

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7457

To require a comprehensive report on United States efforts to address religious persecution and mass atrocities in Nigeria.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 10, 2026

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey (for himself, Mr. MOORE of West Virginia, Mr. MAST, Mr. DIAZ-BALART, Mr. HUIZENGA, and Mr. COLE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To require a comprehensive report on United States efforts to address religious persecution and mass atrocities in Nigeria.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Nigeria Religious Free-
5 dom and Accountability Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Systemic religious persecution has persisted
2 in Nigeria since at least 2009, including mass mur-
3 der, kidnappings, rape, village destruction, and
4 forced displacement of persons, perpetrated by Boko
5 Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province
6 (ISWAP), Fulani militant groups, and other extrem-
7 ist organizations.

8 (2) Estimates indicate that between 50,000 to
9 125,000 Christians have been martyred between
10 2009 and 2025, with more than 19,000 Christian
11 churches attacked or destroyed.

12 (3) Fulani-ethnic militias in Nigeria—including
13 networks of armed groups engaged in organized at-
14 tacks on civilian communities—have carried out re-
15 peated acts of violence that meet the statutory defi-
16 nition of terrorist activity under section 212(a)(3) of
17 the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C.
18 1182(a)(3)).

19 (4) These militias have conducted attacks in-
20 volving targeted killings, hostage-taking, hijackings,
21 armed assaults, massacres of civilians, destruction of
22 property, and forced displacement of local popu-
23 lation.

24 (5) Between May 2023 and May 2025, Fulani-
25 ethnic militias carried out major massacres in Benue

1 and Plateau States—including attacks in Umogidi,
2 Mgban, Yelwata, the Christmas Eve massacres of
3 2023 and 2024, and the Holy Week and Easter at-
4 tacks of 2024 and 2025—killing more than 9,500
5 people, mostly Christians, and displacing over half a
6 million others.

7 (6) The acts carried out by these militias are
8 intended to intimidate, coerce, and displace civilian
9 populations, disrupt local governance, and assert
10 control over territory—actions that meet the criteria
11 for designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization
12 (FTO) under section 219 of the Immigration and
13 Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1189).

14 (7) The expansion of these militias undermines
15 United States national security and foreign policy
16 interests, destabilizes a strategically important re-
17 gion, jeopardizes religious freedom rights, and exac-
18 erbates the threat environment facing West Africa.

19 (8) Nigerian Christian clergy and imams who
20 have advocated for tolerance have been kidnapped,
21 tortured, or murdered, with more than 250 religious
22 leaders attacked or killed in the past decade, includ-
23 ing Father Sylvester Okechukwu in 2025.

24 (9) Christian leaders such as Father Remigius
25 Iyhula and Bishop Wilfred Anagbe, who testified be-

1 fore Congress in March 2025 and November 2025,
2 have faced intimidation and harassment as a direct
3 result of their testimony regarding the sustained
4 persecution they face.

5 (10) Nigeria accounts for 72 percent of all
6 Christians martyred worldwide, according to Open
7 Doors' 2026 Watch List.

8 (11) Approximately 3.5 to 5 million Nigerians
9 are internally displaced, and more than 343,000 re-
10 main refugees in the Lake Chad region.

11 (12) It remains unclear whether any of the lim-
12 ited investigations into these violent attacks have led
13 to prosecutions or convictions of jihadists.

14 (13) Defending oneself from an attack can also
15 lead to a death sentence like in the case of Sunday
16 Jackson, a Christian farmer from Adamawa State,
17 who was sentenced to death in 2021 for the killing
18 of an armed Fulani herder, despite credible evidence
19 that Mr. Jackson acted in self-defense after being
20 violently attacked while working on his farmland.

21 (14) In a show of good faith from the Nigerian
22 Government, Jackson was pardoned in December
23 2025 after spending a decade in prison.

24 (15) Nigeria retains and enforces blasphemy
25 laws carrying the death penalty in 12 northern

1 states under Sharia criminal law; such laws have
2 been used to target Christians, Muslims, and dis-
3 senters.

4 (16) Victims, such as Christians Rhoda Jatau
5 and Deborah Yakubu, have suffered mob violence,
6 imprisonment, or death for alleged blasphemy, while
7 known perpetrators frequently face no punishment.

8 (17) Sufi musician Yahaya Sharif-Aminu has
9 been detained for 6 years in Kano State on blas-
10 phemy charges and faces the death penalty related
11 to peaceful song lyrics; he is appealing his case to
12 the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

13 (18) The Nigerian Government routinely denies
14 that religious persecution exists and has failed to
15 adequately intervene, including on early warning no-
16 tifications of upcoming attacks, including the Octo-
17 ber 14, 2025, Plateau State massacre.

18 (19) The United States Commission on Inter-
19 national Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has rec-
20 ommended Nigeria's designation as a Country of
21 Particular Concern (CPC) every year since 2009.

22 (20) In 2020 and again in October 2025, Presi-
23 dent Donald J. Trump designated Nigeria a CPC
24 pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act
25 of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.).

1 (21) The prior administration’s removal of Ni-
2 geria from the CPC list in 2021 coincided with a
3 marked escalation in religiously motivated violence.

4 (22) Designating Nigeria as a CPC enhances
5 diplomatic tools—including sanctions—to pressure
6 the Nigerian Government to halt religious persecu-
7 tion, prosecute perpetrators, and protect vulnerable
8 communities.

9 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

10 It is the sense of Congress that—

11 (1) President Donald Trump acted justly by
12 designating Nigeria as a Country of Particular Con-
13 cern, in alignment with the recommendations pro-
14 vided by the United States Commission on Inter-
15 national Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and pursuant
16 to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
17 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.);

18 (2) the Government of Nigeria has historically
19 failed to adequately respond to or prevent religiously
20 motivated violence and continues to tolerate impu-
21 nity by extremist actors, in part by denying the reli-
22 gious nature of such extremism;

23 (3) the United States should use all available
24 diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, and security
25 tools to pressure the Government of Nigeria to—

1 (A) end impunity for perpetrators of mass
2 atrocities and religious persecution;

3 (B) protect Christian communities, clergy,
4 and other targeted religious minorities;

5 (C) enable the safe and voluntary return of
6 internally displaced persons to their homelands,
7 prioritizing persecuted Christian communities;
8 and

9 (D) ensure freedom of religion is protected
10 by every level of government and that the prop-
11 er legal channels ensure this right remains
12 wholly intact, including the repeal of blasphemy
13 laws and release prisoners detained for their
14 faith;

15 (4) United States Government engagement has
16 encouraged the Nigerian Government to take posi-
17 tive steps towards addressing these threats by ex-
18 tremist groups and are encouraged to engage in a
19 bilateral agreement to protect these vulnerable com-
20 munities, eliminate jihadist terror activities, further
21 economic cooperation, and counter mutual adver-
22 saries in the region;

23 (5) there is bipartisan congressional support to
24 consider appropriate security cooperation with Nige-
25 ria, including conditioning of foreign assistance as

1 was done in the Fiscal Year 2026 National Security,
2 Department of State, and Related Programs Approp-
3 riations Bill signed into law by President Trump as
4 part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026,
5 to enhance efforts to protect innocent lives;

6 (6) the United States should deliver humani-
7 tarian assistance, co-funded by the Government of
8 Nigeria, through trusted civil society organizations,
9 including faith-based organizations, in Nigeria's
10 middle belt states;

11 (7) the Department of State and the Depart-
12 ment of the Treasury should impose targeted sanc-
13 tions, including visa bans and asset freezes under
14 the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability
15 Act, on individuals or entities responsible for severe
16 religious freedom violations, or report to Congress
17 the reasons such sanctions have not been imposed,
18 including—

19 (A) Fulani-ethnic nomad militias in Nige-
20 ria;

21 (B) Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, former Kano
22 State Governor;

23 (C) Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Associa-
24 tion of Nigeria (MACBAN); and

25 (D) Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore;

1 (8) the Secretary of State should determine
2 whether certain Fulani-ethnic militias in Nigeria
3 qualify as a foreign terrorist organization under sec-
4 tion 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8
5 U.S.C. 1189);

6 (9) individuals and networks—domestic or for-
7 eign—that provide support to these Fulani-ethnic
8 militias should be investigated and held accountable;

9 (10) the Secretary of State should consider
10 technical support to the Government of Nigeria to
11 reduce and then eliminate violence from armed
12 Fulani militias, including disarmament programs
13 and comprehensive counter-terrorism cooperation to
14 rid the region of Foreign Terrorist Organizations
15 that pose a direct threat to the American homeland;

16 (11) the Secretary of State should work with
17 the Government of Nigeria to counteract the hostile
18 foreign exploitation of Chinese illegal mining oper-
19 ations and their destabilizing practice of paying pro-
20 tection money to Fulani militias;

21 (12) the Nigerian Government should thor-
22 oughly investigate instances of penalties or imprison-
23 ment under blasphemy laws or Sharia law and work
24 to end these practices and repeal such laws;

1 (13) the United States stands in solidarity with
2 Christians and all persecuted religious minorities in
3 Nigeria in their right to practice their faith without
4 fear of violence, persecution, or death, and a future
5 goodwill relationship between the United States and
6 Nigeria hinges upon the Nigerian Government's re-
7 sponse moving forward to adequately address the
8 atrocities described in this Act;

9 (14) the Department of State is encouraged to
10 enlist the support of international partners, includ-
11 ing France, Hungary, and the United Kingdom, to
12 work with the Government of Nigeria to promote re-
13 ligious freedom and peace; and

14 (15) the Government of Nigeria can play a key
15 stabilizing role in the Sahel region and across the
16 continent and is poised to deepen and strengthen
17 their relationship with the United States if they will
18 work with us to combat the persecution of Christians
19 in Nigeria.

20 **SEC. 4. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.**

21 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the
22 enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter until Nige-
23 ria is no longer designated as a Country of Particular Con-
24 cern pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act
25 of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.) and in accordance with

1 the recommendations provided by the United States Com-
2 mission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF),
3 the Secretary of State shall submit to the Committee on
4 Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, the Com-
5 mittee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives,
6 the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, and
7 the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate a com-
8 prehensive report on United States efforts to address reli-
9 gious persecution and mass atrocities in Nigeria.

10 (b) ELEMENTS.—Each report required by subsection
11 (a) shall include the following:

12 (1) An assessment of Nigeria’s compliance with
13 the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, in-
14 cluding specific actions taken, or not taken, by the
15 Government of Nigeria to prevent persecution, pros-
16 ecute perpetrators, repeal blasphemy laws, protect
17 vulnerable communities, and facilitate the safe re-
18 turn of internally displaced persons.

19 (2) Identification of all individuals and entities
20 sanctioned, or under consideration for sanctions,
21 under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Account-
22 ability Act or the Entities of Particular Concern list.

23 (3) A description of co-investments and collabo-
24 rative efforts between the Government of Nigeria
25 and the United States to provide and deliver human-

1 itarian assistance to Christians displaced by the at-
2 tacks from Fulani-ethnic militias, through faith-
3 based or nongovernmental partners, including
4 amounts, recipients, type of assistance provided, and
5 measurable outcomes.

6 (4) An evaluation and description of historical,
7 ongoing, and planned United States security assist-
8 ance to Nigeria, and a comprehensive assessment of
9 whether such assistance risks enabling or exacer-
10 bating religious persecution.

11 (5) Whether the Government of Nigeria is tak-
12 ing appropriate steps to cease enforcement of and
13 repeal blasphemy laws, and to investigate instances
14 of non-Muslims, Muslims, and dissenters being sub-
15 jected to Sharia law or blasphemy laws.

16 (6) An assessment of conditions of internally
17 displaced persons, including safety, humanitarian
18 needs, and prospects for return.

19 (7) Recommendations for further executive ac-
20 tions or congressional authority determined to be
21 necessary and most helpful to halt the religious per-
22 secution and mass atrocities occurring in Nigeria.

23 (8) An evaluation of any steps taken by the
24 Government of Nigeria during the reporting period
25 to address religious persecution, dismantle extremist

1 networks, prosecute attackers, reform security
2 forces, or improve protection for at-risk commu-
3 nities.

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