US State Department Makes ‘Baffling Error’ Removing ‘Country of Particular Concern’ Distinction from Nigeria, Says International Persecution Watchdog Org

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--David Curry, CEO of Open Doors USA.

Washington, DC (November 17, 2021) - Today, as required by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken identified the “Countries of Particular Concern” - those who are in severe violations of religious freedom. Burma, the People’s Republic of China, Eritrea, Iran, the DPRK, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan received the designation for having engaged in or tolerated “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.” However, the notable absence of Nigeria, which ranks #9 on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List, has the Christian persecution watchdog troubled. Open Doors has reported that in Nigeria alone, an average of 10 Christians a day are killed for their faith, driving a startling 60% worldwide increase in Christian martyrdom last year.

“We’re deeply alarmed at today’s decision by the U.S. State Department to end the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). This is not only a baffling error, it’s likely in direct violation of the International Religious Freedom Act, the law that requires these designations to be made in the first place,” said David Curry, CEO of Open Doors USA.

Under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998, the President is required to annually review the status of religious freedom in every country in the world and designate each country the government of which has engaged in or tolerated “particularly severe violations of religious freedom” as a Country of Particular Concern.. The law defines particularly severe violations as “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom,” including violations such as: (1) torture; (2) prolonged detention without charges; (3) forced disappearance; or (4) other flagrant denial of life, liberty, or security of persons. The President has delegated the authority to make CPC, SWL, and EPC designations to the Secretary of State.

Curry said, “Open Doors USA has documented thousands of targeted killings of Nigerian Christians every year for more than a decade. In no other country on earth do we see such a sustained level of outright violence directed towards a Christian community, and the situation has only deteriorated over the past 12 months. The Nigerian government has stubbornly refused to address this violence. The removal of Nigeria from this list will embolden bad actors and strongly deter efforts to bring peace to the region.”
Ambassador Sam Brownback, Senior Fellow at Open Doors USA, said, “The sudden removal of Nigeria from the CPC list is a serious blow to religious freedom in both Nigeria and across the region. Just when we should be doing everything possible to stop the relentless violence that’s targeting Christians and others, we do the opposite. This rewards the Nigerian government for tolerating severe religious freedom violations and sends a message to extremists that their actions will continue to go unpunished. People of faith in Nigeria will bear the fallout of this decision, and that’s unacceptable.”

For interviews with Ambassador Sam Brownback or David Curry, please contact opendoors@iconmediagroup.com.

About Open Doors USA
For more than 60 years, Open Doors USA has worked in the world's most oppressive and restrictive countries for Christians. Open Doors works to equip and encourage Christians living in dangerous circumstances with the threat of persecution and to mobilize the Western church to pray and advocate for the persecuted. Christians are one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world and are oppressed in at least 60 countries. For more information, visit OpenDoorsUSA.org.