



NIGERIA

THE ISSUE:

Respect for human rights in Nigeria is at risk as the civic space continues to be squeezed by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari and the Nigerian security forces.

The government has responded violently to criticism of its handling of the insurgency of the armed group Boko Haram in the northern provinces of the country, inter communal violence in the Middle Belt provinces that have taken on religious tones, and outrage over government corruption.

The government has passed multiple laws to muzzle dissent including the Freedom of Information bill, the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation bill, the Prohibition of Hate Speech bill and the Cybercrimes and Anti-Terrorism Act. All of these directly violate regional and international human rights standards and impede the work of human rights defenders and journalists. The government has also taken steps to restrict funding for NGOs including requiring profile checks of staff and possible board members of civil society organizations (even if they do not reside in Nigeria).

Members of some civil society organizations have faced intimidation and physical harm for expressing concerns over the government's Boko Haram counter insurgency or have encountered obstacles when investigating human rights abuses committed by the military against alleged Boko Haram suspects. Groups operating in the restive Niger Delta region face similar impediments.

In December 2018, for example, the Nigerian army responded to an Amnesty International report on the alleged failure of the military to protect residents vulnerable to attacks in central Nigeria by threatening to shut down the group's Nigeria office. On March 20, 2017, protesters carrying a coffin invaded Amnesty International's office in Abuja chanting slogans against the organization like "Amnesty International supports Boko Haram," and "You are demonic, leave Nigeria now." The protesters, some of whom were internally displaced persons from camps outside Abuja, said they were paid N1400 every day by agents of the sponsors of the protest, who they met at Unity Fountain, Abuja.

THE HUMAN COST:

Nigerian authorities continued to detain human rights defenders Olawale Bakare at the Department of State Services in Abuja, and Agba Jalingo in Calabar prison, southern Nigeria. They are facing trumped-up charges of treason because they demanded government accountability. Their cases are emblematic of the harassment faced by Nigerian civil society and the governments abuse of the judicial system.

Security services including the DSS and police periodically arrested and detained journalists who criticized the government. Army personnel in some cases threatened civilians who were assumed to have provided information to journalists or NGOs on misconduct by the military.

TALKING POINTS:

- The United States is extremely concerned over possible abuses by the Nigerian security forces, in particular the Department of State Services.

- The White House should urge President Buhari to uphold the rule of law and ensure accountability for all starting with the public release of the findings of the Panel to Review Compliance of the Armed Forces with Human Rights Obligations and Rules of Engagement, which submitted its report in February 2018.
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- Nigeria is facing a growing threat to freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. As Africa's largest democracy, President Buhari must reverse this trend and protect political space.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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- Nigeria is facing a growing threat to freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. The White House should press President Buhari to reverse this trend and protect political space.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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