

**Testimony by Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson,
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on African Affairs
July 10, 2012
“U.S. Policy Toward Nigeria: West Africa's Troubled Titan”**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Nigeria. Since I served in Nigeria as a Foreign Service Officer at the beginning of my career, I have closely tracked the country’s political and economic development. And for good reason: what happens in Nigeria affects us all, and that is why it is one of our most important strategic partners in sub-Saharan Africa. Let me mention a few facts that illustrate this point. At 160 million people, Nigeria is home to one out of every five sub-Saharan Africans. Its diverse and dynamic people are the greatest source of its strength, with the sixth largest Muslim population in the world, and Nigeria is the world’s largest country to have approximately equal number of Christians and Muslims. It is the largest African contributor to international peacekeeping operations, and the fifth largest in the world. Over one million Nigerian and Nigerian-

Americans live in the United States, constituting the largest sub-Saharan diaspora group in the United States.

Nigeria is a dominant economic and financial force across West Africa. It is the second largest recipient of American direct private sector investment in Africa, and the fifth largest supplier of crude oil to the United States. Nigeria is our largest trading partner in Africa, and our largest export market for wheat. Nigeria has the largest economy in West Africa, contributing over fifty percent of West Africa's GDP, and is the largest producer in West Africa of nearly all major agricultural products. It is also Africa's largest oil producer and with abundant reserves of natural gas. These facts are unmistakable: a stable, prosperous Nigeria can be a powerful force to promote stability and prosperity all over Africa.

Reading recent headlines, there is also no doubt that Nigeria's prospects are tempered by the many challenges it faces. Decades of poor governance have seriously degraded the country's health, education and transportation infrastructure. Despite hundreds of billions of dollars in oil revenue, Nigeria has virtually no functioning rail system and only

half of its population has access to electricity. Nearly 100 million Nigerians live on less than one dollar a day, and nearly one million children die each year before their fifth birthday. Public opinion polls and news reports suggest that there is a strong sentiment throughout Nigeria, especially in the North, that Nigeria's poverty is a result of government neglect, corruption, and abuse.

This brings us to the subject of today's hearing about "West Africa's Troubled Titan." The inability of the government to address the needs of the people, to grow the economy and to generate jobs generates a sense of hopelessness among many. It also helps feed a popular narrative among some that the government does not care. Boko Haram capitalizes on popular frustrations with the nation's leaders, poor government, ineffective service delivery, and dismal living conditions for many northerners. Over the past year, Boko Haram has created widespread insecurity across northern Nigeria, inflamed tensions between various communities, disrupted development activities, and frightened off investors. The near daily spate of bombings and attacks

that have claimed the lives of thousands of Nigerians is unacceptable, and the United States strongly condemns this violence.

Before we prescribe actions, it is important that we understand what Boko Haram is and what it is not. The truth is that our understanding is limited at best. Boko Haram is composed of at least two organizations, a larger organization focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government, and a smaller more dangerous group that is increasingly sophisticated and increasingly lethal. This smaller group has developed links with AQIM and has a broader, anti-Western agenda. This group has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of westerners and for the attacks on the UN building in Abuja. They also bomb churches to aggravate ethnic and religious tensions in an attempt to sow chaos and increase their public profile. Complicating the picture further is the tendency of some officials to blame Boko Haram for all of the bank robberies and local vendettas occurring in the North when these should be attributed to common criminals and political thugs.

To help expose and isolate the most dangerous leaders of Boko Haram, the U.S. Government recently designated three individuals as Specially Designated Global Terrorists – Abubakar Shekau [SHAY-cow], Khalid al-Barnawi [ahl-bar-NOW-ee], and Abubakar Adam Kamar [KAHM-bar]. Shekau is the most visible leader of Boko Haram, while al-Barnawi and Kamar have ties to Boko Haram and have close links with AQIM. These designations demonstrate our resolve to diminish the capacity of Boko Haram to execute violent attacks.

Boko Haram has grown stronger and increasingly more sophisticated over the past three years, and defeating Boko Haram will require a sophisticated and comprehensive domestic response. Security efforts aimed at containing Boko Haram's violence must be targeted, tempered, and humane. The Nigerian government must avoid excessive violence and human rights abuses, and make better use of police and intelligence services to identify, arrest, and prosecute those responsible for Boko Haram's violent acts. Boko Haram thrives because of social and economic problems in the north that the government must also address. A coordinated government effort to provide responsible,

accountable governance to all Nigerians, while creating opportunities for economic growth, will diminish the political space in which Boko Haram operates. We must also remember ongoing dangers in other parts of the country, particularly the Niger Delta. We have been heartened by the success of Nigeria's 2009 amnesty program to reduce militancy in the Delta, but there are still serious concerns about accountable governance and economic development in the region. The Niger Delta is witnessing alarming rates of oil bunkering, costing the government, according to the Minister of Finance, almost 20 percent in potential government revenue. The U.N. Environmental Program released a report last year (2011) detailing the billions of dollars worth of environmental damage the Niger Delta has suffered over the years, and we encourage the Nigerian government to act upon the report's recommendations for remediation. In addition, we are committed to partnering with the Nigerian government to enhance regional maritime security and to reducing the inflow of small arms and light weapons into the region.

U.S. engagement with the Nigerian government is done in the context of partnership, and reflects the comprehensive, whole-of-government approach that is consistent with the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. The forum for this engagement is the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission. The various working groups of the BNC, which have met over 10 times since its launch in April 2010, have provided us regular forums to conduct frank exchanges with senior Nigerian officials on issues of governance, energy and investment, agriculture, regional security cooperation and the Niger Delta. On June 4 and 5, Deputy Secretary Burns led the U.S. delegation at the highest-level meeting of the BNC since the Commission's inauguration. The Nigerian delegation, led by Foreign Minister Ashiru, included representatives at all levels of the Nigerian government – including governors, legislators, military officers, and federal government officials.

To reinforce the linkages among the working groups, particularly as they relate to addressing insecurity in northern Nigeria, the June meeting of the BNC conducted concurrent meetings of four working

groups: Governance, Transparency and Integrity; Energy and Investment; Agriculture and Food Security; and Regional Security Cooperation. One impressive outcome of the working groups is that it sparked serious conversations among various members, branches, and levels of the Nigerian public and private sector. The June meeting presented new opportunities for collaboration. Working with Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and its Independent National Electoral Commission, we agreed to help build transparency and accountability from the local to national levels. We agreed to encourage Nigeria's laudable reform efforts that attract private investment in the power and agriculture sectors. And we agreed to work together to increase public confidence in the ability of the Nigerian military and police units to respond effectively, appropriately, and professionally to the violent extremism threat.

I believe now more than ever that the forces holding Nigeria together are stronger than those trying to tear it apart. Nigeria is up to the task, and the opportunities for growth are endless. We should remember that it has a large and very talented professional class, an

abundance of natural resources, and a strategic location along the West African coast. Nigeria held its most credible national election last year since it returned to democratic rule. There are committed reformers in the economic sector, and leadership in the Ministry of Justice, the judiciary, and the EFCC who are committed to taking on corruption. They are the future of Nigeria. And in partnership together, we must not let the forces succeed who seek to bring Nigeria down.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I welcome any questions you may have.