Written Statement

Submitted to the

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

Hearing on *"Religious Freedom in Nigeria: Extremism and Government Inaction"*

Statement of Mike Jobbins, Search for Common Ground

Wednesday, June 9, 2021 - 10:30 AM - 12:00pm

Held via Zoom

Chairwoman Bhargava, Vice Chair Perkins, Members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, I thank you for holding this hearing to draw urgent attention to the terrible violence affecting rural Nigeria, and for your work and the work of this Commission in ensuring a focus on human rights around the world.

My name is Mike Jobbins, Vice President of Global Affairs and Partnerships at Search for Common Ground. Search for Common Ground (Search) has worked in Nigeria since 2004 and currently has six offices across the country. Search works to advance religious tolerance, transform violent extremism, promote reconciliation across dividing lines, strengthening community-led security, and strengthening democratic governance. We often work in close cooperation with, and with support from, USAID and the State Department as well as many others.[1] While this testimony is informed by my work with Search for Common Ground, the opinions and recommendations expressed are my own.

1. DYNAMICS OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Violence and insecurity have had a profound impact on the Nigerian people. Most Nigerians do not feel the country is secure – this percentage jumps to more than four in five when only considering residents of northern Nigeria.[2] There is significant public support for political, religious, and ethnic tolerance in Nigeria. 86% of Nigerians say they "would not care" if their neighbors were from a different religious group, and by a ratio of 2-to-1, citizens think that there is more that unite Nigerians as a people (62%) than divides them (36%). Almost three quarters (72%) say that diversity is a source of strength.[3]

Yet, Nigeria has a history of armed groups using ethnic and religious identity to seek to mobilize support and justify their actions. A soon-to-be published study from Mercy Corps and leading Nigerian civil society groups based on survey research clarifies that, while secular or material interests are at the core of many of the disputes and claims of armed groups, the nature of the violence falls across religious lines and creates incentives for political and other leaders to adopt religious or ethnic language to "spur" action and rally support. The study also found that support

for violence as "self-defense" increases dramatically where it is perceived that state actors are unable to provide security.[4]

Over the past 12 months, there have been 2658 attacks by armed actors in Nigeria, killing 8668 people and displacing hundreds of thousands, with varying links to ideologically motivated extremist groups.[5] Another way to look at that, is that on one person dies in this violence, every hour of every day. Armed non-state actors – from Boko Haram to communal militias to cultist groups are responsible for 98% of deaths.[6] There is little trust in public security or accountability apparatus.[7] At the same time, tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands of Nigerians – religious leaders, community leaders, youth, women, local government officials – are working often at great personal risk and sacrifice to bring an end to this suffering, and international support to these Nigerian-led efforts can help take them to scale.

I will focus on two conflicts: violence linked to the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency in the North East zone, and rural communal violence and banditry often characterized as "farmer-herder," which was prominent in North Central, but now is prevalent in many areas. I will focus primarily on recent events over the past six months in each context.

1.1. Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

As we look over the past decade, we can see that the degree of violence linked to the Boko Haram insurgency has undergone cycles of escalation and decrease over the years, though in every case, urgent. Now, it appears that what has been gained is currently being lost. Momentum and tactics have shifted with the emergence of two factions from within the Boko Haram armed movement, JAS[8] and ISWAP, with the latter noted particularly for targeting civilians based on faith.

While the government maintains control in most Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno State, in many cases the control is largely constrained to the LGA centers i.e. at times highly fortified cantonment towns surrounded by a trench. For example, if we look at Dikwa LGA, the town is heavily fortified, a garrison of soldiers are entrenched to maintain security of the population and thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Aid is brought via helicopter because the roads are insecure. There is in essence a siege dynamic. We estimate that outside of these garrison towns, a significant population lives under ISWAP control.

As in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, ISWAP tactics have focused particularly on attacking the government while trying to establish a degree governance and encouraging people to remain under their rule. There are credible and ongoing reports of attacks specifically targeting Christians, including a practice of so-called "stop and search" whereby presumed ISWAP combatants stop public transport vehicles: busses, taxis, ask for passengers' identity cards, and abduct or kill those who are assumed to be Christian. While anecdotal, these kinds of attacks and explicit religious targeting seems to be increasing since the last quarter of 2020.

It is not obvious to us that ISWAP is receiving significant financial or material support from within our outside Nigeria, apart from the regional trade in weapons and illicit goods. There is speculation that some fighters displaced from the Middle East have arrived in Nigeria, and there are reports from the Nigerian Government to have identified some financiers. Still, it appears plausible that –

like Boko Haram – ISWAP can sustain operations using captured military equipment, looted goods, and the tax base of people living under their control.

1.2. Escalating Banditry, Rural and Intercommunal Violence

Outside of the North East, we are seeing shocking escalations of violence in other geopolitical zones – North Central, North West, and increasingly in South South, South East and South West. To cite only a few events of the past few weeks:

- Four weeks ago, the most respected open-source conflict tracker, ACLED, warned that abductions and forced disappearances were increasing dramatically, with more than 500 since the start of last year in a "booming kidnapping for ransom industry" by unidentified gunmen, communal militias, Fulani ethnic or pastoralist militia, Boko Haram/ISWAP and others.[9]
- Three weeks ago, in Plateau State (North Central) 14 people were killed in the Dong neighborhood in the city of Jos, mostly women and children and successive attacks unfolded in Barkin Ladi. The scale of the violence in a major city that had been relatively calm in recent years was shocking.
- Two weeks ago, a wave of attacks began in Benue State (North Central) that left more than 28 dead and prompted the State Governor to issue a call – delivered on a Sunday at church – for civilians to take up bows and arrows, machetes, and guns.[10]
- Last week, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) sounded the alarm about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Zamfara State (North West) and plight of more than 120,000 displaced peopled as "occasional clashes between farmers and herders… has now evolved into generalized random violence by armed groups, who use kidnapping and plundering as a lucrative source of income."[11]
- This this week, in Igangan in (Oyo State, South West), several people were killed by unidentified gunmen, after six months of rising tensions between Yoruba and Hausa Fulani, and a self-defense groups expelled ethnic Fulani and Hausa from the town.

Across these disparate near-daily attacks, we would argue that there are three motivations or drivers of the violent groups:[12]

- *Criminal enterprises and banditry.* Armed bands are operating with increasing sophistication, fueled by rising cattle prices and the proliferation of small arms in the recent decade.
- *Resource Competition & Disputes.* Disputes over land and water resources that are mis/unmanaged by formal or traditional justice or dispute resolution.
- *Ethno-religious violence*. Conflicts are often stoked for political motives, or in a cycle of attack-reprisal attack, some of which can be properly called terrorism and mass atrocities under U.S. definitions.

Unfortunately, the inability to apprehend and hold perpetrators accountable for any of these crimes blurs the lines between these different dynamics, which are often referred to in a catch-all as "farmer-herder" violence. They are also interrelated. Banditry shifts herding routes; armed groups destroy punish entire villages as collective punishment; an "ordinary" dispute over trampled crops escalates and armed groups get involved, as the State appears unwilling or unable to provide security, ordinary people – and sometimes government officials – look to vigilantism and loosely organized militia groups.

A significant degree of this violence has had an ethno-religious and focused on "collective responsibility" in the absence of formal accountability. In the early stages of the crisis, years ago in the Middle Belt, if there was an attack on the majority-Muslim Fulani, you would expect an attack on the majority-Christian Birom. And then one on the Fulani again. And so, it would go back and forth. When the military or security forces would deploy to calm the situation, it might buy some time for mediation. But when troops are cycled out, then the revenging resumes.

The upsurge in rural violence has been increasing over the past several years, I would point to several dynamics that should be particularly alarming in this moment:

- *Increasingly sustained conflict.* In years past, the violence – particularly linked to farmer-herder dynamics – was tragic, but often cyclical. During the rainy season when the grass is green, and the violence drops. But now, violence does not seem to be dropping.
- *Scale and scope.* The scale of events now includes incidents in every geopolitical zone. As I highlighted above, this includes events in North West, North East, North Central and South West just in the past few weeks. Over the past few months, there have been events in South South and South East as well.
- *Metastasizing into other issues.* The climate of fear and ethno-religious dimension of the violence has provided a mobilizing factor for other groups. "Self-defense" – whether from criminals or members of other ethnic groups, often Fulani – has provided a justification for individuals to form armed bands, often advancing criminal or unrelated aims. For example, the Biafran secessionist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have used fear of ethnic Fulani and violence in other parts of the country to justify their struggle.

2. UNDERLYING CAUSES

While there are regional differences in the manifestations of violence, we can identify at least three common features across all geopolitical zones, including:

2.1 Frustration, desperation, and a lack of economic opportunity.

More than half (56%) of all Nigerians experienced moderate or high levels of lived poverty in 2020, and this number has risen by 18% since 2017. Even before COVID-19, nearly two in three Nigerians gave up food or medical care at least once and 48% told researchers that they "rarely" or "inconsistently" had enough food to eat.[13]

Against the high baseline, COVID-19 and the fall in global oil prices has created a serious economic shock, including the collapse of the currency and an impact on the State finances. The Nigerian Naira, which was about ₦360 to the dollar last year, now is ₦502 on the black market. The price of meat in the Middle Belt has doubled. A kilo that might have sold for ₦1200 last year, now sells for ₦2500. The attraction of crime and banditry is increasing.

2.2 Increasingly sophisticated criminal economy.

The desperation of people in Nigeria and the Sahel beyond, the rising value of commodities, and the supply of relatively affordable weapons[14] create a powerful market for violence, creating a demand for gunmen, whether in the form of militias, bandits, "security," or vigilantes.

Criminality drives insecurity, but by creating new vulnerabilities and victims, also fuels grievances, desperation, and draws more people into a vicious cycle. For example, in recent years, the cattle economy has begun to transform from a Bedouin-style smallholder economy to a "cowboy" economy. At the end of last year, Nigerian cattle could be sold between ₦100,000 to ₦200,000 Naira (USD $300-650) a head. Cows are attractive, liquid assets whose value has steadily appreciated as urban demand has grown. A typical smallholder herder has perhaps 100 cows[15] on which his family relies for its life and livelihood existence, which might translate into about $50,000 in cash – an attractive target to individual rustlers, bandits, and insurgents. A rustler who steals a dozen cows could make as much in one night as a comfortable middle-class household would make in an entire year.[16] To defend against rustlers, small cattle-keepers sell to larger elites, with larger herd sizes, paid and armed guards. Larger herds, with more armed guards feed into an escalating "range wars" dynamic.

At the same time, the context of poverty and vulnerability raises the stakes considerably for farming communities, and particularly subsistence agriculture. The number of cattle has increased dramatically from 6 million to 66 million between 1961 and 2006[17] and farmland has expanded, leading to increased cases of cattle damaging and destroying fields. This can mean the difference between life or death. For example, cassava – one of the most fundamental crops in the Nigerian diet – harvest can 18 months or more.[18] So a farmer who loses his crops to cattle or flees his home and sees his field laid waste, may see his family out of food for more than a year.

2.3. Cycles of violence, inaction, and lack of accountability

Even prior to the current crises, Nigeria has seen a history of serious violence including atrocities and killings along ethnic and religious lines over the past two decades, including a series of urban riots and mob violence in Jos, Kaduna, Kano and elsewhere that claimed thousands of lives and stoked deep divides along religious lines.

Over the past decade, communities, religious leaders and civil society actors – including with financial support from USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM)[19] and State Department's Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (DRL) – have led a series of community-level peace and reconciliation processes that have begun to reduce the urban violence.[20] However, the lack of criminal charges or accountability for those events has left a serious scar upon victims and their families. The long memory of crimes unpunished incentivizes mob justice, vigilantism, and undermines relations between religious and ethnic groups to this day.

The lack of criminal investigations and clear reporting on who is responsible is an offense to the victims, perpetrates cycles of violence, encourages reprisal attacks in the name of "collective responsibility" and leads to future criminality. It also has led to enormous misreporting. In Nasarawa state, in the quarter of 2020 there were at least two cases where bandits attacked a community of their own ethnic group while promoting it to be a "Fulani herdsmen" attack.[21] This group was apprehended by a local vigilante group and brought to the police, but most times perpetrators of attacks are unidentified and unsubstantiated allowing criminal activity to be lumped under the header of "farmer-herder conflict."[22] Western researchers are not immune to misreporting on these dynamics. For example, the University of Maryland's START database and the Global Terrorism Index report are among the most-cited sources for statistics on "Fulani

Extremist" violence, but only able to document motives and actors in less than 1% of the terror attacks they report.[23]

3. RESPONSES TO THE VIOLENCE
3.1 Security responses

The current security architecture is not succeeding. The Nigerian Government has relied heavily on security force deployments, supplementing police with a range of military forces to contain violence across the country. According to one report, 28 out of 36 states in Nigeria have active Nigeria military operations and that the expense of domestic security deployments increased over 200% between 2014 and 2018.[24] At the same time, Nigerians do not trust the military or police to provide them security. In 2018, only one Nigerian in ten sought police assistance for their problems and of those who did, 77% said that they paid bribes for assistance.[25]

Domestic deployment of the military has stretched security forces' mandates beyond that which they have training to do – pushing soldiers into mediation, community engagement, investigating cattle raids – outside of their traditional mandate of warfighting. In the Middle Belt, for example, the role of the various security forces within the Special Task Force (STF) have been poorly communicated to the civilian population and poorly coordinated[26], marked by accusations and corruption, and been seen poor coordination between the different security forces deployed.[27]

Last year, frustration with a security apparatus seen as corrupt, brutal, and yet ineffective manifested across the country in the #ENDSARS protests. As USCIRF noted in its recent fact sheet, human rights abuses and curtailments of civil liberties in the name of counter terror operations are counterproductive and threaten wider religious freedoms and human rights.[28]

3.2 Civilian responses

There are efforts under way by State and Federal Governments, international and local civil society, often with the support of international donors including the United States. To highlight a few promising avenues. To highlight six examples:

1. Government and Civilian-Led "Peace Architecture" to rethink structure security. The concept of a "Peace Architecture" or "Community Security Architecture" as articulated in Nigeria refers to how actors within a particular community (LGA leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, civil society actors, community representatives, women and youth, various civilian and uniformed government agents) interact to improve security and peace. This multi-stakeholder approach, rather than relying on security forces alone, has prevented future conflicts, improved security outcomes, and increased accountability. This approach brings civil society, government, and security forces together to use each group's unique position and skills to identify and respond to emerging security threats. These groups meet regularly to identify security threats and agree on appropriate responses. They were most successful when combining training, dialogue, and media components to include communities in their own security[29] and three in four yielded a tangible reduction in violence. [30]

2. Early Warning, Early Response to prevent violence. A number of organizations, including Search, have established civilian and community-led Early Warning and Early Response mechanisms (EWER), which seek to harness the shared intelligence between communities,

security actors, and governments to identify and address imminent threats to ensure civilian protection. These have proven to be very effective. When implemented correctly, EWER systems can amplify community members' agency to create proactive solutions to prevent violence and improve state response. Increasingly sophisticated communication and data analytics help detect and share early warning signs of violence, but local people-to-people engagement to transform conflicts and support preventive actions. Where community leaders were deeply engaged in these processes, both community and security force actions were more effective.[31]

3. Reduce resource conflicts through better conflict management. Through Search's work, we have seen that community platforms for conflict mitigation have reduced trigger events for resource management related conflicts.[32] In Nasarawa, they assigned community groups to patrol and inspect destroyed farmland and created 'safe corridors' for moving herds through the state. In Plateau, dialogues have secured agreements that reduce the risk of conflict with acceptance from all communities, such as prohibiting the use of children as herdsmen and banned night grazing of cattle, which are highly associated with trampled crops. But they have also reduced conflict events and fatalities. In Plateau State, community members said that both crime and security force abuses decreased and that conflict management across religious and tribal lines improved. Moreover, conflict events reduced by half in LGAs that had platforms for community conflict mitigation.[33] We now see, within the National Livestock Transformation Plan, opportunities to scale these approaches and will soon launch a pilot in Adamawa.

4. Improving Accountability. Victims of abuses often have few opportunities to make their voices heard, and the justice system is under-resourced and lacks the constellation of external constituencies – media, civil society, community leaders – to advocate for and ensure justice. That is particularly the case in which government officials, security forces or powerful actors are involved. Yet, we have seen that improved local collaboration between civil society organizations, judicial actors, and religious actors have better allowed the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to identify and receive reports of human rights abuses. Where we have seen media campaigns that explain to citizens how to press their rights, we have also seen increases in the number of complaints submitted and achievement of some desired results (for example, shifting security deployments and replacing troops accused of human rights violations).[34] At the same time, very significant progress remains to be achieved on criminal accountability.

5. Supporting demobilization and preventing recruitment, particularly of children. In partnership with UNICEF, we are currently supporting demobilization, beginning with children affiliated with the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) militia and Boko Haram in the North East of the country. To date, we have supported the demobilization of 1200 children and supported an additional 1200 non-combatant children through the program. There are significant opportunities to scale demobilization efforts, at least of children, to other parts of the country, especially in the North West. At the same time, as the context has changed, we are developing training modules with the Nigerian Government and key local actors on Preventing Violent Extremism.

6. Address religion not only as an element of the crisis, but part of the solution. Despite the current violence, which has stoked divisions along ethno-religious lines, Nigerians remain broadly tolerant and supportive of the freedom of religious belief. There are key efforts underway, including the establishment of high-level interreligious councils at the state level, coming together to encourage religious freedom and toleration, and both Muslim and Christian legal groups committed to

advancing public understanding and the implementation of Article 38 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. RESPONSE

Robust U.S. action to support Nigerian peacebuilding and atrocity prevention efforts is both the right thing to do, as well as in America's national interest. Politically, Nigeria and the United States share deep social and political ties and are two of the world's largest democracies. Economically, Nigeria is Africa's biggest economy, and US goods and services trade with Nigeria was more than $10 billion in 2019.[35] The importance of the U.S.-Nigeria relationship will only grow with time. For every year since 2005, more children have been born in Nigeria than in the entire Middle East put together.[36] Morally, the suffering of those killed, abducted, and abused is a shock to the conscience and an offense to human dignity.

While the primary responsibility for improving peace, security, and rights falls upon the Nigerian State, and the burden of building peace and preventing these atrocities is being shouldered first and foremost by the Nigerian people, there are five key things that the United States Government can and should do to support these efforts:

1. "First of All, Do No Harm" and "right size" the role of ethnicity and religion in analysis. In the context of escalated violence and incomplete information, there is a risk that policy, program responses, and public statements can do harm by intensifying, rather than de-escalating the conflict. Given the amount of erroneous reporting in local media or mischaracterization for political purposes, there is a danger that public statements and actions fuel, rather than de-escalate, the conflict. U.S. leaders in Congress, Administration and civil society should use their platforms and tools to drive attention and rally support to efforts to end the violence, while ensuring that analysis is informed by accurate and complete information, in consultation with Nigerians networks like the FFARN, and oriented toward helping bring an end to the crisis.

We are in a context where criminals, bandits, and highwaymen, and many political interests are seeking to wrap their secular and materialistic interests in the cloak of religion and ethnic identity. When outside actors overplay, or inaccurately describe, the role of ethnoreligious identity in the unfolding violence, they inadvertently fan the flames and play into the hands of those whose interests are served by increased violence. On the other hand, analyses that downplay the gravity of the current situation, ignore aspects or incidents related to ethnoreligious identity, or do not acknowledge the relationship to past injustice and impunity, are inaccurate and a disservice to victims of violence.

2. Dedicate Resources & Strategy to Peacebuilding and Atrocity Prevention. Despite the scale of the conflict and its toll, the United States systematically under-invests in peacebuilding. Only 3% of U.S. foreign assistance in Nigeria went to peace and security programs in the country.[37] This problem is not unique to Nigeria. In the current budget and appropriations cycle, Congress should consult with the two main networks working on this issue in DC: (1) the Prevention and Protection Working Group and (2) the Alliance for Peacebuilding and accept their recommendations to:

1. Fully fund the Human Rights and Democracy Fund at USAID and the State Department, the parent account for Religious Freedom, good governance and other human rights issues.

2. Support the flexible accounts (Complex Crisis Fund and Atrocity Prevention) that enable USAID and the State Department to respond to crises like this one.
3. Expand USAID's People-to-People Reconciliation program, which supports the long-term peace and reconciliation programs that have been shown to be effective in reducing ethno-religious violence in the Middle Belt and elsewhere.
4. The Global Fragility Act, which Congress passed this year was designed to deal with issues such as these unfolding in Nigeria. The U.S. Congress should fully fund the Prevention and Stabilization fund and deploy long-term and flexible resources to ending chronic crises such as the ones we are seeing in Nigeria.

Finally, while many of the underlying factors may be addressed through broad development assistance, Congress and the Administration should embrace the new and proposed tools that bring a robust focus on the threats to religious freedom and risk of atrocities and use the full suite of Conflict and Violence Prevention, as well as Democracy, Human Rights and Governance assistance instruments.

3. Take a Whole-of-Government Problem-Solving Approach. There is no silver bullet to addressing the intertwined drivers of conflict and violence in the Middle Belt in particular, or Nigeria more broadly. However, there are achievable solutions sector-by-sector (agriculture and livestock policy, security cooperation, justice, educational cooperation, etc.). State Department can coordinate across the range of U.S. equities in this space, spanning from USDA's Agricultural Cooperation to U.S. DFC's underwriting of investments, to climate and conservation sectors, to the resources at USAID and the State Department to ensure that all assistance and cooperation contributes to ending this chronic crisis. One recent toolkit, supported by the State Department and Search for Common Ground helps lay out some of these opportunities.[38] Another promising response is the informal "Africa Pastoralism Working Group" led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service linking people following this issue across interagency lines as well as in American civil society and academia.

4. Bring Cultural Heritage and Public Diplomacy Resources. Use the cultural heritage and diplomacy tools of the U.S. Government to implement "conflict-smart" approach to sensitive topics, for example by supporting efforts that: investing in the implementation of the Universal Code of Conduct on the Protection of Holy Sites in Nigeria; increasing Embassy engagement beyond the high-level religious actors to celebrate and support grassroots and influential faith and opinion leaders; and expanding intercultural virtual exchange programs such as the Stevens Initiative to include Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries.

5. *Take Conflict Geography Approach and Coordinate with Others*. Many of the conflict dynamics in Nigeria are transboundary, from cross-border movement of weapons and cross-border criminal gangs and extremist organizations to the regional effects of climate change. At the same time, coordinating policy and programs between Nigeria and the French-speaking Sahel countries can run into bureaucratic and cultural hurdles. Congress can facilitate a regional or "conflict geography"[39] approach by expanding authorities for cross-border conflict resolution programs as it has in other parts of the world. At the same time, the U.S. can rally a wider group of actors, including allies like the European Union, the United Kingdom, and European governments to take a concerted effort towards this problem and encourage and support action led by the United Nations, African Union, and ECOWAS.

[1] Search's work in Nigeria is supported by charitable contributions, as well as grant support from USAID and the State Department, the governments of France, the Netherland and Germany, cooperation agreements with a number of UN Agencies and the European Union, as well as support from foundations and the private sector. Search's annual Impact Report and financial information is available online.

[2] NOIPolls, "A Call for Improved Security as Majority of Nigerians Feel Unsafe." November 7, 2018.

[3] Afrobarometer. "Nigerians show high tolerance for diverestiy but low trust in fellow citizens, Afrobarometer study shows." March 10, 2021

[4] Mercy Corps. *'Fear of the Unknown:' Religion, Identity, and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*. Forthcoming.

[5] From the Armed Conflict Location Event Data (ACLED) "Event Dataset."

[6] From the Armed Conflict Location Event Data (ACLED) "Event Dataset" in December 2020.

[7] To read more about the absence of trust in security forces and lack of accountability measures, please refer to: Chom Bagu, and Katie Smith. "Past is Prologue: Criminality & Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt." Search for Common Ground, 2018.

[8] Here we use Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (JAS) and ISWAP to refer to the two emergent factions emerging from the Boko Haram movement. In other work, JAS is referred to as "Boko Haram" and ISWAP as distinct groups.

[9] Olajumoke Ayandele and Curtis Goos. "Mapping Nigeria's Kidnapping Crisis: Players, Targets and Trends."May 20th, 2021.

[10] Jude Egbas. "Gov Ortom has asked his people to pick up guns and knives against killer herdsmen." *The Pulse.* May 24th, 2021.

[11] Medecins Sans Frontieres. "Zamfara state gripped by humanitarian crisis as violence escalates." June 3rd, 2021.

[12] Search for Common Ground coordinates the Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria (FFARN), which brings together over three dozen leading academics, practitioners, and policymakers from across the country to share analysis, conduct joint research, and identify collective priorities for action on farmer-herder relations.

[13] Only 25% of Nigerians believe the government is improving living standards for the poor; approximately 18% believe the government has been successful in creating jobs, and only 17% believe the government is doing well in narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. More data is available in" Sunday Joseph Duntoye. "With lived poverty on the rise, Nigerians rate government performance as poor." *Afrobarometer Dispatches* (No. 395). October 8, 2020.

[14] The average cost of a Kalashnikov AK-47 rifle, the popular weapon often used to carry out violent attacks, costs about $1,292 in Nigeria – cheaper than an Apple laptop or several cows.

[15] Marie Julie Ducrotoy et al. "Fulani Cattle Productivity and Management in the Kachia Grazing Reserve, Nigeria," *Pastoralism* 6, no. 25 (2016).

[16] Femi Adewunmi, "Nigeria's Middle-Class: How We Live, and What We Want from Life," October 2, 2011.

[17] Chom Bagu and Katie Smith. "Past is Prologue: Criminality & Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt." Search for Common Ground, 2018.

[18] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Cassava," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Plant Guide*.

[19] This has been reorganized earlier in 2020 now as the Office of Conflict and Violence Prevention

[20] Carolyne Ashton, "Preventing Inter-Religious Violence in Plateau State Nigeria: Final Evaluation," Search for Common Ground (2013)

[21] "Early Warning / Early Response" Data (2020), Search for Common Ground

[22] "Early Warning / Early Response" Data (October 2020), Search for Common Ground

[23] START identifies a motive in less than 1% of violence it attributes to "terror" by Fulani extremists, and adds 'speculation' in another 9%. Many of the cited motives are criminal rather than terroristic, and prominent attacks highlighted in these indices, including killings at Zaki Biom in Benue State or last years' massacre in Kaduna State are publicly contradicted by on the ground reporting by Nigerian Police, Nigerian and international press on the scene.

[24] Chris M.A. Kwaja and Olubukola I. Ademola-Adelehin, "Seeking Security and Stability: An Analysis of Security Responses to Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria," Search for Common Ground (2018).

[25] NOIPolls, "A Call for Improved Security as Majority of Nigerians Feel Unsafe." November 7, 2018.

[26] Established in 2010, the STF is the primary unit deployed alongside the police. It represents a coordinated response by the military, bringing together the different services within the armed forces, including the Army, Navy, and Airforce, as well as other security agencies such as the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), and the DSS. Within the framework of their involvement in internal security operations, the goal is to harness their different resources and expertise in tackling the problem under a unified command structure led by the Defense Headquarters.

[27] For an in depth discussion of successes, shortcomings and results of these efforts, see Chris M.A. Kwaja and Olubukola I. Ademola-Adelehin, "Seeking Security and Stability: An Analysis of Security Responses to Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria," Search for Common Ground (2018).

[28] Madeline Vellturo. "Fact Sheet: Violent Islamist Groups in Northern Nigeria." *U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom."* February 2021.

[29] Search's work in Nigeria has often involved relationship-building tactics, like dialogue facilitation, to mitigate conflict. These social cohesion projects have most recently involved community platforms created to facilitate dialogue between pastoralists and farmers. These platforms have endured beyond the funding and coordination of Search; they convene regularly to identify early signs of conflict and how to discuss how to de-escalate the situation. Search's activities catalyzed the passions of individuals to continue to build cohesion in their communities, equipped with skills and renewed passion to carry forward long-term change.

[30] Horacio R. Trujillo, "Expanding Initiatives to Reduce Human Rights Abuses in Northern Nigeria," Search for Common Ground (2018),

[31] To read more on Early Warning and Early Response systems, as well as Search's specific projects utilizing them, information is available online.

[32] Olubukola Ademola-Adelehin. Testimony for Hearing on "Nigeria: Conflict in the Middle Belt." September 2017,

[33] Horacio R. Trujillo, "Expanding Initiatives to Reduce Human Rights Abuses in Northern Nigeria."

[34] Horacio R. Trujillo, "Expanding Initiatives to Reduce Human Rights Abuses in Northern Nigeria."

[35] U.S. Trade Representative. "Nigeria Factsheet." 2019

[36] From UN Population Data and growth scenarios of Nigeria and Southwest Asia. Available online.

[37] From U.S. Foreign Assistance Data "Nigeria Foreign Assistance data" as of December 2020.

[38] The toolkit considers best practices in policy and programming responses to the farmer-herder dimensions of the crisis, including modules on (1) Food Security & Rural Development (2) Environment & Conservation (3) Democracy & Governance (4) Regional Integration (5) Gender & Women's Empowerment (6) Conflict Management (7) Law Enforcement & Counter Terrorism. The interactive toolkit is available online.

[39] Because conflicts and their effects are rarely isolated to one single country, utilizing an approach that defines engagement by the borders of conflict (i.e. a "conflict geography"), not country boundaries, allows for greater flexibility and accuracy when examining the causes, characteristics and consequences of conflict. After examining over 100 different conflicts and various methods of categorization, Search ultimately decided that a "conflict geography" approach that focused on acute manifestations of violence, spillover and resonating effects, and proxy factors best represented the holistic nature of conflict. Search identified 10 consequential conflict geographies that undermine global security and development goals: the Horn of Africa; Central and South Asia; the Sahel; the Levant; Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin; the Bay of Bengal; Central Africa; the Arabian Peninsula; the Sudans; and the Northern Triangle.