

Widening Genocide of Christians Reaching Crisis Levels

Religious freedom has fallen into a dire state on a global scale, but nowhere is it more perilous to be a Christian than in Nigeria. Recently, a Nigerian Catholic bishop called out both his government and the international community to respond to the ever-increasing violence targeting Christian communities in his country.

The US House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights and international organizations convened Tuesday when Bishop Winfred Anagbe of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Makurdi in Benue State, Nigeria, was scheduled to testify about mass killings in his country.

In 2021, labeled Nigeria, a predominantly Muslim nation, as "The World's Greatest Enemy of Christianity." Open Doors US identified Nigeria as the sixth-worse country for Christian Persecution on its 2023 World Watch List, but cited Nigeria as the source for 89% of the number of Christians killed for their faith worldwide in 2022.

A total of 5,191 Christians were killed in Nigeria in 2021. No less than 915 were killed in the first three months of 2022. Nearly 3,800 Christians were abducted in Nigeria in the same year and 700 more in January through March 2022. A total of 46 Nigerian Christians in four different villages in the southern part of the African country were killed by terrorists during a two-day period in June 2023.

Nigerian Christians believe God is "still alive" and they are hopeful in the face of this brutal persecution.

Anagbe was unable to attend the hearing, but his remarks were

read into the record of the subcommittee, the Christian Post reported. Anagbe says there is a “conspiracy of silence” that enables Christian genocide in Nigeria.

“For a long time, attacks by Islamic militants have not only killed thousands, but have also displaced millions who now take refuge in camps scattered across the State,” Anagbe explained.

“Schools, clinics, churches, markets etc., have all been destroyed in some areas. Since 2014, when I became bishop, I have lost territory to the Islamic militants masquerading as herdsmen, I have had to close 14 parishes because of the danger.”

Anagbe said that in mass killings, he and other bishops in Benue have lost parishioners on almost a daily basis.

“The killings of people, even pregnant women and children, and the occupation of their lands to cause the cessation of all economic activities mirrors the pattern of Jihadi elements like the Boko Haram in other parts of Nigeria,” Anagbe stated.

Anagbe’s heartfelt words compelled committee members to “come to the aid of the Christian community in Benue, and indeed Nigeria as a whole, before it becomes too late.”

Anagbe conveyed there is a 97% majority of Christians in Benue, and the violence amounts to a religiously motivated jihad.

Plea for Help

✖ Rabbi Abraham Cooper, chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, testified that he disagreed with the Biden administration for keeping Nigeria off the US State Department’s annual list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), a designation for governments that engage in or tolerate egregious violations of religious

freedom.

“I had the honor of visiting Nigeria just prior to COVID, and together with my colleague and friend, Rev. Johnnie Moore, we debriefed some 90 survivors of Islamic terrorism in that country, including a 9-year-old girl,” Cooper says. “In Nigeria, religious freedom conditions have remained abysmal with state and non-state actors committing particularly severe violations against both Christians and Muslims.

“While some officials have worked to address religious freedom violations, others actively infringe on the religious freedom rights of Nigerians, including enforcing blasphemy laws. ... Sadly, Nigeria has become a country steeped in religious freedom violations where people of faith and those of no faith at all, increasingly live in fear of harassment, imprisonment and violence,” Cooper says. {eo}

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