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## “Nigeria at a Crossroads: The Upcoming Election”

### Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

*Rep. Chris. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman  
December 13, 2018  
Excerpts of Remarks*

Today’s hearing will come to order.

I would like to thank both of our very distinguished witnesses, Ambassador Tibor Nagy and Ramsay Day, for doing double duty two days straight. You were here just yesterday, doing what I thought was a tremendous job for our Africa-wide Committee hearing, and today with a very specific focus on Nigeria. So thank you, above all for your leadership, but also for spending a considerable amount of time with the full committee and now the subcommittee.

The reason why we have called you back is to focus on Nigeria, and let me say how we do believe that the upcoming election is an inflection point, February 19, 2019. It could be a great day, and we’re hoping it will be, but there are still some unanswered questions. Perhaps you can provide some insights into those questions.

Nigeria is so large and robust—as often has been said, as Nigeria goes, so goes Africa. Having been there so many times, I believe that’s true. And wonderful, wonderful people, there’s a great deal of faith there, Muslim and Christian. But there are also some besetting problems brought by a minority number of people, that continues to plague the large masses of people who suffer from those problems. It’s economic and political leadership in sub-Saharan Africa is extremely important. A stable and prosperous Nigeria contributes to stable and prosperous neighbors. Conversely, an unstable Nigeria wracked

by poverty and violence does not contribute to well-being of its own citizens or its neighbors, but rather can lead to their destabilization.

Nigeria today is clearly at a crossroads. We see continuing violence along ethnic and religious lines, exacerbated by economic, social and political tensions, coinciding with this upcoming major election.

The incumbent, President Muhammadu Buhari, is seeking a second consecutive term – but in a way it's his third overall, if you count the fact that he served as head of state from 1983 to 1985 following a military coup which installed him.

President Buhari won election in 2015 in part because he promised to end Nigeria's endemic corruption and defeat the terror group Boko Haram. Since then, however, he has frankly disappointed. While Boko Haram has been somewhat contained, it still remains a threat, though in terms of actual violence, the death toll attributable to Boko Haram now surpassed by clashes instigated in large part by well-armed Fulani extremists, which are often labeled "herder-farmer" violence. In the first half of 2018, per the International Crisis Group, over 1,300 Nigerians have been killed in this conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt—a horrible loss of life.

Though the greatest number of victims in this particular conflict are Christian farmers, other groups in the country have suffered, including Nigeria's Shia Muslims in the State of Kaduna, who were targeted by government forces in 2015 in what is known as the Zaria Massacre. Igbo who predominantly come from the South and who still remember the brutal war for Biafran independence nearly half a century ago, also feel alienation, particularly after a call in 2017 by a radical group for Igbo to be cleansed from northern Nigeria and forced to return to their traditional homeland in the South.

I and many others are very concerned about the apparent inability – or perhaps even reluctance – of the Nigerian federal government under President Buhari to stop the violence or even, at times, to unequivocally condemn the attacks. This concern is exacerbated by the fact that in any election politicians seek to maximize the support of their base, and in this particular case, it is President Buhari's ethnic and religious base which is contributing to much of the tension.

Thus it is critically important that political leaders such as President Buhari, religious leaders such as the Sultan of Sokoto, and institutions such as the cattleman's association *Miyetti Allah* – all of whom have influence among the Fulani – unequivocally condemn attacks and use their power and influence to promote peace and reconciliation. In that regard, there have been a number of proposals aimed at promoting peace which should be commended. As President of the Senate, Dr. Abubakar Saraki, who is in the audience today—and we welcome and thank him for being here—is himself a Muslim

leader, one who sought to create the Religious Equity Commission, which aims at promoting peace among different religious groups.

In one of the many trips I made to Nigeria, I met Archbishop Kaigama, the Archbishop of Jos, which was the center of much of the conflict in where many of the churches were firebombed. We met with survivors from those churches. Archbishop Kaigama worked closely with the imam who was his counterpart in humanitarian and peace-building projects—and I can tell you the respect and admiration for each other was actually awe-inspiring, they both said nothing but superlatives in how they wanted to work together for peace in the Jos area.

Thus there are a number of hopeful initiatives in Nigeria which can be built upon. I am looking forward to hearing from our two very distinguished witnesses today about what our government is doing to promote peace and stability in Nigeria, and what we are doing to help ensure a free and fair election, followed by – depending on the outcome – a peaceful transition of power. And let me also say how we're all looking forward to insight you can provide to the Subcommittee, fresh on the heels of the framework that was announced this morning, which I hope you will spend some time conveying your impressions of it, and where it will lead in terms of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the subcontinent.

I'd like to now yield to my good friend and colleague Karen Bass.