

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on
ATROCITIES AND MASS KILLINGS IN NIGERIA'S MIDDLE BELT
December 17, 2020 – 1:00 p.m.
2172 Rayburn

Statement of Most Rev. William A. Avenya
Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gboko, Nigeria

Greetings to you and peace from the Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Not intending to downplay the magnitude of the atrocities and mass killings in other parts of the country, especially in the north, it is depressing that our Middle Belt region has truly become a vale of tears, a region where mass burials are very common! It appears as though what is happening here is part of a grand conspiracy. Our national government has not shown convincing signs of real commitment to ending the menace. In fact, its complacency makes it additionally difficult for any critical mind to exonerate it of any possible involvement. How can one explain a scenario where as many as a hundred innocent and defenceless villagers are killed in one single attack and no one says anything about it? Since the consistent attacks began some five years ago, there has hardly been a single day gone without killing in one part of the region or the other. In fact, one cannot give the accurate figures of those who have been killed since the beginning of these atrocities! Interestingly, no one has ever been arrested or questioned or prosecuted or convicted of any charge relating to this spree of killings. Yet, these killers are not invisible, neither are they unknown. Instead, these atrocities are made to look as though they were ethnic or communal clashes.

Besides, there is a high probability that the killings have a religious undertone. The targeted victims give a clear index to the religious connotation of this carnage. Also, the absolute impunity and unchallenged audacity with which these acts are committed creates a feeling that it is a premeditated and pre-planned onslaught on the targeted populations and regions, especially when this is considered in the context of historical developments.

It appears that the system has not only permitted but is also aiding the enthronement of supremacist views of one religious group against the others. The mass slaughter of Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt, by every standard, meets the criteria for a calculated genocide from the definition of the Genocide Convention as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" as well as the available facts. This has inflicted deep mental, psychological, physical and economic injuries to the affected families and communities.

I am grateful to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for this platform to let the world know about the atrocities being perpetrated on the peace-loving people of Nigeria's Middle Belt. As a body that can amplify our anguish and influence the needed attention to our plight, we

appeal that you project the reality and degree of our groans to the world. Even if in the end nothing is done, at least it will be on record that we cried out for help but the world was negligent of our groaning.