



# NIGERIA

Fractured and Forgotten

DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE ALONG RELIGIOUS FAULT LINES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# NIGERIA



If immediate action is not taken, religious minorities in northern Nigeria will continue to face policies and practices that seek to remove their very presence, while the violence of Boko Haram and Fulani militants will further compound one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Full Report at [www.StandwithNigeria.org](http://www.StandwithNigeria.org)

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The 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative (21CW) is a Christian human rights organization empowering a global movement to advance religious freedom.





### WHAT IS BOKO HARAM?

Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist group based in northeastern Nigeria with allegiance to the Islamic State. Since 2011, Boko Haram has killed over 15,000, displaced 2.1 million from their homes, and was ranked as the world's deadliest terror group by the Global Terrorism Index in 2015.

# Summary

Nigeria is a country on the verge of fracturing along religious fault lines.

Ethnic and religious minorities in northern Nigeria are largely forgotten as they face systemic and systematic discrimination.

Muslim and Christian communities in northeastern Nigeria are profoundly and negatively impacted by the terrorist violence pursued by Boko Haram that in a pledge of allegiance now considers



itself the Islamic State of West Africa. Boko Haram has displaced or killed more Muslims than either Christians or practitioners of African Traditional Religion. In the Middle Belt, Fulani militant attacks are significantly escalating with the net effect that in the name of creating grazing territory, largely Christian Local Government Areas are being targeted and destroyed. No longer a conflict between agrarian farmers and pastoralist nomads, Fulani militants are assaulting communities with supply helicopters, raids launched from multiple boats, machine guns mounted on vehicles, AK47s, scorched earth policies and sustained offensives.

What is unfolding in Nigeria has been labeled as part of the “world’s most neglected humanitarian crisis” with the gap between the suffering and the humanitarian response greater than even in Syria, Iraq or Yemen.<sup>1</sup> 14.8 million in northeastern Nigeria are impacted by this crisis;<sup>2</sup> there may be as many as five-to-seven million internally displaced persons (IDPs);<sup>3</sup> almost one million school-age children now have almost no opportunity for education;<sup>4</sup> 13,000 churches have been abandoned, closed or destroyed;<sup>5</sup> and 2,000 women, boys and girls have been abducted by Boko Haram.<sup>6</sup>



**Boko Haram Aggression in Middle Belt of Nigeria**



MAP OF AFRICA



**WHO ARE FULANI MILITANTS?**

The term “Fulani” refers not just to a terrorist group, but to a whole ethnicity, not all of whom are terrorists. This diffuse group of 20 million people, mostly pastoral nomads (the largest such group in the world) typically speak Fula as their first tongue and practice Islam. They came onto the world stage in a serious way in 1804 in what is now Nigeria and Cameroon, when a Fulani preacher launched a holy war against local rivals, creating the Sokoto Empire.



### WHAT IS AN IDP?

An IDP is an internally displaced person, who is forced to flee his or her home but who remains within his or her country's borders. They are often referred to as refugees, although they do not fall within the current legal definition of a refugee.

more than  
**13,000**



**churches abandoned,  
closed or destroyed**

**2,000**



**women, boys and girls  
have been abducted  
by Boko Haram since  
2012**

If immediate action is not taken, religious minorities in northern Nigeria will continue to face policies and practices that seek to remove their very presence. Terrorist violence will further compound one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. The accelerating aggression of Fulani militants in the Middle Belt, right in the heart of the country, will create one of the most significant security risks in West Africa while solidifying religion as a primary identifier further fracturing an already destabilized Nigeria.

### Fractured and Forgotten



#### FOUNDATION OF DISCRIMINATION

Ethnic and religious minorities in northern Nigeria are largely forgotten as they face systemic discrimination.



#### TERRORISM AND THE EXPLOSION OF VIOLENCE

Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria and Fulani militants in the Middle Belt are the first and fourth most lethal terrorist organizations in the world and continue to perpetrate tremendous atrocities. If immediate action is not taken, one of Africa's most important nations could be further destabilized with an impact that will be far reaching.



#### HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

With millions impacted, villages razed, and the displaced suffering in caves and makeshift homes, Nigeria is the world's most neglected humanitarian crisis

Now is the time to

**#StandWithNigeria**

# Acknowledgments



**21CWI's executive team speaks to Kadarako villagers in Nigeria**

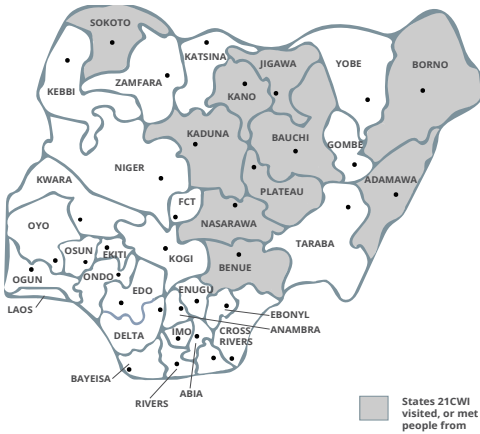
The 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative (21CWI) is a Christian human rights organization empowering a global movement to advance religious freedom as a universal right through advocacy, capacity building and technology. From February 20 – March 1, 2016, a 21CWI team traveled to Nigeria to document the impact of violence and marginalization on the situation of human rights and religious freedom in northern and central Nigeria, and to listen to and learn from a wide range of actors pointing to approaches that are building reconciliation and reversing trends that threaten to fracture Nigeria along religious fault lines. The delegation was led by 21CWI Founder and President Randel Everett and included Senior Distinguished Fellow former Congressman Frank R. Wolf, Executive Vice President Elijah M. Brown, and Director of Strategic Communications Lou Ann Sabatier. 21CWI worked with various



## 8 NIGERIA ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



**States 21CWI visited or met people from**



Nigerian partners including the Stefanos Foundation that tirelessly helped 21CWI interview numerous individuals, collecting hundreds of pages of written documentation and more than twenty hours of video testimony.

The team traveled to multiple sites in the states of Bauchi, Nasarawa, Plateau, and to Abuja, and met with representatives from the states of Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Sokoto. The team traveled past dozens of villages that had been burned to the ground and met with both Christian and Muslim victims of massacres perpetrated by Boko Haram and Fulani militants. This included at one point listening to the report of leaders at a location less than three miles from an active conflict zone. Altogether, meetings, interviews and report opportunities hosted by 21CWI in Nigeria were attended by more than 520 individuals including members of communities impacted by marginalization, malnourishment and violence, grassroots tribal and religious leaders, missionaries, NGO leaders, families and activists whose loved ones were kidnapped from the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok, national Christian denominational leaders, both a member and former member of the National Assembly of Nigeria, a leading military official, members of the office of the Vice President of Nigeria, and the United States Ambassador to Nigeria. Over the past six months, both in preparation for and as a result of the research trip, 21CWI has sought to triangulate information through ongoing dialogue with Nigerian partners, Congressional leaders and their staff, various officials within the U.S. Department of State, former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell, multiple NGOs, members of the U.S. International Religious Freedom Roundtable, and individuals associated with the work of the UN in Nigeria.

520



**attended meetings, interviews and report opportunities hosted by 21CWI in Nigeria**

For security purposes, many of the names of specific interview participants have been changed or withheld.

The situation in Nigeria is complex and multi-faceted and requires an ongoing diligence to balanced nuance and a rigorous commitment to pursuing hard realities beyond rhetoric and surface-level analysis. 21CWI is at the beginning of this journey. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you and encourage you to visit our Nigeria advocacy and mobilization site [www.StandWithNigeria.org](http://www.StandWithNigeria.org), where you will find videos, pictures, the full “Fractured and Forgotten” report and action packs. In the midst of a nation poised to fracture along religious fault lines we can work together and [#StandWithNigeria](https://www.instagram.com/StandWithNigeria).

**#StandwithNigeria**



# Foundation

## Of Discrimination Throughout Northern Nigeria

### Underdevelopment in Northern Nigeria

Declining economic prospects, weakened political control at the federal level, ongoing lack of infrastructure development, and depressed education and vocation opportunities has fueled a narrative and a context within northern Nigeria that they are suffering regional discrimination at the hands of the nation. As evidence, some point to the reality that “in the North, 72 percent of people live in poverty, compared to 27 percent in the South and 35 percent in the Niger Delta.”<sup>7</sup> Though these realities are rightly and well recognized by many, they are only one side to the foundation of discrimination that exists in relation to northern Nigeria.

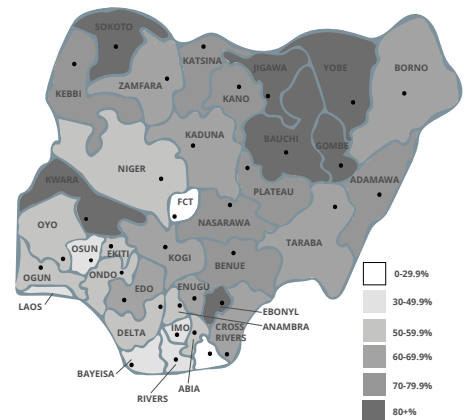
The past sixty years have also seen significant Christian growth. In 1953, 45 percent of the Nigerian population was Muslim, 21 percent was Christian, and 33 percent belonged to other religions, such as African Traditional Religions.<sup>8</sup> By 2010, the Christian population had grown to 80.5 million and 51 percent of the total population, while the percentage of adherents to Islam remained relatively flat.<sup>9</sup> There are now more Christians in Nigeria than in any other African country and more Christians in Nigeria than in any Western European country. This has caused alarm among many northern Muslims in general and the elite in particular who tout the fact that Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in Africa and the fifth largest Muslim population in the world.<sup>10</sup>

### Discrimination within Northern Nigeria against Religious Minorities

For generations, many northern Muslim elite have believed they bear a responsibility to consolidate an Islamic society in the north and to extend that society southward until it eventually encapsulates all of Nigeria. There have always been ethnic communities in the north and across most of the Middle Belt that have resisted this effort. Nonetheless, many northern Muslims blame colonialism as



Percentage of Nigerian States Living in Absolute Poverty



72% in the north  
 VS  
 27% in the south live in poverty


80,500,000

people, or


51%

of the Nigerian population  
are Christians

in all northern &  
Middle Belt states

 30% are  
Christians

 64% are  
Muslim

 8% other  
African  
Religions

the disruptor in this process, and since independence in 1960, have reengaged these efforts.

There were efforts, all of which were rebuffed, in the 1970s, late 1980s and early 1990s to add *sharia* to the federal constitution. Realizing that a national solution was increasingly unlikely, on January 27, 2000, Ahmed Sani, the governor of Zamfara, the state not inconsequentially with the lowest percentage of Christians in the north, unilaterally and officially announced that *sharia* legislation would apply to all aspects of personal and judicial law. By 2002, all twelve of the northern states had adopted *sharia* as the reigning judicial principle. This has accelerated a trend of fortifying religious identification as a primary interlocutor and as a means of discrimination and persecution. Religious minorities in the north have been particularly negatively impacted by these developments.

Recent research for the first time systematically catalogued the church records for every major Christian denomination in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt and reached the following conclusions:

- In six northern and Middle Belt states, Christians comprise greater than 50 percent of the total population: Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba;
- In 158 of the 417 Local Government Areas, Christians comprise greater than 50 percent of the total population;
- Altogether there are more than 30 million Christians comprising 30 percent of the total population of the northern and Middle Belt states, in comparison to 64 percent adhering to Islam and 8 percent participating in African Traditional Religions.<sup>11</sup>

While in some states such as in Zamfara, where Christians compose only 2.3 percent of the total population, one-out-of-three Nigerians in the north are Christian, and in some areas, they are the absolute majority. Despite these numerical realities, the primary narrative often repeated and believed by northern elite, southern Nigerians, the Nigerian media as well as the international community is that there are relatively few Christians and that any discrimination they may experience is isolated, numerically inconsequential, and more a result of the fact that these are southern migrant “settlers” not part of the “indigenous” communities. This narrative is not only false, it gives cover to widely adopted policies and practices that significantly discriminate and negatively impact Christians, and occasionally erupts into violence against millions of individuals. This widespread publicly supported discrimination is a core factor to having created a climate that is



**Christian villagers continue to worship in the face of persecution.**

conducive to the emergence of Boko Haram and undermines human rights and the rule of law. This foundational discrimination is essential to address if justice and reintegration beyond the violence of terrorism is to be established and the fracture of Nigeria along religious fault lines reversed.

Christians throughout the northern states, and not just those in the areas in the northeast most directly impacted by the violence of Boko Haram, report the implementation of widespread policies and practices that negatively impact their lives. These include:

#### **Limited Education Opportunities**

- Parents forced to change the names of their children to Muslim names or face a prohibition on enrolling their children in schools;
- Increased school fees for Christian families;
- Abuse or mistreatment of Christians while they are at school and on the school premises;

For generations, many northern Muslim elite have believed they bear a responsibility to consolidate an Islamic society in the north and to extend that society southward until it eventually encapsulates all of Nigeria.

Openly they say that everyone has the right to worship freely, but that is not the case at the local level.

- **Daniel, Nasarawa State**

- Refusal or restrictions within the public schools on the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge while fully including and requiring the teaching of Islamic Religious Knowledge for all students

### **Limited Vocation Opportunities and Negative Economic Impact**

- Christians fired from government and public school positions;
- Goods in local markets sold to Christians at a higher cost;
- Local markets preventing Christians from renting market space or otherwise selling their goods;
- Confiscation of Christian property;
- Eviction when landlords learn of a family's Christian identity;
- Refusal of Muslim business owners to hire Christian employees.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

- Refusal to sell land for church construction, while permits are issued for the construction of mosques in areas that are predominantly Christian;
- Burning and destruction of churches;
- Christian cemeteries vandalized with Christians then prohibited from cleaning them up;
- Significant repercussions when Fulani and Hausa convert from Islam;
- Abduction of Christian women leading to forced marriage to Muslim men;
- Forced conversions to Islam.

### **Negative Physical Ramifications**

- Abuse or mistreatment of Christians while they are on public streets;
- Health-care denied to Christians;
- Violent community and mob attacks on Christians after political elections or non-related international events such as the cartoon drawing of the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark.

### **Denied Community Services and Rights**

- Restricted community development such as fewer water boreholes and fewer medical facilities in rural, predominantly Christian areas;
- Denied, limited or fraudulent election participation;
- Government security briefings that intentionally exclude representatives of the Christian community;





**This 19-year-old from Borno, Nigeria fled to an IDP camp in January 2015 after Boko Haram attacked his village.**

Representatives from Adamawa State described how time and again their identity as Christians made them second-class citizens.

- Refusal to station police or other security forces in predominantly Christian areas even when local community members report information about impending attacks.

Representatives from Adamawa State described how time and again their identity as Christians made them second-class citizens. One individual detailed how in his local village, 80 percent of the community is Christian, yet during every local election cycle, the Christian representative loses while the Muslim representative wins. In Kano State, some individuals reported that when they went to purchase land, they had to sign a document indicating that they would not build a church on that land before the transaction could be completed. In Sokoto, a group of believers in the Evangelical Church of West Africa denomination had been utilizing a particular church building for more than one hundred years. When they tried to renew their certificate of occupancy, the certificate was denied and the government claimed the building in order to turn it into a center of Islamic study. In Benue State, a woman described a 1995 conflict in the state capital of Makurdi at the conclusion of which only Christians were arrested while Muslims were allowed to go free. This woman and twenty-one others, were held in a local prison for nearly a year, and each time they were taken to the court, bystanders openly mocked them for their Christian faith.

Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in Africa and the fifth largest Muslim population in the world.

Across northern Nigeria, at times individuals must change their names or otherwise pursue other coping strategies to hide their Christian identity to secure safety and a livelihood. In general, Christians throughout northern Nigeria are under-represented in key institutions such as the government, media and education that would otherwise have the potential for pursuing transformative change.

Additional research is needed to determine the breadth by which each one of these realities can be found throughout northern Nigeria. What is clear is that discrimination is more widespread and has far more negative consequences than is often believed. Just as considering the general economic malaise within northern Nigeria is essential, it is also imperative to address the ongoing policies and practices that intentionally target and seek to disempower minority Christian communities if reconciliation, rehabilitation, and ongoing equitable infrastructure development are going to be legitimately established. Unfortunately, at present these foundational causative issues are being largely ignored and the hardening of religious fault lines has quickened since the adoption of *sharia* in 2002 and further accelerated since 2009 and Boko Haram's embrace of violence.



**Christian family who fled the north to escape violence and discrimination.**



**Boko Haram members**

# Boko Haram:

## An Explosion of Violence

Boko Haram's explosion of violence has shocked Nigeria and launched a group ingrained in the deep poverty of rural north-eastern Nigeria into the mainstream attention of the international community. Though Boko Haram is properly understood as emerging from a distinct foundation of discrimination rather than as a sole causative factor, the sheer brutality of the terrorist group threatens to overshadow this foundation and frequently generates analysis focused solely on the eradication of the organization rather than altering the context that gave it rise. Boko Haram cannot be properly understood separated from the economic deprivation of northeastern Nigeria, nor from the context of impunity and social and religious discrimination that occurs within the country's north.

Without question, Boko Haram has created one of the worse humanitarian crises in the world: millions impacted, thousands slaughtered, one of the greatest IDP concentrations in the world,

Without question, Boko Haram has created one of the worse humanitarian crises in the world: millions impacted, thousands slaughtered, one of the greatest IDP concentrations in the world, communities razed, women and children abducted and abused.



**Mother from Adamawa State who survived Boko Haram attack.**

“I covet your prayers... I desire your prayers so that I can be strong and take care of my children.” At the time of this interview, it had been twenty months since she had last seen her husband. She still did not know if he had survived the attack or if he had died.

communities razed, women and children abducted and abused, educational opportunities eradicated and entire economies virtually ground to a halt in certain areas. Northeastern Nigeria has been spiraling into ever greater destabilization and humanitarian tragedy as the Nigerian government and the international community have been slow to respond.

This affects individuals such as Arit from Adamawa State. On May 7, 2014, Boko Haram swept through her small village in northeastern Nigeria, killing 22 people. Arit, along with other survivors, believed that Boko Haram would not return and that the situation would improve. However, in June, when the planting season began, Boko Haram terrorists returned, destroyed the crops, killed youth working in the farmlands and confiscated the community's cows. Arit and others from the village ran to the nearby mountains to seek refuge in caves. Some who were physically unable to climb the rocks and reach the safety of the caves were captured and forcibly converted to Islam. Those who resisted were killed.



For two months, Arit and the others with her hid in the caves with only some venturing out in the evenings to scavenge and beg. Without any outside assistance, this was the sole source of food those in hiding had for the duration of this period. Fear and anxiety ravaged Arit during those two months as five of her seven children had been separated from her in the rush to reach the caves and she did not know if they were dead or alive.

On August 28, 2014, Arit and others attempted to return to their farms in hopes of rebuilding. Multiple gunshots met them. Once again, she fled to the caves. This time she remained for only three days before reaching the depressing realization that her community was now fully under the control of Boko Haram and that return in the immediate future was not a possibility. She prayed and prayed that God would enable her to find her children. Not finding them in a refugee camp in Cameroon, she moved to a displaced area in Nigeria where she learned that her children were in Yola.

When she arrived in Yola her hope was rewarded when she saw the remaining five of her children in the distance. As they ran towards an emotional embrace, the youngest among them cried, "could this be mom?" This young child was three years old.

Arit described that it was God's grace that kept her alive during this time and that had given her the money to search for her children and to resettle in a new area. Her hope is to eventually return to her home village and start life anew. She implored, "I covet your prayers... I desire your prayers so that I can be strong and take care of my children."

At the time of this interview, it had been twenty-months since she had last seen her husband. She still did not know if he had survived the attack or if he had died.

Arit was far from the only individual who described being forced to live in caves and subsist off the most meagre of resources. Lolade, her husband and two children lived in Borno State and were also forced to flee their village and live in mountain caves. In late 2014, they attempted to leave the mountain and flee as refugees to Cameroon, but along the route they were separated, and Boko Haram captured Lolade and her children. As captives, they were held in a high-walled compound with approximately twenty other women. When Boko Haram successfully raided

When asked what she might wish to communicate to people in the United States about her ordeal, Lolade replied without hesitation, "I pray that God should not allow this kind of situation to come into the West."

**When military advanced upon the Zanna Mobarti Primary School in March 2015, Boko Haram fled with**

300 children 

100 women 

and left

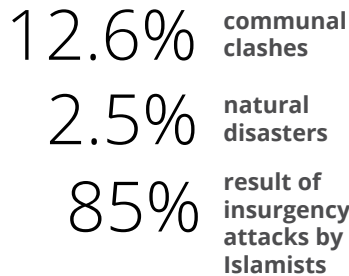
470 dead 



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Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?

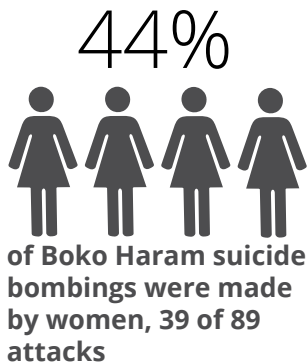
**causes of displacement  
among IDPs in Nigeria**



villages for food, they fed the women and children; and when they had not, the women, children and the fighters alike fasted. Some of the women gave birth to children while they were held captive and the members of Boko Haram assigned those children Muslim names. The mothers, however, would secretly give and use an alternate name of their choosing and that could be publicly continued should an end to the imprisonment become a possibility.

For two months, Lolade and her children were held in this condition. Each night the women were locked into the house around 5:00 p.m., where they would remain until 10:00 a.m. when they would be permitted to collect firewood, leaves and water. One night, she and the other women held in this particular house sensed an opportunity, and Lolade placed one of her children on her back and one on her shoulders, climbed over a wall and ran. Eighteen escaped.

When asked what she might wish to communicate to people in the United States about her ordeal, Lolade replied without hesitation, "I pray that God should not allow this kind of situation to come into the West."



The person who initially captured and imprisoned Lolade was a childhood friend from her home village with whom she had grown up and whom she knew very well.

2013 marks something of a turning point, as it was in May of that year that Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency across the entirety of the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, all of which had been significantly impacted by Boko Haram. In November 2013, the U.S. listed Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.<sup>12</sup> Having escalated into a full-scale conflict, Boko Haram was impacting millions of individuals spread through multiple states in northeastern Nigeria. Boko Haram increasingly functioned as a decentralized organization with independent units and their own operating procedures. This approach has not generated the ability of Boko Haram to hold and maintain for long periods of time distinct territory, but has created a movement able to inflict fear and widespread devastation. Decentralization has made locating Boko Haram and its members challenging, leaves those who have suffered with ongoing traumatic feelings of insecurity given the oft repeated pattern of Boko Haram returning to a given area once security forces have departed, and will likely prove rehabilitation difficult given that there have



**This photo released by Boko Haram shows alive 15 of the 276 Girls, abducted from the Government Secondary School in Chibok.**

often been personal dimensions as units have attacked areas from which they themselves emerged.

Violence continued to occur throughout 2015 as noted by the most recent United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report:

While Boko Haram lost territory, it reverted to asymmetrical attacks and expanded its violence into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. During the reporting period, terrorists attacked at least 30 houses of worship and religious ceremonies in the Lake Chad Basin area, including suicide bombings during Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, and Ashura. Boko Haram also attacked markets, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, and small villages, which were completely destroyed. Human rights groups and escaped Boko Haram abductees report that Christians under Boko Haram control were forced to convert or die, and that Muslim abductees were required to attend Quranic schools to learn the group's extreme interpretation of Islam.<sup>13</sup>

One of the hallmarks of Boko Haram has been its rampant utilization of gender based violence. Boko Haram has abducted 2,000 women, boys and girls. Some of the women and girls have been forced into “marriages” with members of Boko Haram while others have been used for cooking and the maintenance of life within militant camps, trained in the creation and deployment of bombs, or even used in suicide missions. In 2015, women participated in 39 of the 89 Boko Haram suicide bombings or 44 percent of the time.<sup>14</sup>

Displaced women within government-run IDP camps report that survival sex is a reality to address food insecurity, and that there are almost no procedures in place to identify and provide services to women and girls who have escaped or been rescued from Boko Haram.



**READ MORE  
ONLINE**

Where are the  
girls today?

In relation to religious freedom, what people fail to know is that the Chibok community is mixed with 70 percent of the population Christian in a state where the population around them is 80 percent Muslim. So you have a Christian minority in a larger Christian county that is within a larger Muslim state. Up to this time the Chibok community had lived side by side with the larger community in peace. And when the girls were kidnapped even Muslims mourned the loss.

- Imam Muhammad Ashafa

611



teachers killed

19K



teachers have fled for their lives

Displaced women within government-run IDP camps report that survival sex is a reality to address food insecurity, and that there are almost no procedures in place to identify and provide services to women and girls who have escaped or been rescued from Boko Haram.<sup>15</sup> Even once they are released, Boko Haram “wives” continue to face suspicion that they have been brainwashed and may be functioning as a sleeper-cell poised to strike. There is also a disturbing narrative among some who believe that the children born to these individuals have a genetic predisposition to terrorism; a stigma that threatens to mark these children for life.

Another trademark of Boko Haram has been the intentional targeting of schools, teachers and students. Since 2009, in northeastern Nigeria, 611 teachers have been killed and 19,000 more have fled for their lives. 910 schools have been destroyed, and a further 1,500 schools forced to close, leaving an estimated 950,000 school-age children with almost no opportunity for education. The most well-publicized incident has been the attack on the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok that resulted in the kidnapping of 276 girls.

While civilians, especially religious minorities, decry the lack of security at the local level, many also remain suspicious of the Nigerian security forces. One former UN official described, “To the Nigerian Army there are only four types of people in northeastern Nigeria: Boko Haram, Boko Haram sympathizers, Boko Haram abductees, and people the army has freed from the control of Boko Haram.”<sup>16</sup> In effect, the Nigerian army seems to have made a decision to describe their efforts in northeastern Nigeria as a process of liberating communities from the control of Boko Haram. This is a significant political and media coup, as in recent days the military has been able to claim largescale victories with significant numbers released. However, the reality is often somewhat murkier, as Boko Haram tends to be active in an area without necessarily holding the territory in a classic sense. This enables the Nigerian security forces to claim a more decisive victory than what is often the case, especially if Boko Haram fighters are left to reenter the area once the security forces have departed.

Boko Haram forces might move through the area, on occasion causing civilian destruction before withdrawing, while in other instances, it is the Nigerian security forces following the same





**Terrorism has disrupted education for thousands of Nigerian children.**

pattern. Moreover, there are reports that at times the Nigerian security forces have actually burned down villages in the name of setting that community free from Boko Haram and then escorting the members of the community to IDP camps.<sup>17</sup>

More Muslims have been displaced and killed than either Christians or practitioners of African Traditional Religion. However, in some areas, given their minority status, Christian communities have been virtually eliminated. The process of rehabilitation and rebuilding will require years of intentional engagement, especially given the fact that the violence has been repetitive and ruthless.

950,000



**school-age children with almost no opportunity for education**



in 2013, Fulani militants  
killed

63

in 2014, they killed

1,229

Nigeria is very fragile. If these 180 million are displaced, they will overrun Africa, they will overrun Europe, and business interests in the United States will be directly and negatively impacted. Nigeria is on the verge of breaking into pieces, and it will not be violence free.

**Stephen Enada, Advocate for Just Society**



**Fulani herdsman in the Middle Belt**

## Fulani Militants: Threatening to Engulf the Middle Belt

Where ongoing discrimination and the violence of Boko Haram have helped produce one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world, Fulani militants are contributing to one of the gravest security threats. In 2013, Fulani militants killed 63 individuals; in 2014, they killed 1,229, a rapidly accelerating trend they have continued to maintain.<sup>18</sup> In one year the Fulani militants went from being unlisted on the Global Terrorism Index to inclusion as the fourth most deadly group in the world.

If this pattern continues, the undermining of the Middle Belt becomes a distinct possibility with an increasing likelihood that Abuja itself will be directly pulled into the fray, igniting a religious and ethnic war. Should this kind of violence engulf the capital and its environs, the economic and security impact would ripple across Africa and beyond. This doomsday scenario is not a foregone inevitability. However, significant engagement, redirected policy efforts and focused attention are necessary in order to prevent the fracture of Nigeria along religious fault lines.

## Introduction to the Fulani

The Fulani, also called the Fulbe or Peul, are a largely pastoral nomadic group found in nineteen different countries, but most predominantly in West Africa. There are more than 30 million Fulani in West Africa, with the largest groupings in Nigeria (18 million), Guinea (5 million), Cameroon (2 million), Mali (1 million), Niger (1 million) and Senegal (1 million).<sup>19</sup> While there is growing pressure on Fulani to settle, and certainly many have done so, for centuries, Fulani have grazed cattle over a wide range of territory throughout western Africa.<sup>20</sup> As the environmental conditions of the Sahel have deteriorated, Fulani herdsmen have been forced to slowly migrate southward and westward in search of grazing pastures. 98 percent of all Fulani are Muslim and collectively are the largest pastoral nomadic group in the world.

It is important to note that the focus within this report is on Fulani militants and not the Fulani as a whole, many of whom do not participate in acts of aggression, maintain fairly peaceful coexistence with local communities and non-Fulani neighbors, and may or may not support violence in the furtherance of political or religious goals.

## Accelerating Inter-Communal Violence in the Middle Belt

Tensions and conflict have long existed between Muslim, pastoralist Fulani and the predominantly agrarian, Christian communities throughout the Middle Belt. Flare-ups have occurred due to grazing patterns that impinge on farming land, cattle rustling, and the intermingling of cultures, peoples and communities. However, to a large extent there has been relative peace and stability for generations. This has slowly been changing, especially since the adoption of *sharia* by northern states and the outbreak of violence in Jos in 2010, the effects of which were felt throughout Plateau State and were interpreted by many Christians and Muslims alike through the lens of religion.



### Fulani Presence Across Africa



### WHO ARE FULANI MILITANTS?

The term “Fulani” refers not just to a terrorist group, but to a whole ethnicity, not all of whom are terrorists. This diffuse group of 20 million people, mostly pastoral nomads (the largest such group in the world) typically speak Fula as their first tongue and practice Islam. They came onto the world stage in a serious way in 1804 in what is now Nigeria and Cameroon, when a Fulani preacher launched a holy war against local rivals, creating the Sokoto Empire.



Reuters

**The aftermath of a Fulani Militant attack**

However, since 2014 there has been a precipitous acceleration of conflict primarily driven by Fulani militants attacking predominantly Christian Local Government Areas with sophisticated weapons in an environment of impunity. This acceleration has transformed the nature and the scope of the violence beyond traditional conflict constructs, although the maintenance of this description is politically useful to shield what would otherwise be analyzed as efforts by the Fulani to ensure a hegemony of power, control over larger areas of land, and the violent expansion of one religion over others. In Sho, Plateau State villagers have been reduced to eating grass for sustenance. In Jol, Plateau State attacks in 2015 alone caused \$1.9 million USD in damage. In Agatu, Benue State an assault launched from boats moving upriver left as many as 500 dead in February 2016.



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Nigeria Fulani Militants



# The Potential Impact of Fulani Militants to Fracture Nigeria

In a loose approximation, the Fulani militants seem to be borrowing from the playbook of Boko Haram. The Fulani are using the claim, and not always without reason, of cattle rustling and limited grazing opportunities as a political rallying cry for participation. This movement is being largely ignored by the government, minimized or outright denied as evidenced in part that few are held accountable and the government refuses to station security forces in areas of vulnerability. Over the past two years, this has allowed the Fulani to form a strengthened ideological and military engagement relatively unhindered. Fulani militants are initiating more brazen and rampant acts of aggression, and having thus far received little to no deterrents, there is a very real possibility these aggressive acts could transition into a full-scale conflict that has the potential to impact millions and undermine the nation. Decisive action and policy approach change is needed now to in order to ensure that this possibility is turned back and that the nation of Nigeria is preserved.

In the past sixteen months there have been 55 separate Fulani attacks in 14 different states resulting in over one thousand deaths. Even though the data for 2016 only includes four months, there has already been a 190 percent increase in fatalities from 2015 to 2016. Benue State has been the most impacted, with 26 distinct attacks leaving 738 dead.



## INFORMATION

Map of Boko Haram Aggression

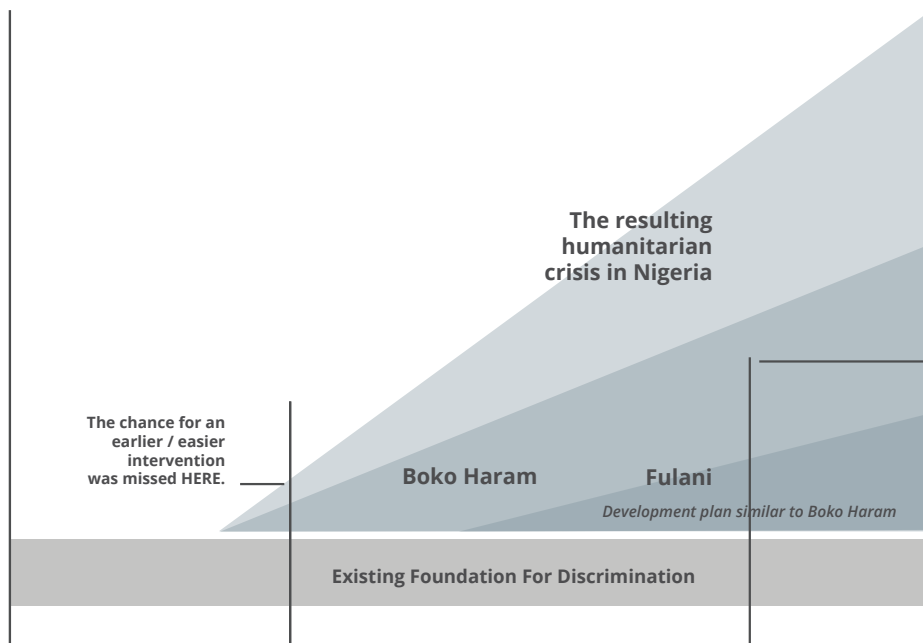


98%



**of all Fulani are Muslim and collectively are the largest pastoral nomadic group in the world.**

An intervention is required NOW, running across all three elements of the problem.





In 2015 alone

1.9  
million



**USD in destruction of  
churches, crops, homes  
in Jol by Fulani**

500



**killed  
by armed men with guns,  
bows and machetes  
in the Agatu attack**

At this time, it seems the Fulani have primarily targeted Local Government Areas that are principally, though not singularly, Christian. However, given the reality that this is a movement of terror undergirded by both religious and ethnic overtones, there is reason to believe that as the Fulani increasingly perceive they have the latitude to pursue their own agenda, that their acts of aggression will progressively impinge on non-Fulani Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religions.

As one intelligence outfit analyzed the attacks pursued by the Fulani militants:

The scale, spread and frequency of the attacks, as well as the near methodical manner in which the communities are wiped out, pacified and the sequence in which it is being carried out speaks to a higher degree of planning and organization than the government is willing to acknowledge. It is dangerous to refuse to acknowledge this, as our recent experience with Boko Haram has shown. It takes only a little nudge forward for what we see as marauders of civilian targets to begin to take on whole army formations. By then it will be a lot more difficult to defeat them, at a considerable cost in men, finances and logistics to the Nigerian state.<sup>21</sup>

Without minimizing the significance of Boko Haram, addressing the Fulani militants will likely prove far more challenging for a variety of reasons. First, unlike Boko Haram, the Fulani are primarily a tribe and not a terrorist organization and bound more closely together through familial and relational ties. Second, Fulani aggression does not stem from a set of poor economic and educational policies that excluded them from broader monetary advancement, but from a mixture of religion, ethnicity and desire to preserve a particular way of life that will be difficult to maintain in the twenty-first century. It bears repeating that the challenge is to isolate and address Fulani engaging in militancy outside of the rule of law and not all Fulani or Fulani pastoralists.

While the impact of Boko Haram has been felt throughout the Lake Chad region, if Fulani militants are allowed to either destabilize the capital, Abuja, or extend their reach into the southern states of Nigeria, the implications of this security threat are far more severe. In an extreme situation, this could cause both a massive refugee flow whose impact would be borne not only in the region but even into Europe, and an economic and security disruption that would be felt well beyond the borders of Nigeria.

# Conclusion



**Three major challenges are undermining the integrity of the nation and pushing the country to the verge of fracturing along religious fault lines:**

# 1

Religious minorities throughout northern Nigeria often live in forgotten shadows and face substantive discrimination and social exclusion that negatively impacts millions and is sustained by policies and practices that are widely accepted as normative. This is all the more relevant given the reality that as a region, northern Nigeria is one

of the most underdeveloped in the nation, and that far too many northerners believe the best means of moving forward is not the nurturing of a shared sense of citizenship but more full-bodied embrace of their particular religious interpretations and social

Religion is much more powerful than an atomic bomb. Religion is like a nuclear power and it can be used either positively or negatively depending on the driver.

**Imam Muhammad Ashafa**

construct. This foundation of discrimination has produced violent episodes for a number of years with Boko Haram just the latest, most sustained, and most violent version. Insecurity and division will continue to fester in northern Nigeria until this foundation of discrimination is ameliorated.

2,152,000



**Displaced People in Nigeria**



Boko Haram and its culture of violence continues, despite recent pronouncements to the contrary. The acts of barbarity and the depths of suffering caused is immense with over 15,000 dead to date.<sup>22</sup> Malnutrition stalks northeastern Nigeria. Almost a million children are being denied an education. One of the largest number of IDPs in the world

continue to live in desperate circumstances. Boko Haram has helped create one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world. Unfortunately, in many respects both the Nigerian government and the international community are failing to rise to meet this challenge.



The threat of the Fulani militants has steadily grown for a number of years, and since 2014, has significantly escalated. This emerging security threat is a combustible mixture of religion and ethnicity and is sowing seeds of destabilization throughout the Middle Belt. This conflict is at the edge of tipping from isolated acts of aggression into a full-scale conflict.

Whereas Boko Haram occurred in rural northeastern Nigeria in an underdeveloped quadrant, the actions of the Fulani militants are taking place in the heart of Nigeria and are increasingly encroaching on the environs of Abuja. Should the capital city of the African country with the largest economy, the largest number of Muslims and the largest number of Christians succumb to ethnic and religious attacks, or should the country further fracture and destabilize, the implications would be felt across western Africa and could create an arch of failed states stretching from Libya to Chad, Mali and down to Nigeria. This need not be the case, but the potential is very real. At the same time, with a Muslim president and a Christian vice president, Nigeria also contains the seeds for a country exemplifying a united citizenship with rule of law, religious freedom and cultural plurality that itself becomes a model of growth, peace and stability throughout the continent of Africa and beyond.



**Boko Haram poster inside Jos prison**

Fully addressing this complex situation will require a level of intentionality and collaboration across multiple sectors and must involve the Nigerian government, key stakeholders throughout the country, local grassroots representatives, the Nigerian diaspora, and international partners. Given the multi-dimensional nature of these conflicts, success is highly dependent upon the development of a comprehensive roadmap to peace. While multiple models exist, perhaps the most pertinent template is that of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or of the more recent Columbia Peace Process.

In this vein President Buhari inaugurated in 2015 and his current administration are to be acknowledged for the important steps that have been taken since that time to address internal corruption and bring Boko Haram to an end. There are opportunities to broaden and expand this good foundation in order to meaningfully pursue a comprehensive roadmap to peace that addresses discrimination, violence and humanitarian need. Thus far, President Buhari has provided strong and positive leadership and given renewed opportunity for the international community to stand with Nigeria at this critical time.

While perhaps religion was not an initial root cause, religious identity is being politicized and is quickly crystalizing into a key factor. Decisive and immediate action, changes in policy, and coordinated intentionality are needed in order to prevent Nigeria from irreparably fracturing along religious fault lines and propel her to emerge as the truly great country that beckons and stands well within her grasp.



### **WHAT IS THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION?**

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with what happened under apartheid. The conflict during this period resulted in massive violence and human rights abuses, and the TRC helped South Africa move forward with forgiveness and united purpose.



### **President Buhari**

Muhammadu Buhari is the President of Nigeria, in office since 2015. He is a retired Major General in the Nigerian Army and was previously Head of State of Nigeria.

# Recommendations

## To the U.S. Government

The United States is one of the world's most important partners for Nigeria, and retains tremendous clout that can be further leveraged on behalf of establishing peace. 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative (21CWI) recommends the following policy approaches:

1. Create a Special Envoy for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region. Ensure that this office is appropriately staffed and resourced to serve as the key interlocutor, building multi-stakeholder engagement and addressing the wide range of complex realities involving refugees, IDPs, economic development, security, justice and peacebuilding.
2. Working the U.S. Institute of Peace and other relevant stakeholders, insist on the development of a comprehensive roadmap to peace that will address:
  - (1) Economic and infrastructure development within northern Nigeria and the discrimination and marginalization that occurs against religious minorities within the north;
  - (2) Initiating an investigative peace process perhaps modeled around a Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that all communities, all ethnicities, and people of all religious persuasions are able to seek appropriate redress regarding their local experiences, doing so in a manner that will help all Nigerians understand and respond to the multi-faceted nature of the reality on the ground;
  - (3) Containing and ending the terrorist actions of Boko Haram;
  - (4) Negotiating with Boko Haram militants a path forward that honors calls for justice with reintegration into the community;
  - (5) Establishing a clear plan for humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation including greater accountability, policy development, and reach throughout all IDP communities;
  - (6) Developing a robust approach related to Fulani militants inclusive of equitable disarmament, transparent response to impacted and displaced communities, and





**Church that Boko Haram destroyed.**

While the pattern unfolding in the Middle Belt may be similar, should the situation with the Fulani militants further deteriorate the impact will be on the footsteps of the capital of one of the most influential countries in Africa, and could create an arch of failed states stretching from Libya to Chad, Mali and down to Nigeria.

- (7) policy provisions around farming and grazing rights;
- (7) Establishing Nigerian police forces throughout the entire country, especially in communities impacted by ethno-religious violence, and ensuring these individuals are adequately trained and held accountable;
- (8) Designing programs related to religious freedom and rule of law that can be deployed throughout the country and ensuring that all citizens have a fair opportunity to participate in the political process;
- (9) Ending policies and practices of impunity; and
- (10) Working to ensure the full establishment of the rule of law, religious freedom, con U.S. Government Accountability Office ceptions of national citizenship, the federal constitution, and the maturation of institutions of governance.

The USG should insist that a comprehensive roadmap to peace is developed by June 2017 and fully implemented thereafter with direct measures of inducement and accountability attached to the development and implementation of this plan.



**The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria is dire.**

3. Strengthen the USAID offices of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) as they relate to Nigeria in order to ensure that the humanitarian crisis is as vigorously engaged as the situation warrants and addresses the full range of humanitarian needs from short-term relief to psychological care for victimized women.
4. Work alongside the Nigeria House of Assembly to establish a Religious Freedom Caucus modeled after the one found in the U.S. House of Representatives. This would help address and reverse religious fault lines and ensure the full implementation of religious freedom for people of all faith or no faith.
5. Support the full and transparent establishment of the Atrocities Prevention Board which would be well-positioned to track and recommend approaches related to the ethno-religious interchange driving multiple components of the conflict in Nigeria, especially in relation to the Fulani militants in the Middle Belt.
6. Formally request a Government Accountability Office study on all humanitarian assistance funding allocated for education in Nigeria to ensure that resources allocated are used in schools where the curriculum, policies and practices are impartial towards all individuals regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion.
7. Pursue through the United Nations:
  - (1) the establishment and implementation of a Nigerian comprehensive roadmap to peace, and
  - (2) the designation of the crisis as an L3 humanitarian crisis.

What is unfolding in northern and central Nigeria is one of the gravest current humanitarian crises in the world.

## To the United Nations

1. A visit by the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur of IDPs to Nigeria with a formal report to the Security Council that includes an action plan on:
  - (1) protection of communities and people,
  - (2) their empowerment in the political process, and
  - (3) development of long-term stability and reintegration.
2. Categorization of the crisis in Nigeria as an L3 humanitarian crisis.



**IDP camp near Abuja, Nigeria**

## To the Nigerian Government

1. Establish a comprehensive roadmap to peace directed by a high ranking member of the Nigerian Government and inclusive of multiple community, grassroots and regional stakeholders.
2. Develop a robust program for multi-sector education on behalf of religious freedom, human rights and the rule of law that contains elements such as:
  - (1) establishing a unit of study focused on religious freedom within all public schools,

- (2) building a coalition among businesses leaders throughout Nigeria who commit to hire and work according to principles of religious freedom and the rule of law, and
  - (3) training within Local Government Areas on constitutional rights and religious freedom.
3. Expand the activities and support offered by the National Emergency Management Agency to ensure that all IDPs receive support, especially as the vast majority currently receive virtually no humanitarian assistance.
4. Create a mechanism that would allow families in the northeast and Middle Belt to register the data of their missing.
5. Fully secure the Nigerian border and establish ranches throughout northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt for Fulani pastoralists. This must be done in a way that is fully transparent, discontinues transnational migratory patterns, takes into account the full history of particular contexts, and – when necessary – offers fair and just compensation for those who may experience rezoning.
6. End the two-tiered system of “indigenous” and “settler” rights.
7. End or reverse legislation, such as that currently in the Plateau State, which seeks to unnecessarily regulate religion and the free exercise thereof.
8. Establish within the Nigeria House of Assembly a Religious Freedom Caucus modeled after the one found in the U.S. House of Representatives in order to help address and reverse religious fault lines and ensure the full implementation of religious freedom for people of all faiths or no faith.
9. Enhance Nigerian security forces by:
  - (1) ensuring that civilian protection is at the heart of all security operations, and
  - (2) establishing mobile police units throughout northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt beginning with communities that have been repeatedly targeted.
10. Strengthen the rule of law by ending a culture of impunity and ensuring that the judicial system holds accountable all those who participate in violence within a system of fair due process.



## To Denominations, Churches and Individuals in the United States, Nigeria, and Around the World

### Denominations at their Next Annual Gathering

1. Issue a statement, pass a resolution or release an appropriate corollary that raises awareness about the situation unfolding in Nigeria, standing in solidarity with the many suffering through one of the worst humanitarian crises, and calling on leaders to work to build holistic peace and reconciliation.
2. Include a keynote, workshop, or breakout session that builds awareness among constituents, trains key leaders, and mobilizes members and communities of worship around advocacy engagement and broad-based commitment to “Stand with Nigeria.”
3. Utilize media outlets for the next six months including newspapers, blogs, radio, Bible study curriculum, and social media engagement to ensure that at this critical time, people of faith are aware, praying for, and standing with Nigeria.
4. Increase humanitarian assistance and ensure that all activities within Nigeria include training and aid that addresses and furthers religious freedom.

### Churches and Individuals

1. Designate a Stand with Nigeria Sunday in the next six months that would include a dedicated time of prayer, a sermon and a call to action.
2. Build a relationship with a Nigerian congregation in your area and participate in a joint time of prayer, listening, relationship building and practical engagement.
3. Contact your denomination and ask its leadership to:
  - (1) pass a resolution,
  - (2) host a workshop,
  - (3) strategically utilize media outlets, and
  - (4) increase humanitarian assistance.



**Imam Muhammad Ashafa of the Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna, Nigeria**

4. Contact your members of Congress and ask them to “Stand with Nigeria” by:
  - (1) reading the report, and
  - (2) implementing the above policy recommendations.
5. Utilize your media outlets and commit over the next six months to:
  - (1) highlight these realities in your church newsletter,
  - (2) write one guest editorial to your local newspaper, and
  - (3) post once a month on your social media platforms.
6. Incorporate a one-time special offering dedicated to the “Stand with Nigeria” project and transformative change that will restore hope to millions.
7. Participate in a Pray for Nigeria campaign and pray every day for one full week for an end to violent attacks, rehabilitation and reintegration for those who are suffering, and for peace, justice and reconciliation to flow through Nigeria.
8. Invite one other church, family member or close associate to join with you in order to help launch a movement that stretches around the world on behalf of those who are suffering.

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The situation in Nigeria is complex and multi-faceted and requires an ongoing diligence to balanced nuance and a rigorous commitment to pursuing hard realities beyond rhetoric and surface-level analysis.



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