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Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Nigeria: Situation of Christians, including those living in northern cities, Lagos and Abuja; state protection (2011-October 2015) [NGA105320.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Demographic Overview

According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, approximately 40 percent of Nigeria's population is Christian, 50 percent is Muslim and 10 percent "adheres to indigenous religious beliefs" (US 28 July 2014, 1). However, some sources state that Nigeria's population is approximately 50 percent Christian and 50 percent Muslim (ibid. 30 Apr. 2015, 101; *The Economist* 20 June 2015).

The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* notes that Christian groups in Nigeria include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Mormons (US 28 July 2014, 1-2).

Sources indicate that Christians constitute the majority in southeastern states (*The Economist* 20 June 2015; US 28 July 2014, 2), where the Igbo ethnic group predominates, "although many Igbos combine traditional practices with Christianity" (ibid.). The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* also indicates that Christians also constitute the majority in the Niger Delta region, where the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups predominate (ibid.). Sources report that Christians are a minority in the northern states (*The Economist* 20 June 2015; US 28 July 2014, 2), where the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri ethnic groups dominate (ibid.). According to the *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, Christians comprise approximately half the population in central Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory, and the southwestern states, where the Yoruba ethnic group predominates (ibid.).

2. Situation of Christians in the North

2.1 Overview of Boko Haram's Activity in the North

Sources report that Boko Haram [formally Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015; AI Apr. 2015, 3)] began an insurgency against Nigerian authorities in 2009 and, in August 2014, declared an "Islamic state" [or "caliphate" (AI Apr. 2015, 3)] in the area under their control in northeastern Nigeria (MRG July 2015, 92; AI Apr. 2015, 3). Sources state that, in 2015, Boko Haram became an affiliate of the Islamic State [IS or

ISIL] (IDMC 16 Apr. 2015; *The San Mateo Daily Journal* 7 July 2015; *Premium Times* 14 Sept. 2015). Sources describe Boko Haram as a "terrorist group" (US June 2015, 40; *This Day* 26 June 2014; GNA 27 Feb. 2015) or an "Islamist militant group" (Open Doors n.d.; CNN 1 Jan. 2015).

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014* indicates that in 2014, Boko Haram took over "large and small towns and villages" in Borno, Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe states (US June 2015, 40). Amnesty International (AI) reports that as of February 2015, Boko Haram controlled the majority of Borno state, northern Adamawa state and eastern Yobe state (AI Apr. 2015, 3). Freedom House similarly states that Boko Haram controls "large swathes of territory in Borno as well as parts of Adamawa and Yobe" (28 Jan. 2015). According to a 27 February 2015 article published by the Ghana News Agency (GNA), the area under Boko Haram's control is approximately the size of Belgium.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), an organization that monitors and analyses internal displacement worldwide and is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organization" (IDMC n.d.), there are 24.5 million people living in "states under recurrent attacks" by Boko Haram (ibid. 16 Apr. 2015). *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014* indicates that in 2014, Boko Haram attacks most frequently occurred in the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, but attacks also occurred in the states of Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, Niger, Plateau, Taraba, as well as in the Federal Capital Territory (US June 2015, 40).

Human Rights Watch reports that Boko Haram killed approximately 6,000 civilians between 2009 and 2014, and that "more than 2,563 people were killed in 2014 alone" (29 Jan. 2015). *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014* reports that Boko Haram killed "nearly 5,000" people in 2014 (US June 2015, 40). AI reports that Boko Haram killed "at least 4,000 civilians" in 2014 through "deliberate and indiscriminate attacks," and 1,500 civilians between 1 January and 31 March 2015 (AI Apr. 2015, 32).

Premium Times, an Abuja-based media organization (n.d.), reports that Boko Haram regularly carries out acts of "gratuitous violence" in major cities in northern and central Nigeria (*Premium Times* 14 Sept. 2015). AI similarly notes that Boko Haram "repeatedly" attacks cities in the northeast (AI Apr. 2015, 4). The *Los Angeles Times* indicates that Boko Haram targets crowded urban areas for bomb attacks (*Los Angeles Times* 31 July 2014). Al Jazeera reports that Kano, the largest city in the north with a population of six million people, is a "frequent target of Boko Haram attacks" (Al Jazeera 28 July 2014). *PM News*, a Nigerian newspaper, reports that the city of Bauchi has been "consistently targeted" by Boko Haram, including through church bombings (*PM News* 23 Oct. 2014). Human Rights Watch reports that Boko Haram's violence extended beyond Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states in 2014 to cities in other states, including Kano, Jos, Kaduna, Gombe, and Bauchi (29 Jan. 2015).

2.2 Boko Haram's Targeting of Christians in the North

Several sources report that Christians are one of Boko Haram's targets, but non-Christians are also targeted (MRG July 2015, 92; CBCN 18 Sept. 2014; AI Apr. 2015, 5). According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), which describes itself as the "organ of unity, communion and solidarity for the millions of Catholics spread across the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory" (n.d.), Christians and other non-Muslims in general are Boko Haram's "principle targets for extermination, expropriation and expulsion" (CBCN 18 Sept. 2014). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reports that Boko Haram "has worked to expel all Christians from the north" (US 30 Apr. 2015, 102).

Sources report that Boko Haram deliberately kills Christians (Open Doors n.d.; Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015; AI Apr. 2015, 14). Sources also state that Boko Haram threatens to kill Christians who do not convert (ibid.; US 30 Apr. 2015, 102). Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that between 2009 and September 2014, more than 500 Catholics were killed by Boko Haram (AFP 7 Sept. 2014). Corroborating and further statistics on the number of Christians killed by Boko Haram could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that Boko Haram attacks:

- churches (MRG July 2015, 92; CBCN 18 Sept. 2014; AI Apr. 2015, 14);
- Christian communities (US 28 July 2014, 7);
- Christian religious leaders (ibid. 30 Apr. 2015, 102); and
- Christian ceremonies (ibid.).

In a press statement made on 18 September 2014, CBCN reports that there was "mass slaughter" and the burning of villages, churches and rectories in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Kano and Kaduna states (18 Sept. 2014).

Sources report that Boko Haram has burned down "dozens" of churches (US 28 July 2014, 7; *The San Mateo Daily Journal* 7 July 2015). According to the President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, cited in

an article published by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) [1], as of July 2015, Boko Haram had destroyed approximately 850 churches in northern Nigeria (CSW 16 July 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, church attendance in the north is low due to fear of Boko Haram (US 28 July 2014, 7).

Sources report on the following violent acts against Christians in northern cities of Nigeria:

- In January 2014, Boko Haram attacked a Catholic parish in Adamawa, killing 22 people (Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015);
- In May 2014, a Christian neighbourhood of Kano was bombed, killing five people (*Los Angeles Times* 31 July 2014);
- In June 2014, "suspected" Boko Haram militants in Borno burned down 5 churches and killed 30 people during a raid (Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015);
- In July 2014, Boko Haram bombed a church in Kano, killing five people (*Los Angeles Times* 31 July 2014). Three "suspected Boko Haram members" were arrested following the church bombing (Al Jazeera 28 July 2014);
- In August 2014, Boko Haram captured Madagali in Adamawa and destroyed churches and targeted Christians who remained in the town (AFP 7 Sept. 2014). According to the spokesperson for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri, Christian men captured by Boko Haram in Madagali were beheaded, while Christian women were forced to convert to Islam and were taken to become wives of Boko Haram members (ibid.);
- In November 2014, Boko Haram attacked Christians and Christian churches in Mubi, the second largest city in Adamawa state (*This Day* 6 Nov. 2014). Several churches were "torched," including a Lutheran church, a Catholic church and a Baptist church (ibid.). Christians in the city were reportedly ordered to leave, convert to Islam, or be killed (ibid.). According to the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese in Yola, "hundreds" of residents were killed and "thousands" became homeless (ibid.);
- On 1 January 2015 there was a suicide bombing outside an evangelical church in the northeastern city of Gombe (CNN 1 Jan. 2015); and
- In July 2015, there was a suicide bombing of a church in Potiskum (*The San Mateo Daily Journal* 7 July 2015; *The Guardian* 31 Aug. 2015) killing five people (ibid.).

2.3 Abductions

Sources report that Boko Haram has abducted Christians (Al Apr. 2015, 14; Open Doors n.d.). According to the IDMC, between January 2014 and April 2015, militants in northeastern Nigeria abducted "at least 2,000 women and girls" (IDMC 16 Apr. 2015). The same source states that one of the reasons why militants carry out abductions is "a strategy to forcefully convert Christian women and girls to Islam" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that in April 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok (ibid.; US June 2015, 41). An article written by a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom [2] and published by the *Weekly Standard*, a US-based "conservative" magazine, noted that most of the kidnapped girls were Christians and were seized in a predominantly Christian area of northern Nigeria (*The Weekly Standard* 23 June 2014).

The IDMC notes that human rights violations against girls and women in captivity include "physical and psychological abuse, forced labour, participation in military operations, marriage to captors and sexual abuse including rape" (IDMC 16 Apr. 2015).

2.4 Internal Displacement

The IDMC reports that there are 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, primarily as a result of Boko Haram's violence in the northeast (ibid.). The *Daily Independent*, a Nigerian newspaper, reports that approximately 10 percent of IDPs are in camps and shelters, while the remainder fled to other states (*Daily Independent* 11 June 2015). According to the IDMC, there are over 40 camps in Adamawa, Borno and Taraba states, hosting more than 150,000 IDPs, but the conditions are "miserable": the camps are unable to meet basic food, water and sanitation needs (IDMC 16 Apr. 2015). According to the Bishop of Maiduguri, quoted in a 7 September 2014 article by the AFP, as of September 2014, more than 90,000 Catholics from the area had been displaced as a result of violence (AFP 7 Sept. 2014). Further statistics on Christian IDPs could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.5 Discrimination

The USCIRF reports that, according to Christian leaders, the governments of northern states discriminate against Christians with regards to employment, access to education, representation in government, and in granting permission to build or repair churches (US 30 Apr. 2015, 104). The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* indicates that local officials in northern states "used zoning regulations and title registrations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches" (ibid. 28 July 2014, 4). According to Open Doors, a UK-based religious organization "serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide," Christians in parts of northern Nigeria face discrimination, are often denied access to secondary school and higher education, and their communities lack "basic facilities such as clean water and health clinics" (Open Doors n.d.).

3. Situation of Christians and Boko Haram Activity in Lagos

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Human Rights and Justice Group International (HRJGI), a Lagos-based NGO that "seeks to enhance knowledge, respect and observance of human rights," stated that the situation for Christians in Lagos State is "normal" and that they live "peacefully" along with people of other religions (HRJGI 31 Oct. 2015). He further indicated that the Lagos State authorities and Nigerian police have "strengthened the security situation" to ensure that people can practice their religion in Lagos (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor in the Department of Religion at the University of Vermont, who is researching the relationships between different religious communities in Lagos, stated that there have been "isolated occurrences" of violence based on religion in Lagos, including against Christians, Muslims and "traditionalists," but that these acts are "relatively few" (Associate Professor 21 Oct. 2015).

Sources report the following incidents regarding Boko Haram activity in Lagos:

- A suspected Boko Haram member was arrested in April 2012 for allegedly attempting to bomb a church in the Ikorodu neighbourhood of Lagos (*Premium Times* 14 Sept. 2015);
- Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a bombing at a fuel depot in Lagos in June 2014 (ibid.; *Los Angeles Times* 31 July 2014);
- There were two bomb explosions at a tank farm in Apapa, Lagos on 25 June 2015, killing four people (*This Day* 26 June 2014); and
- Nine suspected members of Boko Haram were arrested in Lagos in August 2015 for allegedly planning attacks (*The Guardian* 31 Aug. 2015).

According to the *Daily Independent*, there are IDPs in Lagos who relocated from northern Nigeria; some live with family members while others rely on charity (*Daily Independent* 11 June 2015). The Executive Director of the HRJGI stated that IDPs relocating to Lagos from other areas of Nigeria face difficulties because "the government alone cannot meet their needs" (31 Oct. 2015).

4. Situation of Christians and Boko Haram Activity in Abuja

The Executive Director of the HRJGI stated that the only threat for Christians in Abuja is the Boko Haram insurgency and that the situation for Christians otherwise is the same as in Lagos (31 Oct. 2015). The Associate Professor indicated that incidents of violence against Christians are "more likely to occur" in Abuja than in Lagos, noting that Boko Haram has attacked churches, mosques and public spaces in Abuja (21 Oct. 2015).

Media sources report that on 25 December 2011, a Catholic church in Madalla, a town outside Abuja, was bombed, killing at least 35 people (*The Wall Street Journal* 27 Dec. 2011; AFP 28 Dec. 2011; *This Day* 23 Dec. 2014).

Sources report on the following Boko Haram attacks in and near Abuja that targeted the general population:

- a bombing in April 2014 killed at least 75 people (US June 2015, 41; MRG July 2015, 92);
- a bomb attack in June 2014 on a shopping plaza in Abuja, killing 21 people and "severely" injuring 17 people (*This Day* 26 June 2014); and
- an attack in October 2015 in Nyala and Kuje, in the outskirts of Abuja, that killed 18 people and wounded 41 people (ibid. 26 Oct. 2015).

5. Situation of Christians in Other Areas of Nigeria

Sources report that there is a problem with violence between predominantly Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim herders in central Nigeria (AAP 27 May 2015; US 30 Apr. 2015, 104). According to the USCIRF, in 2014, there were "attacks in Bauchi, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, and Taraba states that killed hundreds, displaced thousands, and destroyed a number of churches" (US 30 Apr. 2015, 104). Without specifying the time period, Open Doors reports that Hausa-Fulani herdsmen have killed "thousands" of Christians and "destroyed or targeted hundreds of churches" (Open Doors n.d.). Freedom House states that clashes between Muslims and Christians "have broken out for decades in the states of Kaduna and Plateau, especially around the city of Jos, often killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands at a time" (28 Jan. 2015). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), more than 1,000 people were killed in the first few months of 2014 as a result of communal violence between Fulani Muslim pastoralists and Christian "indigene" farmers near Jos, Plateau State in the Middle Belt and more than 100 people were killed in three Christian villages in Kaduna State as a result of suspected Fulani attacks (MRG July 2015, 92).

6. State Protection

Sources indicate that Nigeria's constitution and laws protect religious freedom (US 28 July 2014, 1; Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015). Freedom House states that religious freedom "is generally respected by the government in practice," with the exception of some instances in which state and local governments "placed limits on religious activities and endorsed a dominant faith" (ibid.).

Regarding protection for violence between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, the USCIRF states that "[y]ears of inaction by Nigeria's federal and state governments have created a climate of impunity" and that "[r]arely are perpetrators of sectarian violence held accountable" (US 30 Apr. 2015, 101, 104). The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* similarly states that there is a "lack of government protection for victims of religious violence" and that the authorities at all levels of government did not effectively address the problems leading to violence between Christian farmers and Muslim cattle herders in central Nigeria (ibid. 28 July 2014, 3, 6).

Sources indicate that the Nigerian army is fighting Boko Haram in the northeast (Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015; US June 2015, 40; GNA 27 Feb. 2015). Media sources state that the army is receiving support from a multi-national task force from neighbouring countries (ibid.; *The San Mateo Daily Journal* 7 July 2015). Sources report that the government declared a "state of emergency" in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (US June 2015, 40; Freedom House 28 Jan. 2015) that lasted from May 2013 until November 2014 (ibid.). According to the *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, the Nigerian government's actions against Boko Haram have been "largely ineffective," and the military fighting has increased the death toll of civilians in these areas (US 28 July 2014, 8). Voice of America similarly states that the Nigerian army "has struggled to stop attacks by Boko Haram" (VOA 27 Jan. 2014). Freedom House indicates that the government response to Boko Haram has been criticized for being "ineffective" and for committing "gross human rights violations with impunity" (28 Jan. 2015).

The *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that, according to Christian groups, "local and state authorities did not deliver adequate protection or post-attack relief to rural communities in the northeast" (US 28 July 2014, 6).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is an organization that advocates for religious freedom internationally (CSW n.d.).

[2] The Center for Religious Freedom, headquartered at the Hudson Institute in Washington, DC, has "sponsored investigative field missions, reported on the religious persecution of individuals and groups abroad, and undertaken advocacy on their behalf in the media, Congress, State Department and White House" (Hudson Institute n.d.).

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