

Nigerian crisis presents security threat, human rights group insists

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WASHINGTON—Officials with the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative urged President Obama to appoint a special envoy to Nigeria and the Lake Chad region of Africa to deal with what they called “one of the worst humanitarian crises of our day.”



Representatives of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative met with more than 500 people during a fact-finding trip to Nigeria earlier this year. Randel Everett, president of the human rights organization and former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and Frank Wolf, former congressman and distinguished senior fellow with the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, issued the open letter to the Obama administration.

On the verge of starvation

They highlighted “the dire crisis continuing to unfold in northeastern and central Nigeria” where six people a day, on average, are dying from malnutrition and thousands are on the verge of starvation.

Everett and Wolf cited a Doctors without Borders report saying two-thirds of the children their physicians screened were emaciated, and as many as 30 people were dying some days due to hunger and illness.

Boko Haram and Fulani militants to blame

They attributed much of the responsibility for the crisis to Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist group.

“The Global Terrorism Index now considers Boko Haram the most lethal terrorist organization in the world, with the Fulani militants of Nigeria’s Middle Belt the four deadliest,” they wrote. “Our own research indicates that in just the first four months of this year, there was a 190 percent increase in people killed by Fulani militants.”

Met with more than 500 people in Nigeria



Leaders of the 21st Century

Wilberforce Initiative witnessed personally and heard firsthand testimony about the humanitarian crisis and human rights abuses in Nigeria. Everett and Wolf noted they were part of a group who traveled earlier this year to Nigeria to witness the situation.

“We met with over 500 people, drove through entire villages burned to the

ground, visited with families forced to live in caves to elude terrorists, and heard firsthand testimony of communities surviving by eating grass,” they wrote.

The human rights organization issued a report on their findings, “[Nigeria: Fractured and Forgotten.](#)”

‘One of the most significant security threats in West Africa’

“The crisis in Nigeria and the surrounding countries is larger than Boko Haram and cannot continue unaddressed,” Everett and Wolf wrote.

They expressed appreciation to U.S. State Department for naming Boko Haram an FTO—foreign terrorist organization—and to the Obama administration for offering assistance to Nigeria.

“However, given that this is the world’s most neglected humanitarian crisis and one of the most significant security threats in West Africa, we believe what is needed is a special envoy for Nigeria and the Lake Chad region,” they wrote.

The special envoy should report directly to Assistant Secretary of State Linda Thomas-Greenfield and have responsibilities related to Boko Haram, other terrorist groups, internally displaced people groups and refugees, they said.

“It is our firm belief that the United States and other Western nations have a vested interest in confronting one of the worst humanitarian crises of our day,” they wrote. “The appointment of a special envoy would send a strong signal and further strengthen American leadership.”