with our Nigerian counterparts to confront the persecution of Christian communities and to hold perpetrators of this violence accountable.

Unfortunately, the violence has not stopped. The July 27 attack on a Christian community in Kaduna and the dozens of people killed in Plateau State in August and September, respectively, show that violence continues to plague Christian communities. This is not a distant problem. It is an ongoing atrocity, and this Administration is treating it as one.

We are engaging the Nigerian government through direct, results-driven diplomacy. We stood up the U.S.-Nigeria Joint Working Group following the CPC designation, meeting first in Abuja in January and again here in Washington in August. We are expecting results: protection for Christian communities in the Middle Belt through increased Nigerian security and law enforcement deployments, more timely and effective responses to early warnings of impending attacks, accountability for perpetrators through stronger courts and security services, and deeper military-to-military cooperation.

On the ground, the United States Government is taking a unified approach to building Nigerian security capacity where it matters most. Via the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, we provided training and equipment to police units charged with protecting vulnerable Middle Belt communities; we have expanded biometric information sharing with the Nigerian

government so perpetrators can be identified, prosecuted, and where appropriate sanctioned rather than merged back into the population; and State and Treasury finalized an action plan with Nigeria's financial institutions to disrupt the terrorist financing networks that fund attacks on churches. Though Nigeria has reported progress, Under Secretary Hooker made clear in the Joint Working Group's second session that this pace is insufficient and pressed Nigeria directly on civilian casualties, the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced victims, and the need for greater transparency in humanitarian aid expenditures and delivery.

I am realistic about the challenges ahead. For example, Nigeria will hold presidential elections in January, which could spur violence. In addition, Nigeria's security architecture remains stretched, its judicial reach into the Middle Belt remains limited, and the resources we can bring to bear are finite. But when American diplomacy is engaged, when our demands are specific, and when we hold partners accountable in private and in public, we achieve results no one else can deliver.

Mr. Chairman, this Administration takes the persecution of Christians in Nigeria seriously, and we will continue using every diplomatic tool available – from the CPC designation to targeted security cooperation – to protect Christians and hold perpetrators accountable. I look forward to your questions and to working with this Subcommittee to ensure our approach remains both principled and effective.