



THE BARONESS COX
HOUSE OF LORDS
LONDON SW1A 0PW

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26 July 2021

Dear Dominic,

The recent FCDO Report on Human Rights and Democracy does not list Nigeria as a priority country, despite daily reports of terrorist violence, mass forced displacement, the rise in abductions for ransom and a general backsliding on democratic practices.

Nigerian citizens are currently at the mercy of non-state actors who have been allowed to evolve and now have the capacity to shoot down a fighter jet, as has recently occurred in Kaduna state. Given the scale and depth of suffering, we would be very grateful if you could respond to each of the following urgent concerns.

1. Violations of freedom of religion or belief

- We are encouraged by your broad commitment to reduce levels of violence in Nigeria. We also share your deep concern over the continuation of terrorist attacks against Muslims and Christians in the north-east.
- We are disappointed, however, by your characterisation of violence in the Middle Belt, which is among the country's gravest security challenges and deserving of a robust response. We urge the UK to allocate humanitarian aid to the Middle Belt, in addition to UK aid to the north-east.
- While you commit to "continue to look at ways to address" the complex drivers of violence in the Middle Belt, it remains unclear whether this includes addressing the religious dimension – particularly as religious affiliation is instrumentalised increasingly to recruit or inspire violent acts,¹ and predominantly-Christian communities are attacked for reasons connected with their faith.²
- The FCDO report refers to violence by the same non-state actors in the north-east and the Middle Belt, with no mention of targeted attacks largely against Hausa Muslim communities

¹ As emphasised by US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, on 8 December, following the US State Department's decision to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern because of FoRB violations and escalating 'religious-tinged violence'.

² As emphasised in the Bishop of Truro's review, whose recommendations the UK Government have agreed to implement in full.

in the north-west, Igbo communities in the south-east and Yoruba communities in the south-west.

- The report also fails to cite the seminal two-year-long inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International FoRB, published in June 2020, which describes in detail violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief, and which poses the question whether genocide is unfolding in Nigeria.

2. Case study: #ENDSARS protests

- There are now widespread concerns that human rights violations take place with a degree of official complicity and that the Nigerian Government only occasionally investigate or prosecute those responsible for such crimes. The Government give the unfortunate impression of being as quick to pardon, rehabilitate and release ‘repentant’ terrorists as to harass and shoot protestors who make legitimate calls for justice and reform in a peaceful manner.
- The FCDO report claims that, as the #ENDSARS protests grew in number, “there were some clashes between protesters and the Nigerian security services, including the police and army.” There were no clashes between #ENDSARS protestors and security services. Rather, thugs appear to have been sent to attack the protestors,³ while the security forces consistently used excessive force,⁴ even prior to the killings at the Lekki Toll Gate.
- Footage showed these thugs damaging property and attacking civilians. There is also video evidence of police shooting at individuals in Sabon Gari, the Christian district of Kano City, to terrorise residents at night.
- You will be aware of efforts within Nigeria to give #ENDSARS protest in the north a religious coloration so as to rally Muslim communities against the protests, who would otherwise have taken part.⁵ Northern governors later attempted to rebrand the legitimate protests as insurrections aimed at toppling President Buhari,⁶ which he himself recently stated on film.⁷

3. Other notable omissions

We understand that the FCDO’s annual report can only provide a snapshot of the most grievous violations of human rights, but it is a serious concern that it does not refer to any of the following cases:

³<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/421724-endsars-how-thugs-attacked-us-at-cbn-headquarters-protesters.html>; <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/-armed-thugs-attack-protesters-in-nigeria-s-capital/2006685>; https://twitter.com/bertram_hill1/status/1318616370318368771?s=20; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/nigeria>

⁴ <https://punchng.com/hrw-seeks-prosecution-of-police-officers-harassing-endsars-protesters/>

⁵ <https://dailypost.ng/2020/10/20/end-sars-thugs-attack-christian-procession-in-kogi-beat-up-pastors-abduct-three/>; https://mbasic.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10222692754284231&id=1134900901&refid=17&ft=mf_story_key.10222692754284231%3Atop_level_post_id.10222692754284231%3Aphoto_id.10222692754284231%3Acontent_owner_id_new.1134900901%3Athrowback_story_fbid.10222692754284231%3Aphoto_id.10222692750004124%3Astory_location.4%3Astory_attachment_style.photo%3Aphoto_id.1134900901%3A306061129499414%3A2%3A0%3A1604213999%3A6955209647237518218&tn=%2As-R

⁶ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/422613-endsars-northern-governors-sue-for-peace-condemn-violence.html>

⁷ <https://punchng.com/endsars-protest-was-to-remove-me-from-office-buhari/>

- The beheading of eleven Christian hostages by ISWAP on Christmas Day 2019.
- The execution of the chair of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa state, Reverend Lawan Andimi, by the Abubakar Shekau faction of Boko Haram on 20 January 2020.
- The profiling by ISWAP of travellers who are intercepted in the north-east, targeting Christians, people from Plateau State, members of the security services and humanitarian aid workers.
- The case of Leah Sharibu, who remains in captivity.
- The arbitrary arrest and detention of Professor Richard Solomon Musa Tarfa, co-founder of orphanages for vulnerable children in Kano and Kaduna states, and the removal of these children to a Government-run home in Kano with no access to education or to establishments of the religion or belief of their choice.
- The sentencing of a 13-year-old boy to ten years imprisonment and menial labour on blasphemy charges by a Sharia court in Kano state; and the death sentence handed to a musician who was deemed to commit blasphemy for a song he circulated via WhatsApp.
- The harassment of Dr Obadiah Mailafia, former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, who faced a six-hour interrogation session for sounding the alarm about the violence in Nigeria in general and southern Kaduna in particular, which is evolving in line with his warnings.

We and others have raised many of these urgent concerns with you, Nigel Adams and Catriona Laing on numerous occasions, especially since 2015. Yet we have received no assurance of a shift in UK foreign policy to reflect the urgency of the crisis, while successive FCDO reports have failed to reflect the critical decline in security that is causing seasoned observers increasingly to refer to Nigeria as a failing or failed state.⁸

We therefore urge you to re-consider how the FCDO could shine a light on the erosion of human rights and democracy in Nigeria. We urge you to list Nigeria as a priority country.

We would be very grateful for the opportunity to discuss these matters with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



Baroness Cox, Founder and CEO, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Dr Rowan Williams

Mervyn Thomas CMG, Founder President, CSW

Ayo Adedoyin, CEO, International Organisation for Peace & Social Justice (PSJ-UK)

⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/27/nigeria-is-a-failed-state/>; <https://www.ft.com/content/9abc218d-3881-4bfd-8951-e76336cde94f>; <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-with-nigeria-verging-on-failed-state-status-west-africa-arrives-at-a/>