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“The Continuing Threat of Boko Haram”

*Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith (NJ-04)
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and Int'l Orgs.
2200 Rayburn HOB
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Good afternoon. Nigeria is one of the United States' main allies, African trading partners, and a major economic and political force beyond the African continent. Unfortunately, it continues to be plagued by terrorist forces whose reach extends beyond the borders of that country. Today's hearing is intended to examine the extent to which the organization known as Boko Haram and its affiliates pose a threat to Nigeria and the region, as well as the United States and the rest of the international community.

Boko Haram is a Nigerian terrorist group whose name in Arabic means “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad.” The name “Boko Haram” is a translation from Hausa meaning that conventional education (boko) is forbidden (haram). Because of its repeated attacks against Christian targets during holy days such as Christmas and Easter, Boko Haram is seen by some as principally an anti-Christian organization. In the last year alone, Boko Haram terrorists are believed to have killed 1,200 Christians in Nigeria. In fact, it is estimated that more than 60% of Christians killed worldwide because of religious intolerance die in Nigeria. This year alone, according to Emmanuel Ogebe, one of today's witnesses, 53 Christian churches have been attacked, and 216 people were murdered by terrorists in them.

However, it would not be a completely accurate interpretation of the facts to assume that what is happening in Nigeria is just a Muslim-Christian conflict.

In the past two years, both of our subcommittees have sent staff delegations to investigate the Boko Haram threat, and this past September Gregory Simpkins, our subcommittee's staff director, and I visited Abuja and Jos to further look into this matter. We found that the truth of this organization is much more complex than is widely understood. Although exact numbers were not made available to us, Boko Harm is definitely targeting other Muslims who don't agree with their

views. Muslim pastors who criticize the terrorist violence are themselves made targets. What must be prevented is a growing inability for Christians and Muslims to work together to meet their common threat.

According to various reports, Boko Haram began in 2003 when about 200 university students and unemployed youth created a camp in Yobe State near the Niger border to withdraw from what they considered the corrupt, sinful and unjust Nigerian government, and their community was supposedly founded on Islamic law. The group was then known by the nickname the Nigerian Taliban. Violent clashes with Nigerian security forces nearly destroyed the group several times, but its charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf kept the group alive until his death while in police custody in July 2009.

Since Yusuf's death, there have been various spokesmen but one person who is believed to be the nominal leader: Abubakar Shekau. Furthermore, a breakaway group known as Ansaru has appeared on the scene.

The proliferation of voices speaking for Boko Haram and the new faction lead some to believe this is not a coherent organization. We learned that it is actually a very sophisticated organization operating in cells disconnected from each other but coordinating at a high level. While there are those acting in the name of Boko Haram for their own purposes, this terrorist group is organized, albeit in an unconventional manner.

Some also believe this group is purely a domestic terrorist group operating in Nigeria. We found that to be a false assumption as well. Boko Haram/Ansaru does wage attacks on the Nigerian government and other domestic targets. Nevertheless, their actions prove their participation in the global jihad movement that wages violent war worldwide to establish their skewed version of Islam as the prevailing religion globally. Various actions, such as the bombing of the United Nations Abuja office in August 2011, and numerous statements from Boko Haram spokesmen indicate their international intent. This international focus has been confirmed by American and Nigerian intelligence information.

The three criteria for an organization to be declared a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. government are: 1) it must be a foreign organization, 2) it must engage in terrorist activity and 3) it must threaten the security of United States nationals, U.S. national security or the economic interests of the United States. Clearly Boko Haram/Ansaru meets that test. This is why I have introduced H.R. 3209 to urge the Administration to declare Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization. This measure would better provide tools for stopping those who currently provide funding or other support for this murderous, terrorist organization, and I welcome the State Department's enactment today of this designation.

Our government has provided training and other assistance to the Nigerian government to battle this terrorist threat. Unfortunately, the past brutality demonstrated by the Nigerian security forces, as well as the inability of Nigerian security forces to collaborate with one another, have prevented this effort from being as successful as it should be. In far too many cases, the Nigerian government itself has actually turned local people in the North against its effort to end the terrorist

threat. By its ineffectiveness, the Nigerian security forces have pushed Nigerian Christians and Muslims to form their own militias to protect themselves from terrorists and each other. In the long run, this development makes eventual reconciliation of Nigeria's various religious and ethnic communities more difficult.

We have with us today the Administration's point person for our government's effort to help end the terrorist threat in Nigeria, a leading Nigerian Muslim spokesman against this terrorism, a Nigerian Christian expert on this terrorist threat, an American-based expert on this violence and a survivor of the Boko Haram threat. This survivor, Mr. Habila Adamu, was challenged to renounce his Christian faith. When he refused, he was shot by terrorists and left for dead. Miraculously, he survived and joins us today with one of the most inspiring examples of faith any of us will ever hear.

We hope today's hearing will provide a fuller understanding of this terrorist threat and explain why declaring Boko Haram/Ansaru as a Foreign Terrorist Organization as part of our government's effort to end this menace and its ongoing financial support was such a necessary decision.