***"One of our distinguished witnesses—Bishop Wilfred Anagbe of the diocese of Makurdi, Nigeria— will testify today that" Militant Fulani herdsman are terrorists. They steal and vandalize, they kill and boast about it, they kidnap and rape, and they enjoy total impunity from the elected officials. None of them have been arrested and brought to justice."***

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Excerpts of opening remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)
Washington, DC—March 12, 2025 (202) 225-3765

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According to the Catholic News Agency and EWTN News: ''Archbishop Ignatius A. Kaigama is concerned over the seemingly endless violence against Christians that claimed at least 58 lives this past weekend and hundreds of others in recent weeks. It is 'our prayer that something definitive will be done to stop the situation that is inhuman,'"

Shockingly, that was more than a dozen years ago and part of my opening remarks at a hearing on July 10, 2012—one of several hearings I chaired on religious persecution in Nigeria—and since then it has only gotten worse.

One year later in 2013, I visited Archbishop Kaigama in Jos, Nigeria. We visited churches that had been recently firebombed by Boko Haram and spent hours listening to survivors tell their stories.

Despite their numbing loss and pain, I was absolutely amazed at the survivors' deep faith, courage and resilience.

I also met with an evangelical believer—Habila Adamu.

Dragged from his home by Boko Haram terrorists, he was ordered to renounce his faith.

With an AK-47 pressed to his face, he was asked "are you ready to die as a Christian."

With extraordinary courage Habila answered, "yes, I am ready to die as a Christian."

He was asked a second time and he repeated his answer—"yes I am ready to die as a Christian."

This time, the terrorist pulled the trigger. A bullet ripped through Habila's face. He crumpled to the ground, left for dead.

By some miracle, he survived.

I asked Habila to come to Washington DC to tell his story. At a Congressional hearing I chaired, Habila told my subcommittee— "I am alive because God wants you to have this message—knowing Christ" is so much "deeper" than merely knowing Boko Haram's story of hate and intolerance.

He closed his testimony with this—"do everything you can to end this ruthless religious persecution…but know Christ first."

Since then, however, the wanton violence against Christians in Nigeria has grown significantly worse.

A couple of days ago, The Pillar reported that "While Christians were receiving ashes last Wednesday to begin Lent, news broke in Nigeria that a priest had been brutally murdered by kidnappers, who had stormed his rectory the night before and kidnapped him… "With deep sorrow and righteous indignation, I condemn in the strongest terms the relentless and tragic wave of kidnappings targeting priests, pastoral agents, and the faithful," Bishop Julius Kundi said in a March 7 press conference which expressed outrage "over the kidnapping and brutal murder" of his priest.

According to sources in the diocese, Okechukwu was bound by his kidnappers, and he was shot in the head, at close range with an assault rifle, according to officials in his diocese."

The systematic slaughter and abuse of Nigerian believers must stop.

Delay is denial—and a death sentence to many.

One of our distinguished witnesses—Bishop Wilfred Anagbe of the diocese of Makurdi, Nigeria— will testify today that" Militant Fulani herdsman are terrorists. They steal and vandalize, they kill and boast about it, they kidnap and rape, and they enjoy total impunity from the elected officials. None of them have been arrested and brought to justice."

In December 2020, President Trump designated Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern only to be reversed without justification by Secretary Blinken in November of 2021.

Religious leaders in Nigeria were outraged by Sec. Blinken's decision.

One Nigerian Bishop challenged Blinken and said Christian persecution is "more intense than ever." (Bishop Mamza)

And Genocide Watch has called Nigeria "a killing field of defenseless Christians." Yet, the Government of Nigeria has failed to make progress against religiously motivated persecution of Christians despite religious freedom being enshrined as an essential human right in its Constitution.

Likewise, Nigerian legal framework supports pluralism at both federal and state levels but glaring contradictions exist, especially with laws that criminalize blasphemy—some even carrying the death penalty.

The U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) was "appalled" that the U.S. Department of State did **not redesignate** Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) —USCIRF recommended this redesignation four years in a row from 2021 to 2024 and said "[t]here is no justification" as to why the State Department continues to fail to redesignate Nigeria as a CPC.

When the former Secretary of State Anthony Blinken held a joint press conference with the Nigerian Foreign Minister on January 23, 2024—following the Christmas Eve massacre when targeted killings by radical Fulani terrorists took the lives of hundreds of Christians—he merely offered his condolences.

And these Christmas Eve killings reoccurred the following year—just less than three months ago.

Make no mistake, these ongoing attacks are based on religion, and diverting attention from it denies what we have seen with our own eyes. This "religious cleansing" needs to stop, and the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Last year the House Foreign Affairs adopted my resolution H. Res 82 urgently calling on the Biden Administration to redesignate Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern. It passed almost exactly one year ago (Feb 6, 2024) in committee but never came to the floor.

While I strongly believe that President Trump will again designate Nigeria a CPC—and do much more to assist the persecuted church including outreach to Nigerian President Bola Tinuba—last night I reintroduced the resolution.

Help can't come fast enough.

Let's not forget these terrible horrifying facts:

Northern Nigeria has seen the destruction of "over 18,000 churches since 2009" from attacks by Islamist militants, according to a 2023 Vatican report.

An August 2024 report from the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa found that 55,910 people were killed and 21,000 people were abducted in the context of terror groups in Nigeria within just four years—October 2019 to September 2023.

Approximately 34,000 *moderate* Muslims have been murdered in Islamist attacks. About 5 million Christians have been displaced and forced into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps within Nigeria and in refugee camps at regional and sub-regional borders, according to an Intersociety report.

Reportedly, these IDP camps receive insufficient support from the government.

The 2023 Watch List released in January by *Open Doors,* the interdenominational foundation that supports persecuted Christians in the world, indicates that Nigeria accounts for 89% of Christians martyred worldwide.

This targeted violence starkly highlights the precarious state of religious freedom in Nigeria.

Despite the Nigerian government's calls for interfaith unity, meaningful reforms to protect religious freedoms remain elusive. It is unconscionable that President Tinubu—sworn in May 2023— has not acknowledged the religious motivations for these attacks.

The government's failure to decentralize security services at the state level and to secure its borders, further inhibits efforts to address the underlying causes of violence impacting religious groups. And it will only worsen as Nigeria is already the most populous African country with its population expected to reach nearly 400 million by 2050.

With its rich resources in minerals, metals, oil, and gas—the subject of conflict for years—Nigeria has a lot of potential for success, especially to alleviate poverty among its citizens and to become a key economic, trade, and national security partner for the U.S.

Yet, the protection and strengthening of Nigeria's religious and civil freedoms must be at the forefront of the U.S.-Nigeria bilateral relationship.

I look forward to working with the administration on these issues and eagerly await the release of the 2025 International Religious Freedom report—an essential tool for the Administration to take additional punitive measures against those who enable this targeted persecution to continue.

We in Congress will pray AND not stop fighting until perpetrators are brought to justice and until the religiously persecuted are safe and free. We will not be silent while our brothers and sisters are slaughtered.