

Debate Pack

12 April 2023

CDP-0081 (2023)

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Religious minorities in Nigeria

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Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on religious minorities in Nigeria will take place on Tuesday 18 April 2023, from 9:30-11:00am. The debate was scheduled by the Backbench Business Committee and will be led by Jim Shannon MP.

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Background

Nigeria is Africa's [most populous country with over 230 million people](#), roughly evenly split between Muslims and Christians. Just [over half the population are Muslim and around 46% are Christian](#) according to the CIA World Factbook.

Muslims include followers of Sunni, Shia and Sufi, with smaller Izala and Salafist minorities, [according to the US State Department's 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom](#). The same report says that approximately a quarter of Christians are Roman Catholic, while Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches are the largest populations among Protestant groups. Other communities include Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Animists, and individuals who do not follow any religion.

Geographically Nigeria has often been described as split between the Muslim north and the Christian south, but [significant populations reside in both parts of the country](#). Islam is the dominant religion in the north-west and north-east regions, while Christianity is the dominant religion in the south-west, including the capital, Lagos, and south-east.

Nigeria's constitution [prohibits the adoption of a State Religion](#) by either the Federal Government or state governments. The constitution provides for states to establish courts based on sharia or customary law. [Sharia courts function in 12 northern states](#) and the Federal Capital Territory.

[Olufemi O. Vaughan](#), the author of a book on religion and the making of Nigeria, suggests "[we cannot understand Nigeria without understanding the role of West Africa's two world religions and how they intersect with indigenous religions](#)." He argues religion is important to both social identities and political mobilisation in the country.

Nigeria's [security situation was a main concern for voters](#) in [Presidential elections held in February 2023](#). Jihadist groups including Boko Haram wage insurgencies in the north-east. In the central region, [there has long been conflict between largely Christian farmers and mainly Muslim herders](#), or pastoralists, over scarce resources. Some of this violence has been described

as “banditry.” The US State Department’s 2021 Report on International Freedom, published in June 2022, [chronicles incidents of religious violence](#).

Jideofor Adibe, Professor of International Relations and Political Science, Nasarawa State University in Nigeria, [identifies three factors that he says have heightened religious tensions in Nigeria](#):

The first is the competition for space between the two main religions of Islam and Christianity. Secondly, there is the perception that Nigerian leaders use the state to promote their religion or faith at the expense of others. Thirdly, there’s a culture of insensitivity to the feelings of minorities.

Charles Ekpo, with the Peace and Conflict Resolution Programme at Arthur Jarvis University in Nigeria, rejects descriptions of Nigeria as a secular state as simplistic, saying [“religion conspicuously influences politics in Nigeria.”](#)

Ekpo suggests that [“religious tolerance has worsened over the years due to the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics,”](#) citing examples such as the escalation of violent religious conflicts and undermining of traditional religious balancing in political posts in religiously diverse states.

Balancing political appointments between Christians and Muslims has been seen as an important means of ensuring representation for both religious groups and [public reassurance that all interest will be taken into account](#). Ebenezer Obadare, the Douglas Dillon senior fellow for Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, notes that the 2023 election of a Muslim President, Bola Tinubu, and Vice President, Kashim Shettima, has [caused concern among some sections of the Nigerian Christian community](#). During the election campaign, Tinubu [told northern Christian leaders that he picked Shettima because he “protected Christians”](#) while he was Governor of Borno State.

While the election of two Muslims to the posts is not without precedent, during the outgoing administration of Muhammadu Buhari, Christian Yemi Osinbajo served as Vice President.

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Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

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[Interview: Jesuit journalist on the roots of insurgent violence in Africa—and how faith communities are responding](#)

America: The Jesuit Review
Chris Chatteris, S.J.
15 March 2023

[New Report Shows Religious Dynamics in Nigeria’s Ongoing Violence](#)

Providence
Paul Marshall
28 February 2023

[Nigeria remains off U.S. religious freedom watch list](#)

Genocide Watch
21 February 2023

[Nigeria election \(Feb 25\) could trigger refugee crisis](#)

Anglican.ink
Andrew Boyd
20 February 2023

[Nigeria election 2023: Has Buhari tackled Boko Haram threat?](#)

BBC News
Mayeni Jones
18 February 2023

[Catholic priest burned to death in Nigeria](#)

Catholic News Agency
Courtney Mares
15 January 2023

[Is Nigeria really the world’s most dangerous place for Christians?](#)

Baptist News Global
Anthony Akaeze
23 August 2022

Terrorists Kill 32,000 Nigerian Muslims as MURIC counters US Lawmakers on Christian persecution

Guardian (Nigeria)
Sulaimon Salau
7 August 2022

Alleged Christian genocide: Muslim, Christian youths attack UK lawmakers

Daily Post (Nigeria)
John Owen Nwachukwu
23 August 2020

Christians in Nigeria feel under attack: why it's a complicated story

The Conversation
Jideofor Adibe
2 August 2022

Nigeria's Christians are under attack, but does the West care?

The Spectator (subscription required)
Hardeep Singh
19 May 2022

Conflict in Nigeria Is More Complicated Than "Christians vs. Muslims"

Council on Foreign Relations (Blog)
John Campbell
1 May 2019

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Press releases

[Lindisfarne publishes report on Genocide in Nigeria](#)

The Lindisfarne Centre

31 March 2023

Evidence the Fulani attacks on Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt are due to Islamic radicalisation

For more than two decades there have been increasing attacks by Fulani militias on villages inhabited by Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR) in Nigeria's Middle Belt. In 2013/14 the annual numbers killed jumped from around 63 to an estimated 1,229.

The attackers are almost entirely Muslim and the victims overwhelmingly non-Muslims, churches have been repeatedly destroyed and the attackers shout Islamic slogans as they attack. Despite this, Western media have repeatedly claimed this is a climate-change-driven conflict between herders who happen to be Muslims and settled farmers who happen to be Christians. In other words, it is claimed that there is no religious motivation for the attacks.

The Lindisfarne Centre for the Study of Christian Persecution has today published a research report which provides evidence that in recent years jihadist groups in West Africa have been repeatedly seeking to radicalise the Fulani. There now appears to be a revival of a traditional form of Fulani Islam which existed prior to British annexation of Northern Nigeria in the early twentieth century. This involved raids to capture both cattle and slaves from among the non-Muslim populations of what is now Nigeria's Middle Belt. These raids were justified by Islamic concepts such as jihad, booty, land seizure and enslavement of non-Muslims which formed part of the traditionalist Islam taught in Maliki madrassas which predominate in West Africa. The current Fulani attacks on Christian and ATR villages in the Middle Belt bear significant resemblances to these earlier Fulani raids. A deadly history is being allowed to repeat itself.

The large-scale killings of Christians and other non-Muslims and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of others indicate that at least two of the criteria set out in the UN Genocide Convention have already been met - a factor almost entirely ignored by Western media.

The Lindisfarne Centre's report also identifies two further, future risks. First, that the Fulani attacks could progress from killing Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion, burning their churches and seizing their land, to reviving the enslavement of non-Muslims, which was widespread among the Fulani until the early twentieth century. Secondly, there is a risk

that jihadist groups such as Boko Haram may be exercising “strategic patience” – holding back, waiting for the Fulani to clear Nigeria’s Middle Belt of much of its non-Muslim population, before they themselves enact the next stage of their jihad to seize control of Nigeria.

*Report available in Further reading

Nigerian Presidential elections 2023: Foreign Secretary's statement
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
1 March 2023

Statement by Foreign Secretary James Cleverly:

“The United Kingdom commends Nigerian voters for their participation in the Presidential and National Assembly elections and for their patience and resilience in exercising their democratic rights. We congratulate the President Elect, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

We note the position of opposition parties on the election outcome and the concerns expressed by observer missions and civil society about the organisation of the process, including delays and technical challenges. We encourage the authorities to examine all concerns carefully, take action to resolve outstanding issues and focus on delivering the will of the Nigerian people.”

Upcoming general elections in Nigeria: joint statement
British High Commission Abuja
23 February 2023

Diplomatic missions of the US, Australia, Japan, Norway, Canada, and the UK issued a joint statement on the general elections in Nigeria on 25 February 2023.

“Statement by the United States, Australia, Japan, Norway, Canada and the United Kingdom:

The Diplomatic Missions of the United States, Australia, Japan, Norway, Canada and the United Kingdom in Nigeria welcome the signing of the second Peace Accord by the candidate parties competing in the upcoming Presidential Election of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and fully commit to supporting all efforts that will ensure the Nigerian people decide who wins the election.

“We believe it is vital for Nigeria’s stability and democratic consolidation that the process is conducted and concluded safely, fairly and credibly. We

encourage all actors to intervene proactively to calm any tensions and avoid any violence in the periods before, during and after the elections.

“We call on all officials at federal and local levels in Nigeria to respect the human and democratic rights of its citizens. We strongly condemn any actions that undermine the peaceful and transparent conduct of the electoral process.

“We call on parties to respect electoral laws and institutions and take a firm stand against violence and hate speech by their supporters. We ask the security services in Nigeria to do their utmost to protect that process and prevent and deter attacks against INEC facilities, materials and personnel.

“We call on all officials, including the law enforcement authorities, to ensure a safe and conducive environment for the exercise of public freedoms - including the freedom of opinion and expression, the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association - all of which are essential in democratic societies, in particular in the context of elections. Law enforcement authorities should remain visibly neutral and respond in a proportionate manner to any election-related incidents.

“We further urge all presidential candidates and political parties to live up to their commitments under the second Peace Accord to accept the results of the election as announced by INEC and to pursue any challenge of the results through the appropriate legal channels.

“Finally, we the Diplomatic Missions of the United States, Australia, Japan, Norway, Canada and the United Kingdom in Nigeria would like to congratulate Nigeria on its 24 years of democratic progress since 1999, during which it has been a symbol to others of the value of exercising democratic rights for the betterment of society. We hope that this year’s elections further build Nigeria’s democratic tradition.”

UK Minister for Africa statement on upcoming Nigeria elections
British High Commission Abuja
21 February 2023

“Nigeria matters to the UK, and we are following the run up to these Presidential, National Assembly and Gubernatorial elections very closely. Over the last 2 months I have met 4 of the presidential candidates and the Chairman of INEC, and emphasised our support for the process and our commitment to a strong relationship between our 2 countries.

“The UK government continues to work closely with INEC and our Nigerian civil society partners to provide advisory support on electoral and legal reforms, assist in strengthening democratic institutions, and advocate for the

importance of civil society engagement in electoral and democratic processes to help deliver credible elections.

“It is vital for Nigeria’s stability and democratic consolidation that the electoral process is free, fair, and credible. I encourage all actors in Nigeria to intervene proactively to calm any tensions and prevent violence in the periods before, during and after the elections.

“I call on party officials at all levels to respect human rights and electoral laws and institutions and take a firm stand against violence and hate speech. I strongly condemn any actions that undermine the peaceful and transparent conduct of the electoral process.

“Where the UK is aware of attempts to subvert democratic processes at the national or state level we are prepared to take action against those who engage in or incite electoral violence and other anti-democratic behaviours. These actions could include preventing people from obtaining UK visas or imposing sanctions under our human rights sanctions regime.

“The UK government remains committed to supporting credible and inclusive elections, which are fundamental to Nigeria’s continued democratic growth and to the future of regional and global democracy.”

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PQs

Mubarak Bala

23 Mar 2023 | 166231

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his counterpart in Nigeria on Mubarak Bala.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government continues to raise Mr Bala's case with the Nigerian authorities, most recently with the Kano State Government on 19 January. In the UK, officials remain in communication with the Humanists Society and received an update on Mr Bala's case from them on 1 February. The right of individuals to express opinions, including expressing their non-belief, is essential to a free and open society. Dialogue on human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, will remain an important part of the UK's partnership with Nigeria under the future administration.

Nigeria: Abduction

23 Mar 2023 | 166230

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Nigeria on the kidnapping of Christians in Kaduna State.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Nigeria has experienced an increase in conflict since 2019. I [Minister Mitchell] discussed this challenge with Nigeria's leading presidential candidates in December and January. This included a discussion about insecurity with the now president-elect, who was joined by the incumbent Governor of Kaduna. To address kidnappings and their impact on Nigeria's ability to fulfil its constitutional commitment to Freedom of Religion or Belief, our UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership includes training to develop the Nigerian police and military forces' anti-kidnap capacity. We will continue to work with the Nigerian government and local partners to address the root causes and impacts of violence against civilians, including kidnappings in Kaduna State.

Nigeria: Foreign Relations

16 Mar 2023 | 163911

Asked by: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans he has for engagement with Nigeria following the 2023 elections in that country.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Nigeria's recent presidential elections marked a significant moment in the country's democratic progress. I [Minister Mitchell] met all the frontrunner candidates ahead of the election and officials have continued engagement with a range of counterparts throughout. Nigeria is a priority partner for the UK and I look forward to working with the new administration to support a more prosperous and secure Nigeria, which is in all of our interests.

Nigeria: Elections

13 Mar 2023 | HL5966

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussion they have had with the government of Nigeria regarding reports of interference, including intimidation, violence and bribery, in the Nigerian general election held on 25 February; and what assessment they have made of the implications of any interference on security, human rights and national cohesion in that country.

Answering member: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Minister for Africa [Minister Mitchell] advocated for the delivery of free and safe elections when he met with Nigerian presidential candidates and the chairperson of the Nigerian electoral commission. Since 2019, we have provided over £5 million to Nigerian civil society organisations to improve electoral education and build citizens' capacity to hold individuals, parties and institutions to account.

We note the position of opposition parties on the outcome and the concerns expressed by civil society about the election process. The British High Commission in Nigeria has engaged with political parties to encourage those who wish to challenge the process to do so peacefully and through the appropriate legal channel. We encourage the Nigerian authorities to examine all concerns and take action to resolve outstanding issues.

Nigeria: Killing and Abduction of Christians

09 Mar 2023 | 729 cc409-410

Asked by: Bob Blackman

To ask the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, whether representatives of the Church of England have had recent discussions with the Church of Nigeria on taking steps to help tackle the killing and abduction of Christians in that country.

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

The murder and abduction of Christians in Nigeria is distressingly common, totally abhorrent and has gone on for far too long. The Bishop of Guildford was in Nigeria last November to support the Church of Nigeria, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who knows Nigeria well, stays constantly in touch with the situation there.

Asked by: Bob Blackman

I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Clearly, the recent election in Nigeria has led to a complete spike in terms of violence, particularly towards Christians. What attempts are being made by the Church to reach out to Christians in Nigeria to assure them of our support, and to the victors of the election to make sure that they safeguard Christians in that country?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that matter before the House. He is right to do so. I know that the Church of England and the Anglican communion will do exactly what he says. It is worth putting on the record that, even before the elections, 21 Christians were killed, and churches, houses and food were destroyed. In November last year, female students at the state university were raped in Boko and in January Catholic priest Isaac Achi was burned to death and another priest was shot and injured in Paikoro. Open Doors believes that Nigeria has the highest recorded level of violence against Christians in any country.

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

Of course, violent Islamist militants are not the only threat to Christians in Nigeria. The so-called motorbike bandits that operate in the border areas are abducting women and causing all kinds of violence. In the middle belt, Christian farmers face mass displacement and murder. It is not just about sending solidarity through the Church of England to Christians in Nigeria. What more can the Church of England do to influence the British Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to do more to assist Nigeria in defeating those militants who are persecuting Christians?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his interest in this matter, which needs as much attention as we can give it. The Government are actively

implementing the Bishop of Truro's recommendation that the Church of England checks regularly with the Government that all those implementations are being put into place. He is right to mention that. It is ongoing work, incredibly serious, and we need to keep focusing on it.

[Nigeria: Christianity](#)

22 Feb 2023 | HL5532

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the alleged attacks on 5 February in villages in the Bokkos area of Plateau State in Nigeria; and what representations they have made to the government of Nigeria concerning who may have been responsible for these incidents.

Answering member: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

His Majesty's Government condemns the 5 February attacks on villages in Bokkos district and all incidents of violence against civilians in Nigeria. These attacks must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. Minister of State for Development and Africa, Andrew Mitchell, discussed the issue of increased violence in Nigeria with the country's leading presidential candidates ahead of the election this month. The UK will continue to facilitate coordination between Peace and Security Commissioners in affected states and to help address violent crime by training peace ambassadors in Plateau State. Our High Commission is in regular contact with local leaders to promote tolerance and understanding between communities.

[Nigeria: Development Aid](#)

15 Feb 2023 | HL5407

Asked by: Lord Patten | Party: Conservative Party

To ask His Majesty's Government whether British aid to Nigeria is conditional on equality of access to that aid from those of all faiths and non in that country.

Answering member: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK Government aid is delivered impartially and based on need. We focus our aid investment and expertise on the highest priority issues where we can make the most difference and achieve maximum impact in Nigeria. Everyone has an equal right to UK Government aid regardless of their beliefs. In Nigeria, our humanitarian assistance programme is aligned with the UN Humanitarian Response Plan, which is focused primarily on North East Nigeria, due to the extremely large scale and deep severity of humanitarian needs there.

[Nigeria: Abortion](#)

09 Feb 2023 | 138334

Asked by: Kate Osamor

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Nigerian counterpart on reports that the Nigerian military has been carrying out a programme of mass forced abortions in north-eastern Nigeria.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We have raised the matter with the Nigerian Government and welcome the announcement from the National Human Rights Commission that it has appointed a special panel to investigate these reports. We continue to follow developments closely.

[Mubarak Bala](#)

09 Feb 2023 | 138071

Asked by: Alexander Stafford

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterparts in Nigeria on the case of Mubarak Bala.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn all violence across Nigeria, including the recent kidnapping in Kaduna state and the murder of Fr. Isaac Achi in Niger state. Events such as these are occurring across Nigeria as conflict and insecurity rises. The Minister of State for Africa & Development recently discussed this challenge with some of Nigeria's leading presidential candidates, and with the Governor of Kaduna. The UK continues to support Nigeria to tackle this issue, and fulfil its constitutional commitment to Freedom of Religion or Belief, by strengthening military capabilities, human rights compliance, policing, and anti-kidnap capacity through our UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership.

The UK Government continues to raise Mr Bala's case with the Nigerian authorities, most recently with the Kano State Government on 19 January.

Isaac Achi

09 Feb 2023 | 138070

Asked by: Alexander Stafford

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the killing of Fr Isaac Achi in Nigeria.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn all violence across Nigeria, including the recent kidnapping in Kaduna state and the murder of Fr. Isaac Achi in Niger state. Events such as these are occurring across Nigeria as conflict and insecurity rises. The Minister of State for Africa & Development recently discussed this challenge with some of Nigeria's leading presidential candidates, and with the Governor of Kaduna. The UK continues to support Nigeria to tackle this issue, and fulfil its constitutional commitment to Freedom of Religion or Belief, by strengthening military capabilities, human rights compliance, policing, and anti-kidnap capacity through our UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership.

The UK Government continues to raise Mr Bala's case with the Nigerian authorities, most recently with the Kano State Government on 19 January.

Business of the House

02 Feb 2023 | 727 c479

Asked by: Jim Shannon

This month Nigeria will hold elections. More than 3 million Nigerians have been displaced by violence and climate change, forcing them to live in internal displacement camps. Religious minorities are often excluded from those camps due to stigmatisation or fear of future attacks, leaving them unable to cast a vote in the election. Whenever I ask the Leader of the House for help, she always responds positively. Does she know of any representations from His Majesty's Government to ensure that Nigeria's religious minorities are not disenfranchised?

Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Leader of the House

I thank the hon. Gentleman again for his diligence in shining a spotlight on what is going on in Nigeria. Enormous numbers of people are displaced, for a variety of reasons. He will know that wherever there is support—particularly international aid—there is oversight of how that aid is distributed, ensuring an equal duty of care. There are ways of monitoring that. I will ask the Foreign Office to write to the hon. Gentleman to let him know how that is being carried out in the areas that he raises.

Nigeria: Christianity

01 Feb 2023 | 133581

Asked by: Jessica Morden

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Nigerian counterpart on the prevalence of deadly attacks on the country's Christian population.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government condemns all incidents of violence across Nigeria and is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all communities. I [Minister Mitchell] raised the effect of insecurity on communities in my engagements with leading Nigerian presidential candidates in December 2022 and January 2023. Additionally, at the UK's Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in July 2022, the Nigerian High Commissioner reiterated his Government's commitment to freedom of religion or belief. We will continue to call on the Nigerian Government to assist affected communities and implement long-term solutions.

Business of the House

26 Jan 2023 | 726 c1184

Asked by: John Cryer

For many people in certain areas of Nigeria, terror and kidnapping have become almost a way of life. We have had statements and urgent questions in the past, and a debate on one occasion. However with the focus of this place and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office understandably on Ukraine and other parts of the world, would it not be important to have a statement or a debate on that benighted country, to keep our focus on Nigeria as well?

Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Leader of the House

The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We have all been horrified by the frequent reports of that kind of activity—whether the murder of priests, as we have had recently, the kidnap and ransom of particular individuals or brutal killings. It is an incredibly important country, as is our relationship with it. I will ensure that the Foreign Secretary has heard the hon. Gentleman's concerns. He will know that the next Foreign Office questions is on 31 January, but I will make sure that the Department has heard what he has said.

Nigeria: Military Aid

23 Jan 2023 | 123876

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the training and technical assistance provided to the Nigerian military and police through the UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership; what recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of violence in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

2022 was one of the worst years on record for levels of conflict and political violence deaths in Nigeria. The country faces multiple security challenges, including terrorism in the North, intercommunal conflicts and criminal banditry in the North West and Middle Belt and violence in the South East and South West. I [Minister Mitchell] discussed rising insecurity with the leading presidential candidates in December 2022 and January 2023. We monitor the progress and effectiveness of all our support through the UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership and will discuss this in detail with our Nigerian counterparts at the next annual dialogue later this year.

Nigeria: Christianity

19 Jan 2023 | 123984

Asked by: Conor McGinn

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Nigerian counterpart on the persecution of Christians in that country.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all communities in Nigeria. In July 2022, at the UK's Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Nigerian High Commissioner reiterated his Government's commitment to freedom of religion or belief. I have raised concerns about the effect of insecurity on communities in my engagements with leading Nigerian presidential candidates in December 2022 and January 2023. We will continue to call on the Nigerian Government to assist affected communities and implement long-term solutions.

Nigeria: Armed Forces

04 Jan 2023 | 108129

Asked by: Ms Lyn Brown

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he will take to support accountability over allegations of (a) the killing of child non-combatants during operations against jihadist armed groups by Nigerian armed forces and (b) coerced abortions by Nigerian armed forces; and whether the Government has supplied (i) training, (ii) equipment and (iii) other forms of support to units of the Nigerian armed forces which have been the subject of recent allegations relating to the killing of child non-combatants.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

As I set out in the House on Tuesday 13 December, keeping a close eye on these reports. We have raised the matter with the Nigerian Government and welcome calls from the Nigerian Chief of Defence Staff to launch an independent investigation by the National Human Rights Commission.

UK armed forces conduct counter-insurgency training in Nigeria covering a range of matters such as infantry skills, human rights and combatting the threat of improvised explosive devices in order to help Nigeria counter shared threats, such as terrorism and serious organised crime. This has included support to Nigerian military units that are deployed in the North East.

Topical Questions

13 Dec 2022 | 724 cc882-1094

Asked by: Dame Nia Griffith

Yesterday Reuters reported on a massacre by Nigerian Government forces that included at least 10 children who were allegedly unarmed and shot while lying down. Reports said children, some born from rape by Jihadist fighters, are being viewed as tainted. Treating children like that is abhorrent, so what action has the Secretary of State taken to raise these issues with the Nigerian Government and ensure accountability for alleged war crimes even during operations against jihadist armed groups?

Answered by: Mr Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The hon. Lady is right to raise this matter, which is of immense concern, and we will be raising all the issues she has set out through our high commissioner in Abuja.

Nigeria

07 Dec 2022 | 826 cc174-177

Asked by: Baroness Cox

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Nigeria regarding the violent targeting of Christians, non-Islamist Muslims, and other minority faith and non-faith groups in that country, including reports of massacres, destructions of homes and clinics, forced displacement, and abductions.

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

My Lords, the UK Government believe that violence against any person because of their religion or belief is unacceptable. In Nigeria, attacks by terrorists and criminal gangs as well as localised community violence are having an unacceptable impact on people's lives. We regularly raise our concerns, including about the impact that violence is having on different faith and non-faith groups, with Nigeria's Ministers, state governors and security professionals. Through the UK-Nigeria security and defence partnership, we are committed to supporting Nigeria to improve security across the country and protect human rights.

Asked by: Baroness Cox

My Lords, I thank the Minister for his very principled reply. Is he aware that, according to Intersociety, 4,020 Christians have been killed by militant Islamists; that more than 2,000 were abducted between January and October this year alone; that, according to Open Doors, 3,500 killed were last year; and that many Muslims have also been killed? I have visited Nigeria many times, including twice this year, and I have seen the mass graves of civilians, the burned villages, and met survivors who described the atrocities perpetrated by militants. Will His Majesty's Government therefore make representations to the Nigerian Government to call perpetrators of violence to account and protect its civilians from the escalating massacres and abductions?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The noble Baroness is absolutely right: it is a grim picture, with atrocities being committed far too regularly. Of course, we continue to encourage the Nigerian Government to take urgent action to protect people at risk, bring perpetrators to justice and implement long-term solutions that address the causes of violence. Most recently, the British high commissioner for Nigeria raised our concerns about violence with all the main presidential candidates ahead of the 2023 elections. Our high commissioner works very closely with state governors, local community faith leaders, NGOs and so on to address these issues, including through our work with the Nigeria Governors' Forum. In January, the Minister for Africa raised our concerns with Nigeria's Vice-President during his visit here. She also raised the various security challenges

that Nigeria is facing with Nigeria's National Security Adviser, General Monguno, at our security and defence partnership meeting in February. The former Prime Minister also raised the issue during his meeting with President Buhari at CHOGM in June.

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, the Minister has mentioned the security and defence partnership twice. Bearing in mind that this has resulted in police advisers being deployed to Nigeria from the UK, as well as wider support for community policing, has the FCDO assessed how that is working? Has it made any commitment to it continuing?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

My Lords, we refreshed our security and defence partnership with Nigeria in February this year. We committed to work together to respond to shared threats such as serious and organised crime and terrorism, and to support Nigeria to tackle its domestic security challenges. Our support is very wide-ranging, a reflection of improvements we brought to the partnership. It includes training, mentoring and advice on tackling serious and organised crime, countering terrorism, reforming and strengthening civil policing, improving capacity to prevent and respond to kidnappings, which are an increasing occurrence, and complying with international human rights law.

Asked by: Baroness Northover

My Lords, does the Minister agree that the situation in northern Nigeria—poverty, malnutrition and a perceived absence of government—could create the opportunity for terrorist groups, along with its potentially wide effect? This is a region on which DfID, when it existed, focused. Can he tell the House what used to be spent on the programme in northern Nigeria in 2020 and what is spent now?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The noble Baroness is right to highlight the problems in north-east Nigeria, where extremist groups and the ongoing conflict are having a massive impact on communities. These terrorist organisations are set on undermining the right to freedom of religion or belief by attacking those of all faiths who do not subscribe to their limited, extremist views. We are taking a co-ordinated approach to supporting Nigeria and its neighbours to address both the causes and impacts of that conflict. That involves political and defence engagement, humanitarian development and counterterrorism support, and stabilisation and mediation assistance. I do not have figures solely from the time of DfID, but I have some which overlap; over the last five years, the UK has provided £425 million in humanitarian aid to north-east Nigeria. We believe that has reached around 1.5 million vulnerable people.

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

My Lords, it is four years since a 14 year-old girl, Leah Sharibu, was abducted by Boko Haram. She was forcibly taken, raped and impregnated, and she has never been returned to her family. As recently as last week, the Nigerian high commissioner, speaking here in your Lordships' House, said that she is still alive. The Minister has just referred to kidnappings and abductions. Can he tell us when we last raised Leah's case with the Nigerians? What is happening to the Chibok girls and what more can be done to secure their release?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The case the noble Lord mentions is truly devastating and grotesque in so many respects. Of course, we continue to condemn Islamic State West Africa Province for that abduction and the ongoing captivity of Leah Sharibu. We have raised her case with the Nigerian Government on numerous occasions—I cannot tell the noble Lord exactly when the last time was, but I will ask the Minister for Africa—and we have called for her release and that of everyone held by terrorist groups in Nigeria. The problem, as the noble Lord knows, is that kidnappings are occurring frequently across Nigeria, and they are carried out by criminal gangs and violent extremist organisations which are indiscriminate in the treatment they mete out to those they capture. Needless to say, the UK condemns all such activities and we are doing everything we can to help the Nigerian police force cope with and tackle this growing problem.

Asked by: Lord Cashman

My Lords, the Minister refers to upholding international human rights standards. As has been raised, there is increasing concern about the treatment of women and girls. Will he therefore reassure the House that he will go back to the Nigerian Government and raise this issue of the treatment of women and girls, as well as the discrimination faced by lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people, who indeed face the death penalty?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The figures are truly horrifying. Just last year, an estimated 1.3 million people were in need of services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states alone. The numbers are staggering: 82% of those people are women and girls. Sexual violence and exploitation are a serious problem across Nigeria, but particularly in those regions. The UK delivered sexual exploitation and abuse training to the Nigerian army the year before last and last year, to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into account during security operations. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund has also supported community-led reporting structures, which give women a place to report sexual harassment and violence and seek support. Over the past five years, humanitarian funding from the FCDO in Nigeria has provided more than 590,000 people with access to services that can help protect them from conflict-related sexual violence.

Asked by: Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords, does the Minister agree that when violence and atrocities take place in the name of religion, the leaders of that religion should be the first and foremost to condemn those atrocities? Does he further agree that an opportunity was lost at the recent freedom of religion and belief conference, hosted by the UK, to get a binding commitment from religious leaders to that effect?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The noble Lord is of course right that leaders of all the great religions need to take every opportunity to condemn violence in the name of their religion. Obviously, religious belief—and indeed non-belief—is a driver for attacks by terrorist groups. Mostly in north-east Nigeria, Christian communities in particular are targeted by groups, as are Muslim communities which do not subscribe to a particular narrow and extremist point of view. Religious identity can of course be a factor in intercommunal violence, but the causes of these attacks go further than that. They are complex and frequently relate to competition over resources, historical grievances and sometimes just base criminality.

Asked by: Lord Kamall

My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister tell us about some of the work the Government are doing with not only local but international civil society organisations, particularly those which focus on interfaith initiatives and anti-radicalisation?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond

The FCDO base in Nigeria works frequently through religious organisations there, but also through civil society, on a wide range of issues, such as countering violence against women and girls, promoting media freedom and doing what we can to undermine the organisations behind some of the atrocities we have been talking about today. This is very much a focus of our work.

[Nigeria: Religious Freedom](#)

06 Dec 2022 | 97452

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Nigerian High Commission on (a) religious tension and violence in Nigeria and (b) whether it should be categorised as religious persecution or criminality.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government condemns all violence against civilians in Nigeria. The root causes of conflict are complex. Religious identity can be a factor, and competition over land and resources, historical grievances, violent extremism, and criminality are also important drivers of conflict.

FCDO officials regularly meet the Nigerian High Commission. Former Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, raised religious identity and violence with the Nigerian High Commissioner in July 2021.

We welcomed the pledge from the High Commissioner at the Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief to uphold Nigeria's constitutional right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Nigeria: Terrorism

06 Dec 2022 | 97451

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assistance his Department is providing to help with the suppression of (a) domestic terrorism by in Nigeria perpetrated by (i) Boko Haram and (ii) the Islamic State of West Africa Province and (b) other domestic terrorism in that country.

Answering member: Mr Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Nigeria is facing multiple, worsening, security challenges that affect people of all ethnic and religious identities across the country. The UK Government is committed to supporting Nigeria to tackle the threat posed by terrorist groups through our Security and Defence Partnership.

In Northern Nigeria, terrorist groups such as Islamic State West Africa and Boko Haram attack those of all faiths who do not subscribe to their extremist views. In North east Nigeria we fund a range of activities including operational and strategic capability in a range of technical areas, community stabilisation committees, and security infrastructure.

Christianity: Nigeria

01 Dec 2022 | 80704

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, whether the Church Commissioners have had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Affairs on taking steps to help tackle (a) violence against and (b) the abduction of Christians in Nigeria in the last 18 months.

Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

Bishops and officials of the Church of England regularly engage with Ministers and officials at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on a range of thematic and geographic concerns regarding freedom of religion or belief, which include the human rights situation in China, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. Bishops in the House of Lords regularly raise concerns about the same through questions to Government. Details of these can be seen at:

Nigeria: [Nigeria – The Church of England in Parliament \(churchinparliament.org\)](https://www.churchinparliament.org)

6 Other Parliamentary material

6.1 Debates

[Persecution of Christians](#)

17 Nov 2022 | House of Commons | 722 c380WH

Motion that this House has considered persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief. Agreed to on question.

[Blasphemy Laws and Allegations: Commonwealth Countries](#)

11 Oct 2022 | House of Commons | 720 cc1-20WH

Motion that this House has considered blasphemy laws and allegations in Commonwealth countries. Agreed to on question.

[Nigeria: Security Situation](#)

19 Jul 2022 | House of Commons | 718 cc284-298WH

Motion that this House has considered the security situation in Nigeria. Agreed to on question. Sitting adjourned without Question put.

6.2 Statements

[Nigeria: Killing of Church Worshippers](#)

06 Jun 2022 | House of Lords | 822 cc1072-6

Lords statement on the killing of church worshippers in Ondo state, Nigeria yesterday, and on wider issues of violence against religious groups in Nigeria.

6.3 Urgent Questions

[Violence against Religious Groups: Nigeria](#)

06 Jun 2022 | House of Commons | 715 cc557-567

Urgent question on the killing of church worshippers in Ondo state, Nigeria yesterday, and on wider issues of violence against religious groups in Nigeria.

6.4

Early Day Motions

Father Achi of Saint Peter and Paul in Paikoro, Nigeria

EDM 765 (session 2022-23)

Jim Shannon

17 January 2023

The House extends its condolences to the family of Nigerian priest Father Isaac Achi, and to his parish of Saint Peter and Paul in Paikoro Nigeria; condemns in the strongest of terms the brutal murder of Fr Achi who was burned alive by armed terrorists on Sunday 15 January 2023; urges the government of Nigeria to address the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria as a matter of priority so that all faith and belief groups might enjoy freedom of religion or belief; and implores the government of Nigeria to ensure free and fair presidential elections next month, free from fear of armed terrorist groups.

Killing of Christian worshippers at St Francis Catholic Church in Owo town, Ondo State, Nigeria

EDM 130 (session 2022-23)

Jim Shannon

6 June 2022

That this House condemns the killing of Christian worshippers by terrorist gunmen at St Francis Catholic Church in Owo town, Ondo State, Nigeria on Sunday 5 June 2022; offers condolences and sympathies to the friends and family of the 40 worshippers killed during the attack; urges the Buhari Government to take effective action against the Jihadist ideology destroying lives in Nigeria; and calls on the Government to raise security concerns and threats to freedom of religion or belief with its Nigerian counterparts.

Christian woman stoned in Sokoto, northern Nigeria

EDM 95 (session 2022-23)

Jim Shannon

23 May 2022

That this House notes the horrific stoning of Deborah Yakubu, a young Christian woman in Sokoto, Northern Nigeria; further notes that the stoning took place after Ms Yakubu had expressed concern that a student What's App Group was being used inappropriately and she was subsequently accused of blasphemy; highlights that the body and school building were then torched in a further act of hatred and violence; and encourages the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to make contact with counterparts in

Nigeria and urge them to ensure that justice is done and those responsible for her death are held accountable.

7

Further reading

[Christians at Risk of Genocide: Radicalisation and Traditionalist Islam among the Fulani: The religious background to Fulani militia attacks on Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt](#), The Lindisfarne Centre, 31 March 2023

[Nigeria fact finding and delegation trip report](#), All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, October 2022

[Nigeria – Unfolding Genocide?](#) All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, June 2020

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