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## **NIGERIA | Crackdown Sparks Condemnation**

CSW joins concerned organizations and individuals worldwide in condemning the killing of unarmed and peaceful protesters by the Nigerian security forces at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, Nigeria, on Oct. 20.

The attack took place among protests, which have been ongoing since Oct. 3, when a video emerged of a young man in Delta State being killed by the notorious police unit, the Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS). Prior to the attack, engineers had arrived at the toll gate earlier that afternoon and removed and disabled CCTV cameras. Just before it began, the lights in the area were switched off, and soldiers subsequently opened fire just as the protestors finished singing the national anthem.

Estimates of those killed range from nine to over 70. However, video footage has emerged which appears to confirm allegations by survivors that the military evacuated bodies from the scene in armored vehicles. A similar occurrence took place in 2015, after soldiers attacked the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) facilities in Zaria, Kaduna state. As a result, the true death toll may never be known. The military also allegedly blocked access to the site for ambulances that sought to offer assistance.

The Nigerian army initially attempted to deny responsibility, claiming soldiers were not in the area, despite video evidence to the contrary. The Governor of Lagos also attempted to distance himself from responsibility for the incident, visiting some of the wounded in hospital. However, he later stated in a television address that there had been no casualties.

The military crackdown on protesters have met with widespread international condemnation. In a statement published Oct. 13, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Country Rapporteur for Nigeria, Solomon Ayele Dersso, expressed "serious concern about reports of excessive use of force by police in some regions of Nigeria against people participating in the protest against SARS." The Commission made several recommendations to the government of Nigeria, including to "immediately

halt the use by police of live ammunition in responses to the ongoing protests and ensure that that policing of these assemblies is undertaken in compliance with the principles of minimum use of force as a last resort measure to avert imminent danger to life, as well as necessity, precaution and proportionality.”

Other members of the international community who have issued statements condemning the violence include the UN Secretary General António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet, the EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell, former US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and former US Vice-President and current presidential candidate Joe Biden. The UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab also made a statement calling for an end to the violence following significant protests outside the Nigerian High Commission in London.

The attack by the military was the latest escalation in violence targeting peaceful protesters that appears to enjoy a degree of official sanction. Video footage from several states, including the Federal Capital, Abuja depicts armed hired thugs being transported to marches and sit ins immediately prior to attacks on protestors.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW condemns the killing of protesters in Nigeria in the strongest terms. For over two weeks, unacceptable violence has been directed against peaceful demonstrators. The removal or disabling of CCTV prior to this escalation in violence possibly points to a deliberate decision to use lethal force against young people who were merely demanding good governance, killing an unknown number extrajudicially. We extend our deepest condolences to all who have lost loved ones in this appalling and unwarranted attack, and wish those injured a swift and full recovery. We call on the Nigerian government to rein in the military and bring an end to every source of violence directed at peaceful protestors, ensuring that the fundamental rights to peaceful assembly and association are fully upheld for all citizens. Those responsible for attacks on civilians exercising these fundamental rights must be brought to justice, no matter how highly placed. We also urge members of the international community, and particularly the US, UK and EU to formulate and impose sanctions, including visas and travel bans, on members of the Nigerian government and security services who are implicated in gross violations of the rights of citizens.”

CSW is also concerned by seeming efforts to foment religious and ethnic divisions in northern and central states, where protesters have been demanding an end to the insecurity plaguing these areas as a result of violence by assorted armed non-state actors. On Oct. 19, a prayer walk for peace and security in Anyigba, Kogi state, organized by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kogi East Chapter was stopped shortly after it began by local vigilantes, who tore their signs and flags and told them to

continue their activities in a church. The crowd, which had also been joined by Muslims as they walked, retired to a nearby Dunamis International church and knelt outside it to pray. There they were violently attacked by a crowd armed with guns and cudgels and led by a local official, who particularly targeted church leaders for severe assault, three of whom were detained. Several people were injured, including women and children, and the door and windows of the church were damaged during the attack.

On Oct. 20, thugs armed with machetes and sticks intercepted a march against insecurity in Sabon Gari, the Christian suburb of Kano City in Kano State. Four protesters were reportedly killed by assailants armed with cudgels and machetes, including two women. St Thomas Catholic Church and Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) building along the Airport Road were vandalized, amid damage to and burning of property belonging to the largely Yoruba and Igbo inhabitants of the suburb. Violence continued into the night, with video footage emerging of police shooting at people in the area.

On Oct. 19 and 20, members of the Igbo ethnic group were targeted for attack in the Apo area of Abuja, where property was destroyed, allegedly in the presence of police. The neighboring suburb of Waru was also attacked overnight.

Thomas added, "CSW urges the members of the international community to condemn all instances of religious and ethnic intolerance. Nigeria's greatest strength is its diversity. At what appears to be a pivotal moment in the country's history, Nigerian authorities at state and federal levels must be strongly encouraged to counter narratives which promote sectarianism and hostility, and to oppose every effort aimed at inciting division along these lines. We call for detailed and independent investigations into every instance of violence by both state and non-state actors, ensuring justice for the victims."