

Cyprus Statement on the Crises in Northern Nigeria

Issued by the Religious Liberty Partnership

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As members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) meeting in Larnaca, Cyprus, we are deeply concerned by the continuing loss of life in violence that has affected northern and central Nigeria since 1999, and particularly, the recent murders of hundreds of men, women and children in Plateau State. We stand with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria who seek the restoration of justice, rehabilitation, reconciliation, and peace in their nation, and who uphold fundamental human dignity and rights, including religious freedom. We specifically call on all Christians worldwide to respond to this appeal for prayer and action in recognition that we are One Body united in Christ.

1. The RLP acknowledges

- Nigeria's leading role in peace keeping operations on the African continent, most recently in Darfur.
- The stated commitment of the Federal Government and National Assembly to investigate and bring an end to the violence in Nigeria.
- The preservation of constitutional democracy and the prevention of a power vacuum, a total breakdown of law and order or even a return to military dictatorship despite the challenges engendered by President Musa Yar' Adua's prolonged illness.
- That the Church in Jos, Plateau State, representing all ethnic communities, is making every effort to care for and meet the humanitarian needs of all religious and ethnic groups.
- That the Church in Nigeria is committed to the Biblical response of non-retaliation to violence.

- The Federal Government's initiation of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC),¹ where Christian and Muslim leaders are working together for peace, reconciliation and an end to religious conflict.

2. The RLP calls on the Nigerian government

- To urgently launch an investigation into the army's inadequate enforcement of the curfew, and its failure to provide protection to vulnerable communities in remote areas of Plateau State.
- In view of the grievous consequences of recent security and intelligence lapses, to suspend Saleh Maina, General Officer Commanding the Third Armored Division,² pending an investigation into the reasons for these failures, and into serious allegations of partisan behavior on his part
- To review and adjust the current security arrangements for Plateau State, strengthening the security apparatus.
- To ensure that all of Nigeria's religious communities enjoy freedom of religion, including the right to manifest and propagate their beliefs as enshrined in Article 38.1 of the Nigerian Constitution,³ and in international statutes to which Nigeria is party.
- To track down the planners and perpetrators of violence, bringing them swiftly to justice, and thereby contributing towards ending impunity.
- To ensure that the National Assembly applies any changes to the constitutional provisions that promote the indigene/settler dichotomy on a national basis, as this is a national issue.
- To ensure that victims of violence receive timely and adequate compensation, regardless of their religious affiliation.

3. The RLP calls on the Nigerian church and religious leaders

- To continue to promote and practice non-violent responses to attacks, in line with Biblical principles.

¹ <http://allafrica.com/stories/200806230739.html>.

² <http://odili.net/news/source/2009/jan/10/19.html>.

³ <http://tinyurl.com/Nigeria-Const>.

- For the Nigerian Christian Diaspora, to stand in solidarity with, and take action to assist their brothers and sisters who are suffering religious liberty violations in their home country.
- For the spiritual leader of Nigeria's Muslims, Sultan of Sokoto⁴, to continue to publicly denounce the killings of civilians in Dogo, Nahauwa, Ratsat, Zot and Byei villages in Plateau State, and to call on those responsible to embrace reconciliation.

4. The RLP calls on the worldwide church

- To stand with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria in prayer, and to provide long-term practical humanitarian support, pastoral care and trauma counseling, particularly those who have lost family and loved ones, livestock and livelihoods.
- To pray for the health of the Nigerian President, and for wisdom for the Acting President, who face many responsibilities and challenges at this time.
- To engage with Nigerian diplomatic missions in their respective countries, challenging them to ensure the Nigerian government takes timely and effective action to tackle abuses of human rights and religious freedom.
- To call upon the international community to support an international fact-finding human rights investigation into religious violence and repression in northern Nigeria.
- To support a justice monitor to track the progress of prosecution and trial of perpetrators in the legal system in order to ensure that justice is both done and is seen to be done.

The RLP commits

- To support efforts to ensure the religious rights of all Nigerians, including the rights to freely change one's beliefs and to manifest and propagate these beliefs, as per Article 38.1 of the Nigerian Constitution.
- To support credible international, regional, and local efforts to end hostilities, resolve conflict, and seek an enduring peace.

⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/Sokoto>.

- To support local and international initiatives for peace-building and youth economic empowerment across the faiths that would engage the youth in gainful activity, rendering them less susceptible to extremism and conflict.
- To call for accurate and unbiased reporting on Nigeria by the international media, and for clear and speedy corrections of any errors likely to enflame an already tense situation.
- To call on the Church worldwide to partner with the Nigerian Church in extending assistance to victims of violence.
- To call for all of our constituencies, including the Nigerian Diaspora and the Church worldwide, to pray for the Church in Nigeria as it seeks to respond in a Christ-like manner to religious liberty violations.

Members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP)

- Advocates International, USA: www.advocatesinternational.org
- All India Christian Council, INDIA: www.indianchristians.in/news
- China Aid, USA: www.chinaaid.org
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, HONG KONG: www.csw.org.hk
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, NIGERIA: www.cswng.org
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UNITED KINGDOM: www.csw.org.uk
- Danish European Mission, DENMARK: www.daneu.dk
- Friends of the Martyred Church, FINLAND: www.martyredchurch.net
- HMK, SWITZERLAND: www.hmk-aem.ch
- Hilfsaktion Märtyrer Kirche, GERMANY: www.h-m-k.org
- International Christian Concern, USA: www.persecution.org
- International Institute for Religious Freedom, GERMANY, SOUTH AFRICA, SRI LANKA: www.iirf.eu
- Jubilee Campaign, USA: www.jubileecampaign.org
- Norwegian Mission to the East, NORWAY: www.nmio.no

- Middle East Concern, MIDDLE EAST: www.meconcern.org
- Open Doors International, THE NETHERLANDS: www.opendoorsuk.org
- Release International, UNITED KINGDOM: www.releaseinternational.org
- Rule of Law Institute, BULGARIA: www.ruleoflawinstitute.bg
- Set My People Free, EGYPT: www.petitiononline.com/2010smpf/petition.html
- The Voice of the Martyrs, CANADA: www.persecution.net
- World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, GLOBAL: www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations from around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally. Members of the RLP are primarily involved (that is the majority of their time, personnel, and resources) with ministry to persecuted Christians and/or on religious liberty issues in whatever context and strategy. For more information on the Nigeria Statement or on the Religious Liberty Partnership, contact Brian O'Connell, RLP Facilitator at: Brian@REACTServices.com; +1 425-218-4718.