



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Climate Change and Human Rights

Thursday, July 28, 2022

2:30 p.m. – 4:30 pm

Virtual via Zoom

Rep. Christopher H. Smith

Excerpt of Remarks

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Co-chair McGovern, for convening this timely and topical hearing on the impact climate change can have on human rights.

While we need not settle the ongoing debate of how much climate change is anthropogenic, what I think everyone can acknowledge is that changes in the environment – regardless of cause – can impact human behavior and exacerbate existing societal tensions. Thus we see migration of peoples and competition over scarce resources like water and arable land attributable in part to changes in the environment.

That said, I do want to insert a note of caution here, and point out how ostensible efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change can adversely impact human rights, and how a desire to frame communal conflict as being attributable to an overarching narrative of climate change can cause one to overlook more obvious causes, and in so doing, downplay or avoid facts that conflict with the narrative.

Just two weeks ago, this Commission held an excellent hearing on Child Labor and Human Rights Violations in the Mining Industry of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We heard testimony on forced child labor, unsafe mining conditions in artisanal mines, and environmental despoilation. All of these are terrible human rights abuses.

And what fuels these human rights abuses?

It's the demand for minerals like cobalt for batteries that are used in electric vehicles like Teslas and lithium for solar panels.

In other words, its first-world obeisance to a Green Ideology that puts combatting "climate change" above all other goods, without any cost-benefit analysis or weighing of the harm it might cause.

Indeed, in the case of lithium and solar panels, the human rights harm runs throughout the entire supply chain, for the lithium that is mined in slave-like conditions in the Congo is then used in solar panels

manufactured in slave labor camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China!

This point cannot be lost in any honest discussion of climate change and human rights.

Further, let's look at how an obsession with framing intercommunal conflict in Nigeria as farmer-herder conflict over land driven by climate change has led the Biden Administration and our State Department in particular to overlook more obvious and direct causes for the egregious human rights abuses, mass atrocities and, indeed, genocide that are being committed with impunity in Nigeria – namely, Fulani ethno-religious supremacism abetted by President Muhammadu Buhari and his administration.

That is not to say that climate change and traditional farmer-herder tensions are not factors – I do believe that they are – but they are at best partial, secondary factors contributing to the conflict.

What drives it, rather, is the longstanding Fulani desire to conquer and control, dating back to the 18th century war of *jihad* waged by the conqueror Osman dan Fodio against other, older Muslim kingdoms that existed in what is today Nigeria.

Many of the victims today are Christian – as we saw in the horrific attack on [St. Francis Xavier Church](#) in Ondo State on Pentecost Sunday earlier this year. Indeed, according to the religious freedom watchdog

Open Doors International, last year more than 4,650 Christians were killed in Nigeria.

Yet to frame this as Muslim-Christian conflict also only gives us a partial picture, for Fulani supremacist extremists also target Yorubas based on their ethnicity who may be Muslim as well as Christian, and Shia Muslims also suffer persecution from Buhari's government.

But if you look at who is doing the killing and who is being killed, culpability comes into clearer focus, and the driving factor is not climate change.

Indeed, President Buhari, who has sought to place his Fulani kinsmen in key positions throughout the military, the State Security apparatus and even the Supreme Court, emboldens the militants.

One way we can tell whether the militants are emboldened is to compare the number of attacks that occurred in 2017 when Buhari was hospitalized for extended periods and his vice president Yemi Osinbajo was acting president, with those that occurred when Buhari was in control. Indeed this is something I have repeatedly asked our State Department to do.

Yet instead of doing an honest assessment of what drives conflict in Nigeria, and then reaching conclusions in order to formulate policy prescriptions, the State Department maintains that climate change is the determinant and funnels money to mitigate climate change.

Indeed, this approach is so tone deaf that just days before Secretary of State Antony Blinken was to visit Nigeria, the State Department [removed Nigeria](#) from its list of Countries of Particular Concern for its egregious violations of religious freedom – in effect, surrendering leverage it had over the Buhari government without first seeing any progress towards reaching human rights milestones.

As I believe one of our witnesses, Bob Destro, will address how subjecting all conflict in Nigeria to the predominant narrative of climate change undercuts our ability to identify and address gross violations of human rights I will end my remarks here, though I do ask our panelists to keep the concerns I have raised in mind when looking at the broad issue of Climate Change and Human Rights.

Thank you.