



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Situation of Human Rights in Nigeria – Boko Haram  
*Geneva, 1 April 2015*

Mr. President,

The ongoing violence, persecution and murder at the hands of the Boko Haram group especially in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon, Benin, Chad and Niger, present serious transgressions under international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity which require an urgent and effective response from the involved States, together with the solidarity of the international community. With the merciless acts of this terrorist group, we are witnessing the continued development and dissemination of a radical and ruthless type of extremism inspired by an ideology which attempts to justify its crimes in the name of religion. Furthermore, with the recent explicit allegiance of Boko Haram to the so-called Islamic State group (ISIS), one cannot be blind to the fact that such extremists' groups are growing like a cancer, spreading to other parts of the world and even attracting foreign militants to fight in their ranks.

Nigeria, in particular, has "had to confront considerable problems, among them new and violent forms of extremism and fundamentalism on ethnic, social and religious grounds. Many Nigerians have been killed, wounded or mutilated, kidnapped and deprived of everything: their loved ones, their land, their means of subsistence, their dignity and their rights. Many have not been able to return to their homes."<sup>1</sup> These crimes perpetrated at the hands of Boko Haram have been continuing with impunity and, as witnessed in the last 12 months, have only increased in their intensity and destructive effects. As Pope Francis noted, the tragedy faced in Nigeria at the hands of these extremists "is a scourge which needs to be eradicated, since it strikes all of us, from individual families to the international community."<sup>2</sup>

Crimes in the "name of religion" are never justified. Massacring innocent people in the name of God is not religion but the manipulation of religion for ulterior motives. In fact, "believers, both Christians and Muslim, have experienced a common tragic outcome, at the hands of people who claim to be religious, but who instead abuse

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of Nigeria, 17 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Discourse to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 12 January 2015.

religion, to make of it an ideology for their own distorted interests of exploitation and murder.”<sup>3</sup>

Mr. President,

Notwithstanding the military efforts of the Nigerian government to stop these terrorists, even with the recently formed alliance of a Multinational Joint Task Force composed of neighbouring countries also threatened by Boko Haram, the extremists continue their fury of violence, creating evermore instability in Western Africa. Such a situation clearly poses a dangerous uncertainty to the whole region and even beyond. Without swift, decisive and combined action on the part of the Nigerian government, its bordering countries, the African Union and the United Nations, the serious threat of violence will only continue to jeopardize the lives of millions of civilians throughout that region.

It appears that the time is ripe for the international community to assist in bringing an end to the violence, which has caused numerous civilian victims. Before such violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws, we cannot afford to have a posture of indifference that would lead to the widening contagion of violence and also set a dangerous precedent of “non-action” in response to such horrific crimes.

The Holy See encourages an international collaborative effort to address this crisis situation with urgency so as to prevent the extension of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups and their strategy of inflicting suffering on the local people and to destabilize Africa even further.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of Nigeria, 17 March 2015.