

**Statement of Ayodele Joseph ORITSEJAFOR,
President of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
Oversight Hearing
Before the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights
On “U.S. Policy Toward Nigeria: West Africa’s Troubled Titan
July 10, 2012**

Chairman Smith and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for the opportunity today to address this committee and for your interest in the situation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and especially the increase in terrorist attacks targeting Christians and Christian Institutions. Just this last weekend, 58 people were killed in Christian villages in Jos, including a federal senator and a state lawmaker. Boko Haram already claimed responsibility for these coordinated attacks against the Christian community in Jos, and they also reaffirmed their earlier position saying that “for Christians in Nigeria to know peace they must accept Islam as the only true religion.” Boko Haram is not only a northern problem, but a Nigerian problem with global implications. Nigeria is not a country divided by North and South, but a country divided between those who support freedom and equality in the eyes of the law, and those who promote persecution and violence as a means to an end.

To an outside observer it may appear as though Boko Haram is not a monolithic group; that it is fragmented and disorganized, but I am here today to give you the Nigerian perspective. Since its creation, the Boko Haram network has never hidden its agenda or intentions. Boko Haram has openly stated that they reject the Nigerian State and its Constitution and seek to impose Shari’ah Law. To this end, Boko Haram has waged a systematic campaign of terror and violence. They

seek an end to western influence and a removal of the Christian presence in Nigeria.

This is outright terrorism, not legitimate political activity or the airing of grievances. By refusing to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization, the United States is sending a very clear message, not just to the Federal Government of Nigeria, but to the world – that the murder of innocent Christians, and Muslims who reject Islamism, and I make a clear distinction here between Islam and Islamism, are acceptable losses. It is hypocritical for the United States and the international community to say that they believe in freedom and equality, when their actions do not support those who are being persecuted.

A non-designation for the group only serves to hamper the cause of justice, and has emboldened Boko Haram to continue to strike out at those who are denied equal protection under the law.

The frequency, lethality and sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks raise disturbing questions regarding training and logistical support they have received from other like minded international terrorist networks. In January 2012 the United Nations Security Council published a report stating that Boko Haram members from Nigeria received training in AQIM camps located in Mali and Chad during the summer of 2011. That same summer Boko Haram carried out a bold terrorist attack against the United Nations building in Abuja. Boko Haram did not hesitate in claiming responsibility for the attack, nor has it ever hesitated in claiming responsibility for its ongoing attacks against police, military, local businesses, and increasingly churches and Christian institutions.

In Nigeria, my people are dying every single day, and it is only a matter of time before the international terrorist links and anti-democratic Islamist agenda of Boko Haram turns its attention to the United States. In fact, this may already be a reality, in April of 2012 the NYPD

learned that a U.S. resident living on the East Coast had sent surveillance, including maps and photographs of lower Manhattan and the Holland and Lincoln tunnels to an alleged member of Boko Haram based in Nigeria.

State Department designated Boko Haram's current leader; Abubaker Shekau and 2 others as "specially designated terrorists", but fell short of designating the organization. This would be the equivalent of designating Bin Laden as a terrorist, but failing to designate Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization.

Although I am aware that the designation of Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization is not the final solution to all of Nigeria's problems, yet it is an important first step towards restoring the confidence of those who support freedom and equality in the eyes of the law. We too, want to have freedom, freedom of religion, freedom to worship as we choose without fear, we want to have justice, based in equality and not driven by discriminatory religious practices. Let me remind us that this is not about economics but about an ideology that has a history of sponsoring genocide across the globe. As Boko Haram increasingly turns towards genocide through the systematic targeting of Christians and Christian institutions in pursuit of its goals, history will not forget the actions or the inactions of your great nation. I thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to the continuing our strong partnership with America.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.