

USCIRF Hearing on Nigeria

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Frank R. Wolf

I appreciate the opportunity to be here and I appreciate USCIRF's good work on issues of religious freedom in Nigeria and around the world.

I am grateful for Congressman Chris Smith's recent hearing on Nigeria, but I am disturbed to hear that Nigerian religious leaders Bishop Wilfred Anagbe and Rev. Father Remigius have received threats of death and possible arrest on their return to Nigeria because of their testimony at the hearing.

This is unacceptable, but especially in a country that receives many millions in U.S. foreign aid.

Tens of thousands of innocent Christians have been murdered in northern Nigeria, and Christians in farming communities continue to be killed and ethnically cleansed by the thousands right now. I have met with Nigerian Catholic and Protestant religious leaders and have seen reports that over 100 Catholic priests have been abducted and dozens murdered in recent years.

Muslims, who refuse to pay tribute to Jihadist and other armed groups perpetrating these crimes also face persecution. Millions have been displaced.

At the same time, Christians are being forced out

by being denied jobs and education.

I have been to Nigeria and witnessed some of this firsthand. The U.S. Commission for Religious Freedom has advocated for the persecuted in Nigeria in their annual reports, and a number of commissioners over the past several years have traveled to Nigeria and witnessed the situation there.

It has been difficult, in this dangerous security situation, for our government and others to get a comprehensive, reliable, grounded assessment of the situation. We urgently need a fair, independent, field-based appraisal. Were even more tragic events to unfold, we would question why we didn't pay more attention to this issue

earlier. We need to end the persecution and killing of Christians in Nigeria.

For almost two years, and as a Commissioner on USCIRF, I have been urging the Department of State to engage the services of Bob Gersony, our nation's leading expert in this type of work . In dozens of cases Bob's unique work has produced insights that have informed and shaped our foreign policy for the better. He has helped our government address conflicts and catastrophes in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

He is universally respected for his objectivity and ability to create consensus on our security, political, and humanitarian interests in each case.

Despite considerable risks, Gersony is willing to take on northern Nigeria, which would be his 56th assignment of this type.

The aims of Bob's work would be to assess the facts; to illuminate the trends and actors contributing to these problems; to identify potential interventions; and to enhance our cooperative efforts with the Government of Nigeria to address these threats before a worse tragedy can occur. I believe it would be in all of our interests to get this assignment moving, and immediately.

After persistent efforts, the Department of State contracted to put Bob Gersony on the case. But his contract was among those recently

suspended. Perhaps this was inadvertent, but I believe it is in line with the pragmatic approach of our current Administration.

Having served with him, I know of Secretary Rubio's deep concern about religious freedom, and I feel certain he would want to do everything possible to address the situation in Nigeria.

This project needs to be pursued because it is not enough to say how bad things are without taking action. The U.S. needs to do something that actually will help prevent further killing of Nigerian Christians and moderate Muslims.

People are dying every day, it is getting worse, and it has been going on for years.

Nigeria has remained among the most dangerous places on earth for Christians, according to Open Doors 2025 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

Earlier I mentioned the threats being received by Catholic Bishop Anagbe for testifying before a U.S. Congressional hearing-- and reports of over 100 priests being abducted and dozens murdered in recent years

Get this project back on track. Get Bob Gersony to Nigeria. Let's do something that will

bring real help to end the suffering—to stop the killing and violence.