

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Ref.: AL NGA 2/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 June 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on minority issues and Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20, 54/14, 53/4, 52/5 and 52/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning: **(1) attacks against Christian women and girls from villages in Borno State; (2) [REDACTED], an adolescent girl who was subjected to forced conversion and child marriage in Nabordo, Bauchi State, and her father [REDACTED] whose parental rights have allegedly been denied; the case of the (3) Shikarkir Abductees and (4) attacks on girls from Kaduna State, who were threatened after rejecting a forced marriage arrangement.** These cases relate to a broader concern over the ongoing and worsening insecurity situation in Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt, notably its human rights implications for persons belonging to Christian and other religious or belief communities, particularly women and girls.

Well-founded allegations of gross human rights violations and abuses, particularly those committed by armed militant groups, notably targeted acts of violence, including abductions, forced marriage and conversions, which are part of a pattern of growing insecurity and instability in the country, as well the failure by authorities to ensure accountability for such violations and abuses, have been the subject of previous communications from the Special Procedures mandate holders, including NGA 3/2020, NGA 4/2020, NGA 2/2021, NGA 1/2023.

We note with concern that no reply has been received to date.

According to the information received:

Worsening security situation in Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt

Nigeria has recently witnessed a surge of violence attributed to various armed and political groups, leading to insecurity and unrest. According to information available, the violence is mainly perpetrated by non-State actors, often by extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and radical Fulani herder militias. The operations of these groups concentrate largely across northern Nigeria and into the country's central region.

The situation is sometimes accompanied or exacerbated by societal and institutional complicity, acquiescence or negligence.

Although there has been some progress in addressing the overall rates of physical and sexual violence in Nigeria, violence is still part of far too many Nigerian women's and girls' lives, with data showing that 21 per cent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence (one in five).

With respect to the situation of religious or belief minorities, we wish to raise serious concern regarding patterns of religiously motivated violence and persecution or otherwise disproportionately targeting persons belonging to religious minority communities within affected federated states or local areas, especially Christians, including women and girls.

Indeed, reports point to Christians in Nigeria being particularly targeted. According to information received, more Christians were killed in Nigeria last year than anywhere else in the world combined, placing the country at the center of a growing persecution crisis: of the 4,849 Christians killed for their faith in 2025 worldwide, 3,490 (approximately 72 per cent) were in Nigeria. Also according to information received, between October 2019 and September 2025, a total of 42,033 civilians were killed in 15,434 attacks. Of these civilians, 28,551 were Christian.

The information submitted to our attention corroborates this concern. In consideration of the relative demographic composition of populations across affected federated states, as well as patterns of violence in identified hotspot areas, Christians face an increased vulnerability to violence. In this regard, reports have noted that in the overwhelmingly Muslim-populated north-central states, between 2020 and 2025, 10,928 Christians and 1,919 Muslims were killed. Among those affected areas, it has further been alleged that in Benue State, identified as a hotspot area within the north-central region, Christians were six times more likely to have been killed in 2025 than Muslims. As further detailed below, this situation may be compounded by structural and legal factors in parts of northern Nigeria, including in the 12 federated states that implement strict forms of Sharia law, where concerns have been raised regarding systemic discrimination against non-Muslim, unequal enjoyment of rights, and conversion from Islam can be severely punished.

While Christians are acutely affected, the security situation and the authorities' failure to act have also affected Nigerians more broadly. As a consequence of the ongoing instability, 3.5 million Nigerians have been chased off their land and now live in camps for internally displaced persons.

According to information received, Christian internally displaced women and girls are especially vulnerable. Pregnant women have faced inadequate food supplies and a lack of medical help. As a result, some babies have been lost both during delivery and as newborns. One internally displaced Christian woman from Mangu Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State, reported that 'women delivered in the rain during attacks and some of the children died. No food for the women, some don't know where their husbands are.'

Some young girls have also reportedly been forced into prostitution, exchanging sexual services for basic necessities such as food. According to a witness in Ngala LGA, Borno State, ‘some people got to have sex with small girls in ... camp so they can get food to eat.’ There are also allegations of both a mother and her daughter being involved in prostitution to earn a living.’ Cases have been documented in Borno State where displaced women and girls have been coerced into sex in exchange for essential assistance. Women living in Internally Displaced camps are at heightened risk of sexual assault, also reportedly involving officials abusing displaced women and girls. Moreover, and according to information received, in some areas such as Ngala LGA, to protect themselves and gain acceptance in the community, female Christians have resorted to disguising themselves by wearing hijabs.

Female-headed households are also prevalent. Women face the grief of losing their husbands, alongside the challenge of being the sole provider for their families. Hygiene challenges include sharing one toilet with multiple households and a lack of access to sanitary supplies as well as single-sex water and sanitation facilities.

Our mandates note that various United Nations entities and mechanisms have issued statements, communications, reports, and other findings related to the security situation in Nigeria, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, former and current UN Special Procedures Mandate-holders, and Treaty Monitoring Bodies (see Annex Reference to International Human Rights Law, below). The situation has also received attention in international fora such as the Universal Periodic Review.

While violence occurs in all parts of the country and, in recent years, violence has increased and spilled into southern states, the northern regions and the Middle Belt remain particularly vulnerable.

The specific cases below highlight some of the alleged abuses and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms:

Recent attacks against civilians, including women and girls

According to information received, on 29 March 2026, at least 27 people were confirmed dead and many others injured following a deadly attack on Angwa Rukuba community in Jos North LGA of Plateau State. The incident occurred on a busy street known as a local gathering point, as residents were returning from Palm Sunday church services. Gunmen, allegedly dressed in military-style attire and riding motorcycles, reportedly carried out the attack.

On 8 and 9 May 2026, recent information received indicate that at least 19 Christians, among them women, including pregnant women, and girls, were killed by militias in two attacks in Plateau state. Survivors recounted that the attackers entered the village in the dark, and moved from house to house, shooting indiscriminately and using machetes against those trying to flee.

On 13 May 2026, a young couple, was reportedly killed at Angwan Ishaku in Barkin Ladi LGA. The attackers allegedly arrived on a motorcycle, opened fire on the couple and others around the area, and immediately fled through the road leading towards the settlements in Fass along the Rakung-Sho road.

On 15 May 2026, armed gunmen carried out coordinated attacks on at least three schools in Oriire LGA, Oyo State, abducting pupils, students, and staff. Preliminary reports indicate that 39 children, including very young pupils, and 7 teachers abducted in Oyo State remain in captivity, while two teachers were killed during the incident. The abductees were reportedly moved toward the Old Oyo National Park, a remote, densely forested region bordering Kwara and Niger States. The affected community lacks basic infrastructure, including electricity and paved roads. Rescue efforts are ongoing, led by state security forces with support from local security structures.

Individual cases:

Case 1

Four weeks after her wedding in 2025, a Christian woman was abducted. She was an adult when she was kidnapped. She and her husband had already been displaced from their home and farmland by armed Fulani herders. Despite the danger, they occasionally risked returning to their fields to gather food. On the day the victim was taken, her husband escorted his elderly father and younger sister back to their new home by motorbike and asked her and her sister-in-law to wait at the old farmhouse. As evening fell, motorbikes approached. Expecting her husband, the women stepped outside and instead encountered armed militants. Knowing they would be shot if they ran, they were forced onto motorbikes and taken away.

The captors brought the women to an abandoned house and separated them. During the night, multiple men reportedly sexually assaulted both women. By the next day, they were moved to a militant camp where other Christians were also held. The women were degraded, beaten, and treated as property. Desperate to end the assaults, the woman stated she was pregnant. When the Christian woman in question later bled because of the injuries she had suffered, the militants believed she was miscarrying. Local folk beliefs around women's blood prompted alarm among the camp leadership. She and another woman were released without ransom.

At first, there was relief and joy in the family. Soon, however, trauma surfaced. the victim developed a profound fear of men, including her husband, which strained their relationship. About two months later, she became pregnant, but new challenges emerged after their daughter's birth. Due to complications during delivery, the child experienced developmental delays. Rumors spread in the community that the baby had been fathered by a militant or was in some way tainted by evil spirits encountered during the abduction. Ostracism followed: some people refused to visit her, and even women from the church avoided entering the house, fearing association. The stigma compounded the original violence by isolating mother and child.

As the situation deteriorated, a local trauma center connected the family with a volunteer provider. The center serves thousands of women each year who have suffered violent persecution because of their faith. Typical challenges include sleeplessness, fear, loneliness, uncertainty about future attacks, and intense stigmatization – often by one’s own community.

Case 2: Shikarkir Abductees

On the evening of 12 November 2025, armed militants reportedly belonging to Boko Haram infiltrated the village of Shikarkir in Borno State, Chibok LGA.

Following this display of force, the insurgents proceeded to the Church of Christ in Nations’ pastor’s residence and abducted 2 of his daughters, [REDACTED], as well as other members of the church including girls.

The abductees were taken to the bush to an unknown and undisclosed location and subjected to acts tantamount to enforced disappearance. Since then, there has not been tangible information about them as the Islamic extremist group has neither called to ask for a ransom nor otherwise.

Authorities have been notified of the incident, but there is reportedly no further information about the ongoing investigation on the fate and whereabouts of the two girls.

Case 3: [REDACTED] and her father Ibrahim Musa Bagel

In April 2024, a 13-year-old girl named [REDACTED], a student at the Government Girls’ Secondary School in Nabordo, Toro LGA, Bauchi State, was forcibly converted and married off to a boy, aged 15, against her will. Efforts by local groups to intervene were met with resistance from the Sharia commission and local police authorities.

After the matter was initially reported to the Commissioner of Police in Bauchi, the police intervened and handed her over to her father, Mr. Ibrahim Musa Bagel. Mr. Bagel took [REDACTED] to stay with his younger brother in Toro for her safety, but she ran away from there to return to her ‘husband’s’ house.

The case has taken a difficult legal turn. [REDACTED], who is alleged to be under the influence of the boy’s family, and two others filed a lawsuit against her own father and the Police for ‘Enforcement of Fundamental Rights’ (Suit No. BA/637/2024). On 26 February 2025, High Court No. 5 in Bauchi delivered a judgment in favor of Dorcas.

The police initially attempted to assist by returning [REDACTED] to her family, but the High Court judgment effectively prevents that. On the other hand, the Sharia commission and local extremist groups have been very active, providing the legal and social backing to keep her in the forced marriage.

An appeal proceeding is now pending at the Court of Appeal in Jos (Appeal No. CA/J/272/2025). Plaintiffs are currently awaiting a date for the hearing from the court in Jos.

The outstanding challenge is that perpetrators, individuals with influence within the community, and extremist leaders routinely exploit social structures to exert intense pressure on victims and their families. They instill fear and terror – often through threats of violence. Perpetrators also manipulate legal loopholes to keep minors unlawfully under their custody, effectively depriving parents of the ability to protect them, as seen in this case.

Case 4

On 13 December 2025, a 16-year-old Christian girl was brutally attacked by armed militants and had her hand cut off after her family rejected a forced marriage proposal by the same militants in a community in Kaduna State.

The victim was first taken to hospital before being referred to a private medical facility for emergency care. Due to the severity of her injuries, she has now been referred to another hospital for further treatment.

The family of the victim called on the local authorities and security agencies to intervene decisively, provide medical support for the victim, and ensure that those arrested are prosecuted.

According to information received, suspects were arrested in connection with the attack, while others escaped.

The attack has heightened fears among Christian residents of that community, with attacks linked to forced marriages and banditry remaining a serious threat in the area.

While we do not wish to prejudice the accuracy of these allegations reported to us, we would like to especially express our grave concern regarding the alleged abduction and sexual assault of girls ; the intimidation by armed groups and subsequent abduction and acts tantamount to enforced disappearance of the church members in Shikarkir; the forced marriage and forced conversion of [REDACTED] and the denial of Ibrahim Musa Bagel's parental rights. We are also very alarmed at the attempted forced marriage of the other girl and the violent attack on her when she refused the oath. We are also disturbed by reports of the inaction and complicity of government officials in the face of these abuses, the slowness of investigations and search actions aimed at determining the fate and whereabouts of abducted girls.

If the above allegations prove to be accurate, they would constitute serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including, but not limited to the right to life, liberty and security of person, to freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom from torture and other forms of inhuman treatment, protection against trafficking for purposes of forced marriage, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, freedom to enter marriage only on the basis of their free and full consent, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to equal protection of the law without any

discrimination, to freedom from arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, to parental rights.

More broadly, these individual cases appear to be indicative of a wider phenomenon across Nigeria: an increasingly deteriorating security situation due to militant violence, such as due to groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and other militant groups, particularly in certain northern states. The security situation and intercommunal relations are also exacerbated by reports of episodes of violence relating to accusations of blasphemy, often fabricated, targeting religious minorities in Nigeria by mob attacks and killings. In the present cases, the alleged victims are women and men, children, and other members of Christian religious communities in Nigeria.

We also express concern about the non-application or limited enforcement of Nigerian Constitutional provisions related to prohibiting the Government of the Federation or of a state from adopting any religion as the official state religion (article 9.10), equality before the law regardless of, inter alia, sex and religion (article 42.1), prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of, inter alia, sex and religion (article 15.2), guarantees for freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 38.1), and freedom of expression (article 39).

We are also concerned about overbreadth, vagueness, and the imposition of criminal and other penalties or sanctions deriving from provisions in Part 4, Chapter 19, Section 204 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, which address acts deemed “injurious to the public” and include offenses relating to religious worship, as well as certain state-level blasphemy codes (e.g., Penal Code of Bauchi State 2022 and Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law of 2000), particularly imposition of the death penalty.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information regarding the status of the investigations and any other efforts to ensure accountability, justice, and safety in the cases of the alleged abduction and sexual assault of Rifkatu; the Shikarkir abductees; the forced marriage and forced conversion of [REDACTED] and the denial of parental rights to Ibrahim Musa Bagel; the attempted forced marriage and violent attack on a minor in the Kaduna State; including information on the entities or persons responsible for conducting the investigation and whether any person has been arrested or prosecuted, and the status of any trial.

3. Please provide information on the measures taken to search for, and establish the fate and whereabouts of [REDACTED], as well as other girls abducted from the Church in Shikarkir, in line with the Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons.
4. Please provide information on, in the context of these cases, Nigeria's efforts to comply with relevant and applicable international human rights obligations, including those arising from articles 2, 6, 7, 9, 14, 17, 18, 23, 26, and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); articles 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); articles 2, 3, 12, 24 and 25 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED); articles 5, 6, 10, and 16 of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and articles 5, 7, 9, 14, 18, 19, 24 and 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), among others.
5. Please provide information on measures taken to combat violence against women and girls, including conflict-related sexual violence and ensure that victim/survivors have effective access to specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and any other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.
6. Please provide information on the status of any laws that affect the exercise of freedom of religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression, including so-called "blasphemy" laws at the national or sub-national level, relevant legal cases, and detail any measures taken to ensure respect for and adherence to Nigeria's international human rights obligations. Please also provide information on the steps the Government has taken to prevent, investigate, and stop mob or militant violence or reprisals.
7. Please provide information on measures undertaken or envisaged to ensure access to humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, particularly women and children, including internally displaced persons, and to facilitate rapid and unimpeded access by humanitarian actors to populations in need by removing any barriers to humanitarian access.
8. Please provide information on any other measures taken by Nigerian authorities at all levels to ensure the protection and the realization of the rights of members of religious minorities to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as provided by in relevant and applicable international human rights instruments, both in the northern Nigerian states and at the federal level.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting website at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations, to safeguard the rights of abductees, victims of sexual violence, and other victims of forced conversion and marriages, or attempted forced conversion and marriages, particularly those who have not been reunited with their families or parents and those who remain underage, as well as persons belonging to religious minority communities and other vulnerable groups within particular affected federated states or local areas, from irreparable harm and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we wish to draw your Excellency's attention to the relevant international human rights instruments, norms, and standards relevant to these allegations.

First, Nigeria acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 29 July 1993 without reservations.

Article 2.1 obligates States Parties to respect and ensure the rights of all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction, "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Article 7 protects the right of persons from being subjected to "torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Article 9 recognizes the right to liberty and security of the person. Article 17 recognizes the right of persons to be protected from "arbitrary or unlawful interference" with their "privacy, family, home or correspondence...".

These allegations also cumulatively raise grave concerns, especially regarding compliance with article 18 of the ICCPR, which recognizes the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This includes the freedom to "have or to adopt a religion or belief of [their] choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest [their] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching." Furthermore, no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice. In the case of the minor alleged victims, as well as their parents, article 18.4 of the ICCPR also requires respect for the liberty of parents and legal guardians to "ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."

The Human Rights Committee has noted in general comment No. 22, paragraph 3, that article 18 of the ICCPR "does not permit any limitations whatsoever on the freedom of thought and conscience or on the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice." While the Committee recognized that any other limitations on that freedom may be asserted under article 18(3) to protect public safety, order, health, morals, and the fundamental rights and freedom of others, restrictions must meet the test of legality, proportionality, and may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner (paragraph 8). Of relevance here, the Committee stated that the liberty of parents and guardians to ensure the religious and moral education cannot be restricted (Ibid).

Similarly, article 19 protects the right of persons to hold opinions without interference. This right includes the freedom to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." While that right carries it with "special duties and responsibilities," it may only be subject to certain restrictions in accordance with the requirements of article 19(3) of the Covenant.

We also refer to article 20 of the ICCPR, which states that any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. However, as stated in the “Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence” (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4), article 20 of the Covenant requires a high threshold because, as a matter of fundamental principle, limitation of speech must remain an exception (paragraph 18). In the context of religious minorities, States have a responsibility to ensure space for minorities to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms (paragraph 38).

As stated by the Human Rights Committee, laws limiting the right to freedom of expression must themselves be compatible with the ICCPR (CCPR/C/GC/34). We stress that the protection of religion itself does not and therefore cannot be used to limit the right to freedom of expression. International human rights law protects individuals from intolerance and violence based on their religion or belief, but it does not protect the religion or belief itself. Criminalization of blasphemy is incompatible with the ICCPR (Ibid., paragraph 48). Furthermore, it is incompatible with article 19 to prevent or punish commentary on religious doctrine or tenets of faith (Ibid.). Any such limitation must be understood in the light of the universality, inalienability, and interdependence of human rights and the principle of non-discrimination.

With regard to the acts or omissions of non-state actors, which would encompass terrorist or militant groups, this obligation also requires the State “to ensure that persons are protected from any acts by private persons or entities that would impair the enjoyment of the freedoms of opinion and expression to the extent that these Covenant rights are amenable to application between private persons or entities” (Ibid., para. 7).

Article 23 entitles the family to protection by society and the State, and to ensure that no marriage is entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses. In addition, article 24 requires every child to have “such measures of protection as are required by [his or her] status as a minor, on the part of [his or her] family, society and the State.”

As stated by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 19 (CCPR/GC/19), while the Covenant does not establish a specific marriageable age either for men or women, “that age should be such as to enable each of the intending spouses to give his or her free and full personal consent in a form and under conditions prescribed by law” (paragraph 4). Later treaties that Nigeria has signed and ratified (see below) provide even more applicable standards that prohibit child marriage altogether and give it no legal effect.

Finally, we would like to bring to Your Excellency’s Government’s attention the international standards regarding the protection of the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities, in particular article 27 of the ICCPR, which guarantees, *inter alia*, minorities the right to profess and practice their own religion.

In this regard, article 1 of the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities establishes the obligation of States to “protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall

encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity,” while article 2 recognizes that persons belonging to religious minorities “have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination,” and article 4 requires States to take measures “to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.”

Article 5 of the Declaration requires national policies and programmes to be planned and implemented with “due regard” for the “legitimate interests” of persons belonging to minorities. This includes any programmes of cooperation and assistance among States.

Finally, articles 6 and 7, respectively, call upon States to “cooperate on questions relating to persons belonging to minorities, *inter alia*, exchanging information and experiences, in order to promote mutual understanding and confidence” and “in order to promote respect for the rights set forth in the present Declaration.”

Given that the insecurity and violence in northern Nigeria stems, at least in part, from transnational armed or terrorist groups that operate across borders, these latter provisions are particularly relevant for Nigeria and the broader West African region.

In addition to the Declaration, the Human Rights Committee has stated in general comment No. 23(1994) (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.5) that, although the rights protected under article 27 are individual rights, they depend in “turn on the ability of the minority group to maintain its culture, language, or religion” (paragraph 6.2). Accordingly, “positive measures by States may also be necessary to protect the identity of a minority and the rights of its members to enjoy and develop their culture and language and to practice their religion, in community with the other members of the group” (Ibid).

As a corollary to the ICCPR, we would like to refer Your Excellency’s Government to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Nigeria on 29 July 1993 without reservations, which in its various articles provides for non-discrimination on the basis of, *inter alia*, sex and religion (article 2), the equal rights of men and women (article 3), for marriage to be entered into only with the free consent of the intended spouses, as well as special protection must be accorded to mothers and children (article 10), the right of everyone to the highest standard of physical and mental health, with specific reference for healthy development of the child (article 12), and the right to education, including the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children (article 13).

In addition, we would like to refer Your Excellency’s Government to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria signed on 13 April 1984 and ratified on 13 June 1985, without reservation. CEDAW obligates States Parties, *inter alia*, to condemn discrimination against women (article 2), requires them to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women (article 3), to eliminate prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the

inferiority of either of the sexes (article 5), to suppress all forms of trafficking in women (article 6), to eliminate discrimination in the field of education (article 10), to ensure women's access to services in connection with pregnancy, confinement, and the post-natal period, as well as nutrition during pregnancy and lactation (article 12), and ensure that the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have "no legal effect" (article 16).

With respect to the lack of remedies and the conduct of certain public officials in Nigeria's executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the CEDAW Committee considers that States parties are under an obligation to act with due diligence to investigate all crimes perpetrated against women and girls, to prosecute and punish perpetrators, and to provide effective reparations without delay, including in the context sexual assault and rape. Failure by States Parties to investigate allegations of violations could in and of itself give rise to a separate breach, and where public officials or State agents have committed violations, States Parties may not relieve perpetrators of personal responsibility (C.f. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, paras. 15 and 18). In CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, the Committee also emphasized that under general international law, as well as under international treaties, the acts or omissions of private actors (e.g., terrorist or militant groups) may engage the international responsibility of the State in certain cases that are either (1) attributable to the State or (2) implicate its due diligence obligations to ensure States parties take all "appropriate measures" to eliminate discrimination against women (paragraph 24).

That CEDAW General Recommendation updated former general recommendations, such as those found under general comment No. 19 (1992) (contained in document A/47/38) on Violence against Women, wherein forced marriage was explicitly characterized as incompatible with States Parties' obligations under CEDAW. The Committee concluded, under articles 2(f), 5, and 10(c), that gender-based violence stemmed from "[t]raditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion, such as family violence and abuse, forced marriage, dowry deaths, acid attacks and female circumcision" (paragraph 11).

Relatedly, in general comment No. 21 (1994) on Equality in Marriage and Family Relations, the Committee considered that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years: "When men and women marry, they assume important responsibilities. Consequently, marriage should not be permitted before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act. According to the World Health Organization, when minors, particularly girls, marry and have children, their health can be adversely affected and their education is impeded. As a result their economic autonomy is restricted" (paragraph 36).

Even in those countries that provide for different ages for men and women, based on customary or religious law, the Committee observed that such provisions assume (incorrectly) that "women have a different rate of intellectual development from men, or that their stage of physical and intellectual development at marriage is immaterial," and further emphasized that those provisions should be abolished: "The State can thereby ensure compliance with the Convention and establish equality between partners, a minimum age for marriage, prohibition of bigamy and polygamy and the protection of the rights of children" (paragraphs 38 39). Finally, in its Joint general recommendation No. 31/general comment No. 18 (2014)

(CEDAW/C/GC/31/REV.1 & CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1) on Harmful Practices, the Committee, along with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (below), stated, “Child marriage also contributes to higher rates of school dropout, especially among girls, forced exclusion from school and an increased risk of domestic violence, in addition to limiting the enjoyment of the right to freedom of movement” (paragraph 22).

Accordingly, they called upon States to “adopt or amend legislation with a view to effectively addressing and eliminating harmful practices”, including forced or child marriage, to ensure it is in full compliance with relevant obligations under, CEDAW and other international human rights standards and that legislation “takes precedence over customary, traditional or religious laws that allow, condone or prescribe any harmful practice” (paragraph 55(b)).

Furthermore, regarding the allegations concerning girl children, we would like to particularly refer Your Excellency’s Government to Nigeria’s obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Nigeria signed and ratified on 26 January 1990 and 19 April 1991, respectively, without reservations.

Among other provisions, the CRC requires non-discrimination on the basis of, *inter alia*, sex and religion (article 2), the right of parents to provide appropriate direction and guidance to their children (article 5), respect for the right to life (article 6), the right of the child to know and be cared for by their parents (article 7), right of the child to an identity (article 8), non-separation from parents with limited exceptions (article 9), freedom of expression (article 13), freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (article 14), protection from arbitrary and unlawful interference with the child’s privacy, family, home, or correspondence (article 16), the right of parents to have primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children (article 18), protection of the child from all forms of violence, including sexual abuse (article 19), the right to health (article 24), the right to education (article 28), in States in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, the right to enjoy his or her culture or to profess or practice his or her religion (article 30), protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (article 34), protection from abduction, sale, or traffic in children “for any purpose or in any form” (article 35), protection from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (article 37), protection of children in armed conflict (article 38), and the obligation of States to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims (article 39).

Furthermore, we also wish to respectfully remind Your Excellency’s Government that Nigeria is also a State Party to the CRC’s Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which it signed and ratified in 2000 and 2010, respectively. Among other provisions, the Optional Protocol requires States to ensure that the sexual exploitation of a child is fully covered in its criminal or penal law (article 3), to adopt appropriate measures to protect the rights and interests of child victims (article 8), and to adopt or strengthen, implement and disseminate laws, administrative measures, social policies and programmes to prevent such offences (article 9).

In the latest country report following a visit to Nigeria (A/HRC/41/46/Add.1), the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, noted that Nigeria remains a source, transit and destination country for victims of trafficking,

for the purpose of both sexual and labour exploitation, as well as other forms of exploitation (paragraph 77). She noted that women and girls from north-eastern states were abducted, and some of them were subjected to domestic servitude, forced labour, and sexual slavery through forced marriage to militants (paragraph 15). Thus, she called upon the State to increase “joint efforts [...] including in cooperation with the international community, to identify and refer to the appropriate protection services victims and potential victims of trafficking in camps for internally displaced persons and in host communities, and to integrate anti-trafficking responses into asylum procedures” (paragraph 80).

We would also like to draw Your Excellency’s Government’s attention to the obligations set out in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (The Palermo Protocol), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Nigeria signed and ratified the Palermo Protocol on 13 December 2000 and 28 June 2001, respectively, without reservations. Among other provisions, exploitation is defined to include, at a minimum, “the exploitation of prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (article 3(a)). Further, the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child, defined to mean any person under the age of eighteen years of age, for the purpose of exploitation is considered “trafficking in persons” (article 3(c) and (d)). In this regard, States have an obligation to establish comprehensive policies, programmes, and other measures to “prevent and combat trafficking in persons” and to “protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization” (article 9).

Additionally, we would like to remind Your Excellency’s Government of the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CAT), which Nigeria signed and ratified without reservation on 28 July 1988 and 28 June 2001, respectively. While recognizing the precarious security situation, per article 2, each State Party is required to take effective legislative, administrative, judicial, or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction. Moreover, no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture (Ibid.).

While recognizing that the Convention imposes obligations on States parties and not on individuals, the Committee Against Torture in general comment No. 2 (2008) (CAT/C/GC/2) said in instances where State authorities “know or have reasonable grounds to believe that acts of torture or ill-treatment are being committed by non-State officials or private actors and they fail to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish such non-State officials or private actors consistently with the Convention, the State bears responsibility [...] under the Convention for consenting to or acquiescing in such impermissible acts” (paragraph 18).

We wish to recall that certain human rights and fundamental freedoms can never be derogated from even in cases of emergency, including article 6 (right to life), article 7 (prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, or of medical or scientific experimentation without consent), article 8, paragraphs 1 and 2 (prohibition of slavery, slave-trade and servitude), article 11 (prohibition of

imprisonment because of inability to fulfil a contractual obligation), article 15 (the principle of legality in the field of criminal law, i.e. the requirement of both criminal liability and punishment being limited to clear and precise provisions in the law that was in place and applicable at the time the act or omission took place, except in cases where a later law imposes a lighter penalty), article 16 (the recognition of everyone as a person before the law), and article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion). In this connection, of further special relevance is the Committee's highlighting of the opinion that "the international protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities includes elements that must be respected in all circumstances. This is reflected in the prohibition against genocide in international law, in the inclusion of a non-discrimination clause in article 4 itself (paragraph 1), as well as in the non-derogable nature of article 18" (paragraph 13(c)).

Finally, we would also like to refer Your Excellency's Government to S/RES/2349, adopted by the UN Security Council on 31 March 2017, on Peace and Security in Africa. That resolution called upon Governments in the Region to take further measures to address social, political, economic and gender inequalities, and environmental challenges, and to develop strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts, and address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, including by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural and education leaders, in order to help address the conditions which have enabled the emergence and survival of Boko Haram and ISIL (paragraph 22).

We would also like to bring to the attention of Your Excellency's Government other relevant declarations, resolutions, and decisions made by United Nations or regional bodies and mechanisms.

First, articles 2(b) and 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, defines violence against women as encompassing, but not limited to, "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution," and further calls upon States to condemn violence against women and that they should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination.

Article 4(c) also encourages States to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons.

Article 4(d) calls upon States to develop "penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to punish and redress the wrongs caused to women who are subjected to violence", who should be provided with "access to mechanisms of justice...and to just and effective remedies for the harm that they have suffered."

Article 4(f) calls upon States to develop "preventive" approaches and all those measures of a "legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence, and ensure that the re-victimization

of women does not occur because of laws insensitive to gender considerations, enforcement practices or other interventions.”

For child victims and survivors, article 4(g) calls upon States to ensure that children have “specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.”

This not only applies to non-State actors but also to State officials under article 4(i). The States must “[t]ake measures to ensure that law enforcement officers and public officials responsible for implementing policies to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women receive training to sensitize them to the needs of women.”

The measures should also include, under article 4(m), cooperation with our mandates insofar as States should “[submit] reports as required under relevant human rights instruments of the United Nations, information pertaining to violence against women and measures taken to implement the present Declaration.”

Finally, recognizing the important role that civil society organizations have played in bringing these alleged cases before our mandates’ attention, article 4(o) and (p), respectively, calls upon States to “[r]ecognize the important role of the women's movement and non-governmental organizations world wide in raising awareness and alleviating the problem of violence against women” and to “[f]acilitate and enhance the work of the women's movement and non-governmental organizations and cooperate with them at local, national and regional levels.”

Additionally, we would further like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 53/23, adopted on 21 July 2023, on Child, early and forced marriage. That resolution expressed deep concern about reports of forced religious conversion and forced marriage imposed by armed groups and strongly condemned attacks on and abductions of women and girls, including terrorist attacks, and urged States to protect them from attacks. The resolution further recognized that forced marriage may result in situations that meet the international legal definition of slavery.

We would also like to refer to the complementary General Assembly resolution 79/158, adopted on 19 December 2024, on Child, early and forced marriage. Specifically, we would like to refer to paragraph 37, whereby the General Assembly called upon States to strengthen prevention and protection measures for women and girls, particularly girls who are victims of, or at risk of, abduction, trafficking, and forced religious conversion by armed groups and other non-State actors in the context of child, early, and forced marriage.

Notably, the Human Rights Council Resolution (A/HRC/RES/61/25), adopted on 24 March 2026, expressed deep concern at the increasing number of acts of violence directed against individuals, including persons belonging to religious minorities in various parts of the world and further called upon states to “take all necessary and appropriate action, in conformity with international human rights obligations, to combat hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion

motivated by intolerance based on religion or belief, and any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, with particular regard to persons belonging to religious minorities in all parts of the world.”

At the regional level, Nigeria is a party to the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which it signed on 31 August 1982 and ratified on 22 June 1983. The Charter obligates States to ensure every individual enjoys the rights and freedom without distinction of any kind, including on the basis of sex and religion (article 2), to ensure freedom of conscience, and the profession and free practice of religion (article 8), and to ensure the elimination of discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and child (article 18).

The Charter also includes regional obligations related to eliminating harmful social and cultural practices that are predominant in Africa, harmonizing the rights and duties of individuals and the family, fostering the importance of national and community solidarity or positive African cultural values, addressing the specific context of armed conflict or humanitarian situations, and vesting interpretative and enforcement mechanisms in the African Commission and Human and Peoples’ Rights or the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, respectively. Furthermore, both the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights have issued opinions affirming state responsibility for failure to address mass killings, and ordering investigation and protection in that regard (*Solomon Mfa and Others v Federal Republic of Nigeria and Others* (ECW/CCJ/APP/11/16; ECW/CCJ/JUD/06/19) [2019] ECOWASCJ 44 (26 February 2019)) or called upon the state to, *inter alia*, take all necessary institutional, political, and socio-economic measures to guarantee access to, and ensure safety and security of all persons from situations that threaten their life, physical, and social security (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, ‘The African Commission expresses concern about recurring incidents of violence and calls for concerted action to ensure safety and security of people in Nigeria’ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (15 April 2023)), respectively.

Taken together, the domestic, international, and regional legal frameworks set the standards by which Nigeria should abide to provide appropriate redress and accountability to all persons within its territory or jurisdiction, including women and girls, who have been harmed by the human rights violations that have allegedly taken place.

With regard to the alleged enforced disappearance, if confirmed, it would amount to violations of articles 2, 3, 12, 24 and 25 of the ICPPED and also articles 6, 7, 9 and 16 of the ICCPR, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3). Moreover, it would entail a violation of article 7, read alone and in conjunction with article 2(3) of the ICCPR with regard to the relatives of the disappeared person. In this respect, we also make reference to general comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the ICCPR, which states, *inter alia*, that extreme forms of arbitrary detention that are themselves life-threatening, in particular enforced disappearances, violate the right to personal liberty and personal security. We also make reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, in particular articles 2, 3, 13, and 19. We refer your Excellency’s Government to the Statement on non-State actors in the context of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons

from Enforced Disappearance (CED/C/10/Rev.1), the Guiding principles for the search for disappeared persons, in particular principle 4. We wish to recall the articles 4, 5, 6 read in conjunction with articles 1 and 2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and also direct your Excellency's Government to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Guidelines on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in Africa. Furthermore, we refer to the report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances visit to the African Union judicial and human rights organs and other subregional bodies, which makes recommendations to States to ensure the implementation of their obligations to investigate, and to carry out search activities in relation to, acts tantamount to enforced disappearance perpetrated by non-State actors (A/HRC/57/54/Add.1). Lastly, we draw your attention to the Working Group's thematic report: Standards and public policies for an effective investigation of enforced disappearances (A/HRC/45/13/Add.3).

Finally, we would like to reiterate that we stand ready to assist Your Excellency's Government in relation to any efforts towards strengthening the implementation of existing domestic legislation and constitutional provisions protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as any other measures to ensure compliance with Nigeria's international human rights obligations under the international human rights instruments which it has ratified and acceded to.