

Religious freedom advocates call for hearings in Congress

January 19, 2024

More than 40 international religious freedom advocates [sent a letter](#) to key members of Congress calling for hearings to examine why the U.S. Department of State failed to designate Nigeria and India as Countries of Particular Concern.



Victims of a gunmen attack pray for peace at the internal displaced camp in Bokkos, north central Nigeria, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. Victims of a gunmen attack react at the internal displaced camp upon the arrival of Nigeria Vice President Kashim Shettima, in Bokkos, north central Nigeria, on Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023. Musa Ashoms, commissioner of information and communication for Plateau State, reported 195 deaths due to the attacks. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba)

“Nigeria and India have been rocked by alarming instances of religious violence and persecution,” the Jan. 17 letter to the chairs and ranking members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee states.

The letter—on International Christian Concern letterhead—asserts Nigeria and India both meet the statutory definition for a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act and “should be designated as such.”

“We are disappointed to see the State Department overlook the violence against Christians in Nigeria and India. The U.S. has an opportunity to help end the mass genocide of Christians in Nigeria and pressure India to eradicate its blasphemy laws—and that starts with holding countries accountable for their poor religious freedom conditions,” said McKenna Wendt, advocacy manager for International Christian Concern.

“The U.S. still has a chance to be a global leader in advancing religious freedom in Nigeria and India, and we hope that a congressional hearing would send a message that we are serious about doing so.”

Individuals and organizations signing the letter joined the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) in urging Congress to schedule hearings after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s Jan. 4 announcement of nations designated by the State Department as CPCs or placed on its Special Watch List.

In spite of the Christmas Eve slaughter of Nigerians in predominantly Christian areas and evidence of India’s growing transnational repression of religious minorities, [neither country was designated](#) as a CPC or placed on the Special Watch List.

“There is no justification as to why the State Department did not designate Nigeria or India as a Country of Particular Concern, despite its own reporting and statements. USCIRF calls on Congress to convene a public

hearing on the failure of the State Department to follow our recommendations,” U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Chair Abraham Cooper and Vice Chair Frederick A. Davie said in a joint statement.

The Nigeria-based International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law estimates more than 50,000 Christians have been killed by 2009, and about 18,000 churches and 2,500 Christian schools have been attacked, the Jan. 17 letter notes.



Dozens of houses lay vandalized and burnt during ethnic clashes and rioting in Sugnu, in Manipur, India, June 21, 2023. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri, File)

“In India, state-level anti-conversion laws criminalize the expression of minority religious groups,” the letter states. “Mob violence often goes unchecked.”

In Manipur, between 200 and 400 churches and 3,500 Christian homes have been attacked, and in Uttar Pradesh, more than 400 Christians have been arrested for sharing their faith, the letter notes.

“It is imperative for the United States to actively address these issues and

ensure that the principles of religious freedom are upheld globally," the letter states.

"Accountability and transparency are essential to understanding the State Department's rationale for declining to designate Nigeria and India and CPCs. ... Secretary of State Blinken must answer to Congress and the American people."

In addition to Wendt, individuals who signed the letter include former members of Congress Fred Wolf of Virginia and Dan Burton of Indiana, along with Nina Shea from the Hudson Institute and Nadine Maenza, president of the International Religious Freedom Secretariat.

Organizations endorsing the letter include 21Wilberforce, the Federation of Indian American Christians, Genocide Watch, the Jubilee Campaign and the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa.