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## **NIGERIA | Concerns Raised Regarding Violence**

The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) released a statement raising concerns regarding ongoing violence in several states in Central Nigeria and calling on the government to ensure enjoyment of the right freedom of religion or belief for “all of Nigeria’s religious communities.”

There has been an escalation in attacks in recent years by an increasingly well-armed militia “comprising of members of the Fulani ethnic group on farming communities in Bauchi, Benue, southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states.” While recognizing the existence of “many peaceable Fulani herders and communities” and of “the long history of disputes between nomadic herders and farmers across the Sahel,” the “Abuja Statement on the Crises in Central Nigeria” declares that the manner of attacks witnessed in Nigeria are not replicated in other countries facing similar climatological and environmental challenges, and are occurring “with such frequency, organization and asymmetry that references to ‘farmer-herder clashes’ no longer suffice.”

The Abuja Statement highlights disturbing allegations that while members of the militia “are neither traced nor prosecuted, members of victim communities who articulate their concerns experience an array of repercussions that include threats, arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment.” It goes on to relate the plight of nine elders of the Adara tribe from Kajuru Local Government Area (LGA) in southern Kaduna state who have been detained since February and are facing “dubious charges of incitement and culpable homicide,” and calls on the government to ensure an end to this “judicial harassment and arbitrary detention,” while also regretting the emergence of “periodic retributive violence, as communities conclude they cannot depend on government for protection or justice.”

In addition, the statement calls on the government to facilitate the release of schoolgirl Leah Sharibu and humanitarian worker Alice Ngaddah, who have been held by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) since February and March 2018 respectively, and of 112 Chibok Girls held by the Shekau faction of Boko Haram since April 2014.

CSW’s Chief Executive and Chair of the RLP Mervyn Thomas said, “In our comment on the first RLP statement on Nigeria issued in 2010 at the inception of militia violence, CSW echoed the call for perpetrators to be brought to justice, and warned that it could ultimately pose a danger to

the entire nation if it was allowed to continue with impunity. Sadly, the nation is currently experiencing alarming levels of insecurity, with militia violence having spread to other central states and to parts of the south, ongoing terrorism in the north east, increasingly deadly armed violence in the northwest and a surge in kidnappings for ransom as small arms proliferate. We urge the Nigerian government to ensure the security and welfare of civilians by addressing these threats effectively and prioritizing justice and redress for victims, regardless of their creed or ethnicity. We also reiterate the call for the government to facilitate the release of Leah Sharibu and her fellow hostages, and to ensure that every religious community is able to enjoy religious freedom, as articulated in Article 38:1 of Nigeria's constitution."