

US Classifies Christian Persecutor Boko Haram as Terrorist Group

The U.S. State Department announced Wednesday that it is designating the Nigerian jihadist group **Boko Haram** as a foreign terrorist organization. Numerous concerned organizations, including Alliance Defending Freedom, have formally requested the designation for years.

Boko Haram is responsible for killing an estimated 3,000 Nigerians and citizens of 15 other countries—primarily **Christians**—in the last four years and has acknowledged it has ties to al-Qaida and al-Shabab. A 2012 terrorism report posted on the State Department website ranks **Boko Haram** second only to the Taliban among the top 10 perpetrator groups with the most attacks worldwide.

“Terrorist groups must not be allowed to engage in genocidal terror, especially when available steps can be taken to help curtail such violence,” says Alliance Defending Freedom chief counsel Benjamin Bull. “The State Department is right to finally respond to the calls of many in the international community who see this designation as clearly needed.”

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 empowers the State Department to designate such groups as foreign terrorist organizations. The designation has numerous effects, including the ability to freeze and seize bank accounts, arrest and deport **Boko Haram** members and associates, and impose sanctions on entities that fund the group.

Alliance Defending Freedom and Jubilee Campaign co-authored the formal report and petition submitted to Secretary of State

John Kerry after a report and petition filed last year with his predecessor, Hillary Clinton, received no response. Rep. Chris Smith, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, has repeatedly spoken out and held hearings on the need for the designation.

“Thousands of lives have been lost in this largely silent slaughter in Nigeria at the blood-thirsty hands of Boko Haram,” says Emmanuel Ogebe, Jubilee Campaign’s legal expert on Nigeria who worked on the petition. “Although it took a long time for the State Department to understand what the DOJ, DOD and Congress already did, the time has come to help bring an end to this senseless violence.”

According to Jubilee Campaign, “The publicly reported **Christian** casualties in Nigeria last year were greater than the Christian casualties of Pakistan, Syria, Kenya and Egypt combined. ... Nigeria alone accounted for almost 70 percent of Christians killed globally.”

The group’s bombings have killed **Christians**, moderate Muslims and others it considers “infidels.” The victims have included men, women and children as well as soldiers, police, medical personnel, teachers, Boy Scouts and journalists. Ogebe says the State Department has denied the religious motivation of **Boko Haram**, which has repeatedly declared its goal of overthrowing the state and establishing a radical Muslim theocracy. He says the denial “is disingenuous, deeply insensitive to victims and impairs U.S. threat analysis.”

According to Ogebe, the State Department has also downplayed Boko Haram’s attacks on U.S. citizens, which potentially places more Americans, including diplomats, at risk. The leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, warned in a recent video, “Our strength and firepower is bigger. ... As far as we’re concerned, we will now comfortably confront the United

States of America.”

Shekau challenged the presidents of France, Israel and the U.S. by saying they are no match for him.

In August 2011, **Boko Haram** bombed the U.N. headquarters in Nigeria. The U.S. Embassy has continually warned of threats to Western targets and advised U.S. diplomats to be wary of attending religious services. The U.S. Agency for International Development has been unable to effectively monitor programs and projects involving millions of American taxpayer dollars in northern Nigeria due to the difficulty of conducting site visits.