



September 24, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President  
United States of America  
The White House

Dear Mr. Vice President,

We write to you today to express our deep and growing concern over the persecution of Christians living in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.

Nigeria is a country that has much promise; however, the persecution of Christians and extremist groups like Boko Haram are threatening the future of the country.

Today, millions of innocent Christians in Nigeria face the prospect of intimidation and torment at the hands of Fulani Muslim gangs. Unfortunately, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari – who is himself Fulani and relies on that voter bloc – has turned a blind eye to the violence against Nigeria's Christians. In many ways, President Buhari's silence and lack of policy action is an indicator of his implicit support of the ethnic cleansing of Christians.

The danger for practicing Christians in Nigeria cannot be overstated: the Christian Association of Nigeria has established that over 6,000 people were killed at the hands of these Fulani gangs in a six-month period alone in 2018. The concerns have been echoed by the former U.S. State Department Charge d'Affaires in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>, David Young, who publicly stated that this "*violence that has claimed innocent lives [in the] Plateau state, across the middle belt and indeed across Nigeria.*" NGOs and Christian charities have documented churches being burned, rape and torture, as well as continued killings.

The persecution suffered by Nigeria's Christians does not always involve direct violence: the power of the state is also being used to undermine Christian's right to freely worship. In the Nigerian State of Kaduna, Governor Nasr El Rufai, a close confidant of President Buhari, signed a bill into law that requires religious officiants to have a government-approved license in order to preach, effectively creating a government veto over religious worship.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ng.usembassy.gov/charge-daffaires-david-youngs-remarks-plateau-state-peace-building-summit-07302018/>

And earlier this month, the secretive Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), detained an elderly retired civil servant and practicing Christian, Grace Taiga, who was held for nearly three weeks until baseless charges were finally levied under the guise of a sham investigation ordered by the government. Grace remains in prison in an effort to psychologically intimidate and coerce her into retracting her genuine eyewitness account of a legal dispute between private investors and the Nigerian Government. Pleas for her to be allowed to return home to receive proper medical treatment have been summarily and callously dismissed by the Nigerian Government.

Sadly, Grace is just the most recent example of a Nigerian Christian who has been denied her legal rights, and deprived of her freedoms.

In our view, the actions of Governor Nasr El Rufai and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) violate both the U.S. Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, both of which would allow the U.S. Government to sanction any individual involved in the violation of human and religious rights. The actions of the Nigerian authorities – both ignoring the murder of Christians in the Middle Belt, and detaining innocent Christians like Grace for weeks on end – also warrant further consideration by the Trump Administration of designating Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its ongoing persecution of Christians.

Mr. Vice President, the Trump Administration has been a leading advocate for people of faith across the globe. There is no greater calling than to protect those who cannot protect themselves: Nigeria's Christians are asking for nothing more than an opportunity to worship God safely and free from harm. This freedom of the individual, along with the right to legal representation, and the right to live and worship free from harassment and intimidation, are fundamental to a true democracy. Those principles are also fundamental to keeping the Christian faith alive in countries such as Nigeria, where it is threatened by government oppression. We ask for your help to consider taking action against Nigerian Government officials who have violated U.S. laws, and for your help in securing the immediate release of Grace Taiga.

Sincerely,

Terry Schilling  
Executive Director  
*American Principles Project*

Andrew Langer  
President  
*Institute for Liberty*

Jon Schweppe  
Director of Government Affairs  
*American Principles Project*

Matias Perttula  
Advocacy Director  
*International Christian Concern*

Jerry Rogers  
President  
*Capitol Allies*

Horace Cooper  
Co-Chair  
*Project 21*

George Landrith  
President  
*Frontiers of Freedom*

CC:

The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary, U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Ambassador Tibor Nagy, Jr., Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs

The Honorable Ambassador Sam Brownback, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom