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NIGERIA 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution bars the federal and state governments from adopting a state religion, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate, or change their religion. The federal government was ineffective in preventing or quelling violence, often expressed along religious lines, in the northeastern and central regions of the country. The federal government only occasionally investigated, prosecuted, or punished those responsible for abusing religious freedom, and sometimes responded to violence with heavy-handed tactics. Some state and local government laws discriminated against members of the minority religions in their regions. Non-Muslims complained sharia courts and sharia enforcement bodies in 12 northern states sometimes negatively affected their rights. Christian groups said they faced difficulty obtaining government employment or permits to construct churches in those states. Muslims reported discrimination, including mass arrests of northern Muslims in some southern areas, related to security concerns.

The terrorist organization Boko Haram killed thousands of persons, in both indiscriminate acts of violence and deliberate attacks targeting Christians, as well as Muslims who spoke out against or opposed their radical ideology. Civil society groups estimated Boko Haram killed more people during the year than in the previous five years combined. Boko Haram expanded its control over urban areas of Borno and Adamawa States in the northeast, committing abuses such as mass killings, mass kidnappings, sexual assault, forced conversion, and forced conscription.

Both Muslims and Christians continued to fear discrimination or abuse based on their religious affiliation and experienced societal pressure, including threats of violence and ostracism, if they changed or abandoned their faith. Religious groups continued to say some employers engaged in religious discrimination.

U.S. embassy and consulate general officials discussed and advocated for religious freedom and tolerance with government, religious, civil society, and traditional leaders. U.S. government officials discussed Boko Haram in high-level bilateral meetings. More than a dozen visiting U.S. delegations, including the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, raised religious freedom with state and federal government officials. They encouraged these officials to address interreligious violence and called for timely legal action against perpetrators of

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violence. President Obama offered military and law enforcement assistance to the government to help recover schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram and to combat insecurity in the north. Vice President Biden met with President Jonathan August 5 and reiterated U.S. support for efforts to counter Boko Haram and the importance of respecting religious and other human rights. In Washington, National Security Advisor Rice met with 12 Nigerian state governors March 19, and discussed the need to end the insurgency in the north and to protect religious and other human rights. The embassy met with persons displaced by violence and expanded a project building interfaith networks in order to reduce ethno-religious conflict and promote religious tolerance in six northern states.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 177.2 million (July 2014 estimate). Most observers estimate approximately 50 percent of the population is Muslim and 50 percent Christian. A small number adheres solely to indigenous religious beliefs, and many individuals combine indigenous beliefs with Muslim or Christian beliefs and practices. The predominant Islamic group is Sunni, divided among Sufi groups, including Tijaniyah and Qadiriyyah. Growing Shia and Izala (Salafist) minorities exist. There are also a small number of Ahmadi Muslims. Christian groups include evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. Non-Christians include Jews, Bahais, and individuals who do not follow any religion.

The Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups dominate the predominantly Muslim northern states. Significant numbers of Christians also reside in the north, and Christians and Muslims reside in about equal numbers in central Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory, and the southwestern states, where the Yoruba ethnic group predominates. While most Yorubas are either Christian or Muslim, some also adhere to traditional Yoruba religious beliefs. In the southeastern states, where the Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists constitute the majority, although many Igbos combine traditional practices with Christianity. In the Niger Delta region, where the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups predominate, Christians form a substantial majority, and an estimated 1 percent of the population is Muslim. Evangelical denominations are growing rapidly in the central and southern regions. Ahmadi Muslims maintain a small presence in the cities of Lagos and Abuja.

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Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution bars the federal government or state governments from establishing a state religion. It provides for individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate, or change their religion and prohibits religious discrimination.

The constitution provides for state courts based on common or customary law systems, which have operated in the region for centuries. The constitution specifically recognizes sharia courts for "civil proceedings" but is silent on the use of such courts for criminal cases. Sharia courts in 12 northern states also hear criminal cases where both the Muslim complainant and the Muslim defendant agree to the venue; these sharia courts may pass sentences based on the sharia penal code, including *hadd* offenses (serious criminal offenses with punishments prescribed in the Quran) and punishments, such as caning, amputation, and death by stoning. Non-Muslims have the option to try their cases in the sharia courts if involved in civil disputes with Muslims. Common law courts hear the cases of Muslims and non-Muslims who do not choose to use sharia courts. Sharia courts do not have the authority to compel participation by non-Muslims, but in the past some non-Muslims took cases to sharia courts, citing their speed and low cost. Aggrieved parties can appeal sharia court judgments to three levels of sharia appellate courts. Decisions by the state sharia courts of appeal (the highest level of the sharia courts) theoretically can undergo appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal and then to the Supreme Court, although none has done so.

Despite constitutional language supporting only secular criminal courts and the prohibition against involuntary participation in sharia criminal courts, a Zamfara State law requires that a sharia court hear all criminal cases involving Muslims. Zamfara's state-level religious affairs commission regulates religious affairs and preaching, distributes licenses to imams, and attempts to resolve religious disputes in the state. The states of Bauchi, Borno, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, and Yobe also maintain state-level religious affairs ministries or bureaus, while many other state governors have appointed special advisers on religious affairs.

Christian and Muslim groups planning to build new churches or mosques must register with the Corporate Affairs Commission, which involves submitting an

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application form, proof of public notice, a copy of the organization's constitution, and list of trustees, and a fee of 20,000 naira (\$109).

Both federal and state governments have the authority to regulate mandatory religious instruction in public schools. The constitution states schools may not require students to receive religious instruction in any religion other than their own. State officials and many religious leaders say students have the right to request a teacher of their own religious beliefs to provide alternative instruction.

Several states have laws requiring licenses for preachers, places of worship, and religious schools. A Katsina State law established a board with the authority to regulate Islamic schools, preachers, and mosques, including issuing permits, suspending operations, and imprisoning or fining violators. The Katsina law stipulates a punishment of one to five years of incarceration and/or a fine of up to 500,000 naira (\$2,700) for operating without a license.

Government Practices

The federal government was ineffective in preventing or quelling violence, often expressed along religious lines, or in protecting victims of violent attacks targeted because of their religious beliefs. The government was not able to stop Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (commonly referred to as Boko Haram, Hausa for "Western education is forbidden"), a designated foreign terrorist organization. The security forces operated under a state of emergency, declared in May 2013 and extended a year later, in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States.

The government often responded with heavy-handed tactics and did not adequately equip and train security forces to contain Boko Haram. Security forces sometimes increased the civilian death toll by committing extrajudicial killings of suspected terrorists, and detainees died in custody. Religious leaders, civil society, and international human rights organizations condemned the military's ineffectual or indiscriminate response. Many reported the military did not respond to attacks or threats of attack by Boko Haram, even if given ample warning. Residents reported the military fled their posts during or in anticipation of an attack, and some attacks lasted hours without any response to pleas for military intervention. Soldiers said they lacked the ammunition and other supplies to confront Boko Haram. Press reports indicated that soldiers fled Biita and Izge in Borno State in June after a Boko Haram attack, and many deserted, saying they were outgunned by

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Boko Haram. Security forces reportedly abandoned Mubi in Adamawa State in October in advance of a Boko Haram attack.

Christian and Muslim groups continued to say local and state authorities did not deliver adequate protection or post-attack relief to rural communities in the northeast, where Boko Haram killed and kidnapped residents and destroyed villages, including houses of worship, throughout the year.

The government only occasionally investigated, prosecuted, and punished perpetrators of violence or other abuses of religious freedom. There were no indictments or prosecutions following fatal attacks during the year on high-profile Islamic leaders and traditional rulers in the north. The government's prosecution of suspected Boko Haram members was slow, and most suspects were held indefinitely. On September 30, the Federal High Court in Lagos sentenced three Boko Haram members to 25 years in prison on charges of conspiracy to commit terrorism, possession of firearms, and membership in an illegal organization. On November 24, a Federal High Court judge rejected the charges against a man suspected of planning a bombing in Abuja in April that killed over 70 people, due to errors by the prosecution including the suspect having been held without trial.

Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, leader of the Shia Muslim group the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), reported the army killed dozens of his supporters and three of his sons July 25, during a religious procession. Zakzaky said the army targeted the annual Quds Day procession in Zaria, Kaduna State, while the army argued that it acted in self-defense after being shot at by IMN members. The army and the National Human Rights Commission said they had opened investigations into the killings.

Some Christian groups reported discrimination and a systematic lack of protection by federal, state, and local authorities, especially in central regions, where there were long-standing disputes, many between Christians and Muslims, over land use and other political, economic, and ethnic issues. On June 11, gunmen suspected to be Muslim herders killed nine people and burned down two churches, among other buildings, in two largely Christian villages, Tanjol and Tashek, in Plateau State in central Nigeria. On September 4, a clash between Muslim herders and Christian farmers in the town of Wukari in Taraba State left at least six dead and two mosques among the 10 buildings destroyed. Because of the close links among religion, ethnicity, and political and economic interests, it was difficult to categorize many of these incidents as based solely on religious identity. The

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disputes were usually between ethnic groups native to a region (indigenes) and those whose ethnic roots originated in another part of the country (settlers). Often the indigenes and settlers belonged to different religious as well as ethnic groups. The federal government again did not implement any recommendations from numerous government-sponsored panels for resolving these types of disputes or reducing tensions, despite ongoing calls by political and religious leaders to do so.

Islamic organizations continued to criticize a Katsina State law requiring licensing of Islamic schools, preachers, and mosques, although there were no reports of prosecutions. Opponents described the law as discriminatory because it did not impose licensing requirements on Christian groups and stated it inhibited the freedom of Muslim imams to preach openly against the government. The state government maintained that a more rigid definition of Islamic education and preaching helped address security concerns.

Eight men were arrested in Niger State in June for preaching and operating an Islamic school without a license, in violation of state law.

An October 17 ruling by the High Court in Lagos upheld a ban on wearing the hijab in public primary and secondary schools outside of religious classes and times set aside for prayer. The judge rejected the lawsuit filed two years prior by the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria, which said it would appeal the decision.

There were no verified reports of sharia courts hearing criminal cases without the consent of both parties during the year. On April 23, a sharia court in Kano issued a sentence of death by hanging for Ubale Saidu Dotsa, a 63-year-old Muslim man found guilty of raping a 13-year-old girl and infecting her with HIV/AIDS. According to media reports, Dotsa chose a sharia court over a state court and pleaded guilty to the charge. The sentence had not been carried out as of December. The appeal to the Bauchi State Sharia Court of Appeal of a death sentence for a man convicted of rape and incest in 2013 remained pending at year's end.

Some non-Muslims continued to say government-funded sharia courts amounted to the adoption of Islam as a state religion, while the state governments maintained no person was compelled to use the sharia courts, citing the availability of a parallel common law courts system. Christian groups also stated non-Muslims were pressured to file cases in sharia courts and were treated unfairly in those courts.

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In some states, sharia-based practices, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools and in health care, voting, and transportation facilities, affected non-Muslim minorities. Some Christian groups said religious affairs ministries in some states provided services to Muslims exclusively.

State governments in Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, and Zamfara funded sharia law enforcement groups called the Hisbah, which enforced sharia law inconsistently and sporadically, sometimes targeting Christians or residents of other states. During the year, the Kano State Hisbah periodically arrested residents for alcohol consumption, prostitution, and other reported violations of sharia law.

On August 6, the Kano State Hisbah Board said it had arrested 200 beggars in Kano from other states and 15 from Kano. The Kano State Hisbah authorities said they returned non-residents to their home states and provided assistance to those they determined were Kano residents.

Kano State authorities levied steep fines and prison sentences for the public consumption and distribution of alcohol, in compliance with sharia statutes. On July 14, the director general of the Kano State Hisbah Board said 55 individuals had been sentenced to four months in prison and another 27 were pending trial for alcohol consumption. Christian leaders said the Hisbah targeted Christian areas and churches when arresting people for alcohol consumption.

Authorities in some states reportedly denied building permits to minority religious communities for construction of new places of worship, for expansion and renovation of existing facilities, or for reconstruction of buildings that had been demolished. Christians reported local government officials in the predominantly Muslim northern states used regulations on zoning and title registrations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches. Church leaders said they evaded the restrictions by purchasing and developing land in the name of an individual member of the congregation, but this practice left the church in a tenuous legal position.

Christian groups reported individual administrators of government-run universities and technical schools in several northern states refused to admit Christian students or delayed the issuance of their degrees and licenses. Christian and Muslim groups alleged employment discrimination against their members in regions where they were not the dominant religion.

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The federal government approved the use of air carriers for religious pilgrimages to Mecca for Muslims and to Jerusalem or Rome for Christians, and subsidized both types of pilgrimages. It established airfares and negotiated bilateral air service agreements with Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Italy to support pilgrimages. The National Hajj Commission provided logistical arrangements for approximately 65,500 pilgrims to Mecca. The Nigerian Christian Pilgrims Commission provided logistical arrangements for the travel of as many as 30,000 pilgrims to Jerusalem and Rome. Muslim leaders objected when the military barred multiple chartered flights to Mecca from departing airports in Maiduguri and Yobe States June 28. A spokesman for the military reported the decision was made for security reasons.

Shortages of teachers capable of teaching Christianity or Islam reportedly existed in some public schools, particularly for the minority religion of a region. Increasingly, students received no religious instruction in the public classroom, turning instead to informal religious instruction outside of public schools or to parochial school education.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Boko Haram continued to commit violent acts in its stated quest to impose its religious and political beliefs throughout the country, especially in the northeast. The U.S. government designated Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization in 2013, and the UN Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee added Boko Haram to its list of sanctioned entities May 22.

Boko Haram killed thousands of people. Civil society groups estimated that Boko Haram killed more people during the year than the previous five years of the conflict combined. Their attacks included indiscriminate as well as targeted acts of violence. The majority of Boko Haram's victims were Muslim. The group deliberately targeted Christians, as well as Muslims who spoke out against or opposed their radical ideology.

Attackers detonated three bombs at the Kano central mosque during Friday prayers November 28, and then opened fire on fleeing worshippers, killing over 100 people in total. Analysts speculated the attack was directed at the Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, since he often leads Friday prayers at the central mosque, the mosque is adjacent to his palace, and he had recently called on citizens to practice self-defense against Boko Haram. Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, a Muslim leader who spoke out against Boko Haram, was targeted by bombs twice during the year, once

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at his home July 2, and once after a speech in Kaduna July 23. The unsuccessful assassination attempts were widely believed to be an attempt by Boko Haram to silence the leader of the Tijaniyah branch of Sufism in Nigeria, although the group did not claim responsibility. Boko Haram fighters killed the Emir of Gwoza, Idrissa Timta, on May 30, when they attacked the convoy in which he was riding with other traditional rulers. Timta had previously condemned the insurgency and its impact on his community.

Boko Haram claimed responsibility for scores of fatal attacks on churches and mosques, often killing worshipers during religious services or immediately afterward. Boko Haram burned down many churches and mosques, often while overrunning the villages they raided or occupied.

There were multiple confirmed reports Boko Haram had targeted individuals and communities because of their religious beliefs, including Christians in remote areas of Borno and Yobe States. Survivors and relatives of victims said armed men had attempted to force them to renounce Christianity, killing those who did not convert on the spot. On April 14, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 200 mostly Christian girls taking exams at the Government Girls' Secondary School in Chibok, in Borno State. Boko Haram released a video in which its leader Abubakar Shekau said he would sell the girls into slavery and several of the girls stated they had converted to Islam. Other women whom Boko Haram had abducted later reported they were forced to convert in order to legitimize their "marriage" to their captors, and those who refused to convert were subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse, forced marriage, and forced labor. There were also reports Boko Haram had targeted persons engaging in activities they perceived as un-Islamic. On June 18, attackers bombed a venue for watching World Cup matches in Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State, killing more than dozen people. On November 3, a suicide bomber in Yobe State killed more than 20 Shia members of IMN participating in a procession commemorating Ashura.

Most residents of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, reported the city itself was relatively secure, but Boko Haram was able to carry out suicide bombings inside the city and controlled much of the surrounding area. Boko Haram captured and sometimes held several large towns in Borno and Adamawa States, including Damboa, Gwoza, Bama, and Mubi. Some of these towns remained under Boko Haram control while others were retaken by the Nigerian military. Boko Haram reportedly targeted Christians in some areas that it controlled, killing fighting-age men, committing sexual violence against women, and destroying or

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occupying churches. Boko Haram burned down five churches in the Hawul local government area of Borno State in late July, for example, targeting only those buildings in its attack. The Catholic bishop of Maiduguri said in September that 2,500 people in his diocese had died in the conflict with Boko Haram, and many thousands more were displaced.

Boko Haram destroyed the military base at Damboa in Borno State July 4, killing more than a dozen soldiers, including the commanding officer. In another such incident in Borno State, Boko Haram overran and captured the National Police Mobile Training Camp in Limankara, outside Gwoza in Borno State, forcing dozens of police to flee. Boko Haram targeted Muslim civilians who aided the security forces, often through state-supported, self-defense groups known as the Civilian Joint Task Force. In a video released in late August, the leader of Boko Haram vowed to kill members of these self-defense groups and showed the execution of some 20 alleged group members.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 100,000 refugees fled to neighboring countries. Estimates for the number of Nigerians displaced by the conflict in the northeast range from 800,000 to 1.5 million. One Christian group, Ekklesiyar ‘Yan Uwa a Nigeria, based in the northeast, reported it was providing assistance to thousands of displaced members outside of Borno State, since hundreds of thousands of its members had been killed or displaced, hundreds of its church facilities destroyed, hundreds of its parishioners kidnapped, and several of its clergy killed since the conflict in the northeast began. Some refugees reported fear of both Boko Haram and the military prevented their return.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Muslims and Christians continued to fear reprisals based on their religious affiliation. Muslim and Christian leaders reported that there was a growing lack of trust between members of those two faiths, as a result of the ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria, in particular. Islamic and northern advocacy groups condemned the mass arrest and mistreatment of 486 northern Nigerians in June in Abia State in the South, allegedly on suspicion of connection to Boko Haram. Those detained were released after it was established that they were traders and artisans following normal trading patterns. Churches and mosques hired private security or took additional security measures in response to attacks and bombings.

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Some Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced threats and ostracism by adherents of their former religion. In some northern states, those wishing to convert to Islam were strongly encouraged to apply to the sharia council for a letter of conversion to be sent to their families, which served to dissolve marriages to Christians and to request Hisbah protection from reprisals by relatives. Similar procedures did not exist for Muslims converting to Christianity or renouncing their faith. In February in Ibadan, Oyo State, press reports indicated police arrested a Muslim man for killing his daughter with a machete because she converted to Christianity.

While the law prohibits religious discrimination in employment and other activities, religious groups continued to say some employers discriminated in the work place on the basis of religion. Muslim women in the South who wore the hijab reportedly continued to face job discrimination in the private sector, especially in customer service jobs.

Societal views on the hijab created friction. In February, at the state-run Baptist High School in Osun State in southwest Nigeria, students and parents protested the government's policy allowing Muslim women to wear the hijab. In the week following a series of July suicide bombings in northern Nigeria carried out by women dressed in hijab, reports from the press and Muslim organizations indicated that Muslim women faced societal discrimination, additional scrutiny from security forces, and pressure to abandon the hijab.

Many religious leaders publicly supported tolerance and interfaith methods of conflict resolution. For example, Catholic Cardinal John Onaiyekan and Sultan of Sokoto Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar held a summit on interfaith understanding in August. Some leaders, however, said distrust between Christian and Muslim communities (and discord among denominations within the same faith tradition) could threaten interfaith efforts.

The independent Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) comprised of Christian and Muslim leaders, failed to meet during the year, to the frustration of many Muslim and Christian leaders. The NIREC co-chair and head of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, has criticized Muslim leaders for not doing enough to condemn Boko Haram and has been reluctant to engage in interfaith dialogue, as a result. Muslim and other Christian leaders have expressed disappointment at Oritsejafor's stance.

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Communities sometimes stigmatized those who did not believe in the existence of a divine being. For example, some secular humanists reported they must hide their identities and feign religious devotion to avoid threats of violence. Atheists also said they faced ostracism by families, mistreatment in school, and discrimination by employers. In June the family of a young man in Kano forcibly committed him to a psychiatric hospital after he renounced Islam and said he was an atheist.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy staff promoted religious freedom and tolerance in discussions with government, religious, civil society, and traditional leaders. The Ambassador arranged and attended meetings with government officials for visiting delegations, including the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. These officials encouraged senior representatives at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense and elsewhere to address religious-based violence and called for timely legal action against perpetrators of such violence. More than 10 other visiting U.S. government officials met with civil society groups and religious leaders, including the Christian Association of Nigeria and Jama'atu Nasril Islam, to listen to and show public support for their concerns.

In an August 5 meeting with President Jonathan, Vice President Biden reiterated the U.S. partnership with Nigeria in combating Boko Haram and the need to protect human rights, including religious freedom. Following the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok in April, President Obama offered military and law enforcement assistance to help recover abductees and deal with the broader problem of insecurity in northern Nigeria. In March National Security Advisor Rice met with 12 Nigerian governors in Washington, D.C., to discuss the need to bring an end to the violence and insurgency in northern Nigeria and to respect human rights. Government officials responded with expressions of support for religious freedom and acceptance of U.S. assistance to combat Boko Haram.

The U.S. Consul General in Lagos discussed religious tolerance and interfaith relationship building on multiple occasions with leaders of the growing Pentecostal Christian movement, other Christian leaders, and influential Muslim clerics.

The embassy continued working on a conflict management and mitigation project, which builds interfaith networks to reduce ethno-religious conflict and improve religious tolerance.

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The embassy and consulate general regularly distributed information on religious freedom to journalists, academics, entrepreneurs, civic organizations, teachers, students, government officials, the armed forces, clergy, and traditional rulers. In June the Consul General delivered a goodwill message advocating for religious tolerance and interfaith coexistence to a crowd of several hundred thousand at a prominent Lagos-area Pentecostal church. Mission personnel regularly engaged religious leaders on human rights, education, health, and good governance.