

January 17th, 2024

The Honorable Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ben Cardin
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Gregory Meeks
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James E. Risch
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As human rights and international religious freedom leaders, we stand in support of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in their call for a congressional hearing into the State Department’s exclusion of Nigeria and India from the Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) list.

Nigeria and India have been rocked by alarming instances of religious violence and persecution. Pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act, both countries meet the statutory definition of “engaging in or tolerating particularly severe violations of religious freedom” to be designated as CPC.¹ They should be designated as such.

In Nigeria, extremist violence persecutes the Christian community on a daily basis. The International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, a Nigeria based research group, estimates that more than 50,000 Christians have been killed since 2009. The same report also estimates that approximately 18,000 churches and 2,500 Christian schools have been attacked.² In addition, twelve of Nigeria’s northern states maintain the death penalty as a punishment for blasphemy, and the forced marriage and conversion of women and girls is a pervasive issue.³

In India, state-level anti-conversion laws criminalize the expression of minority religious groups. Mob violence often goes unchecked. Since May of last year, between 200-400 churches and 3,500

¹ 22 U.S.C. § 6402 (1998).

² Emeka Umeagbalasi, “International Report of Nigeria’s Intersociety,” *Intersociety*, April 10, 2023, <https://intersociety-ng.org/5068-citizens-massacred-for-being-christians-in-nigeria-in-2022-1041-slaughtered-in-first-100-days-of-2023/>.

³ Al Chukwuma Okoli, “Gender and Terror: Boko Haram and the Abuse of Women in Nigeria,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, April 5, 2022, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2022/04/05/gender-and-terror-boko-haram-and-the-abuse-of-women-in-nigeria%EF%BF%BC/>.

Christian homes in Manipur State have been attacked.⁴ In a separate state, Uttar Pradesh, more than 400 Christians have been arrested for sharing their faith since the anti-conversion law went into effect three years ago.⁵

It is imperative for the United States to actively address these issues and ensure that the principles of religious freedom are upheld globally.

Accountability and transparency are essential to understanding the State Department's rationale for declining to designate Nigeria and India as CPCs.

We urge the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to convene hearings to thoroughly examine the reasons behind the exclusion of Nigeria and India from the CPC list. Secretary of State Antony Blinken must answer to Congress and the American people.

As a collective voice, we appreciate your attention to this human rights issue. We trust that the Committees will take decisive actions to address this situation, reaffirming the United States' unwavering commitment to religious freedom worldwide.

Sincerely,

McKenna Wendt
Advocacy Manager
International Christian Concern

Frank Wolf
Member U.S. Congress 1981-2015, retired

Nadine Maenza
President
IRF Secretariat

Lela Gilbert
Senior Fellow for International Religious Freedom
Family Research Council

Nina Shea, Director
Center for Religious Freedom
Hudson Institute

⁴ Jay Church, "Unchecked: The Rise of Hindu Nationalism, Legal Repression, and Mob Violence in the World's Largest Democracy," *International Christian Concern*, October 2023, <https://www.persecution.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ICC-2023-India-Report.pdf>.

⁵ "India's Most Populous State Tops in Persecuting Christians," *UCA News*, December 1, 2023, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indias-most-populous-state-tops-in-persecuting-christians/103445>.

Dr. Paul Murray
International Vice President, Religious Freedom Initiatives
Global Peace Foundation

Congressman Dan Burton
(R-IN, 1983-2013)

Dr. Michael Jenkins
President
The Washington Times Foundation

William J. Murray
President
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Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
Founding President and Chairman
Genocide Watch

Richard Ghazal
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In Defense of Christians

Charmaine Hedding
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Shai Fund

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Church Women United in New York State

Coptic Solidarity

Federation of Indian American Christians

Genocide Watch

In Defense of Christians

Jubilee Campaign

Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa

Save the Persecuted Christians

Set My People Free

The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)

United Macedonian Diaspora