

February 17th Briefing: Key Human Rights Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria possesses Africa's largest economy, military, and population. It is a critical player regionally and globally, and a crucial bi-lateral partner for the US. However, Nigeria's Fourth Republic faces critical challenges that the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has been unable or unwilling to address.

In October, the country was rocked by nationwide protests against police abuses focused on the Special Armed Robbery Unit (SARS). While the protests have quieted, concerns over abuses by the Nigerian security forces and police endure and the situation across the country remains dire. Security conflicts, growing attacks on civic space and free expression, and government-driven violence against ENDSARS protesters are steadily diminishing security and human rights across the country.

Nigeria's north eastern region continues to face attacks from the armed group Boko Haram. In the "Middle Belt" region, intercommunal violence that is too often simplified to conflict between pastoralists and farmers is pervasive. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, tensions between the federal government and multinational oil companies and minority ethnic groups remain unresolved even as environmental degradation continues apace. Across regions, various forms of mass atrocity crimes that violate rights of innocent citizens are witnessed.

In addition to perpetuating abuses and a lack of accountability, the Buhari government has also increased efforts to repress freedom of expression and civic space, including toward individuals who speak out in support of the #ENDSARS movement.

The significant presence of Nigerians in the diaspora, whose families and friends in Nigeria are directly impacted, necessitates urgent action from congress on behalf of their constituents. On February 17, the Nigeria Working Group, a coalition of civil society organizations working on Nigeria in partnership with the Nigerian Diaspora, as well as Nigerians on the ground who are actively engaged in the ENDSARS movement, will convene a briefing to highlight these key issues and make recommendations on how the U.S. Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration can support efforts to strengthen Nigeria's rule of law, respect for human rights, and democratic governance.