



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

30th June 2023

Jean Conté

NIGERIA - FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns regarding the persecution of Christians in Nigeria and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). I have read your comments with interest.

The events you point to are deeply concerning and HM Government (HMG) condemns all violence in Nigeria, irrespective of religion or group.

The UPR is a state-driven process which provides the opportunity for each state to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations. As you will be aware, Nigeria will undergo its next UPR in early 2024. In the meantime, I would like to outline the steps HMG has taken thus far to support Nigeria in upholding its constitutional commitment to freedom of religion or belief.

The principal threats to this commitment are the multiple complex security challenges facing Nigerians. In particular, from extremist groups, including Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, who attack both Christians and Muslims who do not subscribe to their beliefs. To support Nigeria's efforts to tackle this issue, HMG has contributed £16.9 million since 2019 to the UN Development Programme's regional stabilisation facility, which improves security, services, and economic opportunities for people in affected areas, and contributes to the demobilisation, de-radicalisation and reintegration of former group members.


Nigeria also faces other security challenges that undermine human rights and freedom of religion, including inter-communal violence and criminality. The UK's wide-ranging bilateral security and defence partnership with Nigeria provides practical support to defend against all these forms of insecurity. This includes training Nigeria's police force to tackle criminality and kidnappings, as well as helping them to prioritise the protection of vulnerable groups, such as religious minorities.

HMG also works with Nigeria to address the root causes of these issues, including poverty, climate change and historical grievances between ethnic and religious communities. The UK Government's 'Strengthening the Delivery of Peace and Security' programme in Nigeria has funded peace-building projects in several Nigerian states that build links and dialogue between civil society groups, religious leaders, and religious communities.

HMG, of course, recognises that Nigeria is a capable and sovereign state, and the Minister for Africa and Development raised the impact of insecurity on human rights, such as freedom of religion or belief, with President-elect Bola Tinubu when they met in December 2022. Regardless, I am assured that staff in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will continue to work closely with the new Nigerian Government, state governors, local community and faith leaders and NGOs, to promote social cohesion and understanding between communities, including religious minorities.



Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,


**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**