



NIGERIA

ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

REPORT

2023

PLAC

POLICY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY CENTRE



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

**Nigeria
Annual Human Rights
Report 2023**

Published by



Plot 451 Gambo Jimeta Crescent, Guzape District, Abuja
Nigeria.

With Support from



© PLAC December 2023
All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
PERSONAL FREEDOM	5
Violations by State Actors	5
Insecurity	7
Attacks on Schools	10
Rights to Fair Hearing and Mob Action	11
THREATS TO CIVIC SPACE AND OF EXPRESSION	15
Freedom of Expression and of the Press	16
THREATS TO JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE	19
Disobedience of Court Orders	19
DWINDLING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS	23
SHRINKING DEMOCRACY	27
Election Day	28
Unmet Thresholds	30
CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	33
Conclusion	33
Recommendations	33
APPENDICES	35

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PLAC wishes to acknowledge the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the publication of this Nigeria Annual Human Rights Report 2023.



Image source: Freepik



INTRODUCTION

The year 2023 did not see an improvement in Nigeria's human rights situation. The persistent problem of violation of human rights that manifests in the form of infringement of personal freedom, constriction of civic space, police and security abuse of citizens' rights, constriction of political participation and deepening deprivations in the economic and social sphere remained and, in some cases, worsened.

2023 saw Nigeria conduct its 7th general elections since the return to civilian rule in May 1999. To put it mildly, the conduct of the elections was abysmal, and citizens suffered infringement to their rights of electing leaders of their choice.

This report delves into the nuanced landscape of human rights, aiming to provide a comprehensive examination of the status of human rights protection within the Nigerian context in the year 2023.

By examining key aspects of human rights such as personal freedom, threats to civic space, judicial independence, economic and social rights and political participation, the report endeavours to highlight challenges faced by individuals in the enjoyment of their inherent rights.

It is imperative to underscore the critical role that human rights protection plays in fostering vibrant democracies, promoting social cohesion and diversity, while cultivating a conducive and peaceful living environment. While recognising the efforts made by nations towards safeguarding these freedoms, it is equally essential to acknowledge the persistent obstacles that hinder their full realisation. Whether arising from legislative constraints, societal prejudices, or systemic shortcomings, these impediments demand collective attention and concerted efforts to dismantle them.

The myriad of challenges from insecurity, separatist agitations, to the incidence of torture, illegal detention, extortion and extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agencies linger.

In addition, limited access to justice, abuse of court process and disregard for court orders, increased cost of living and deteriorating living conditions are some of the other challenges that continue to confront citizens on a daily basis and hamper their ability to lead safe and meaningful lives.

The February 25 Presidential election saw the emergence of Bola Tinubu as Nigeria's President. One of his first moves upon assuming office was to end the petrol subsidy regime and unify multiple foreign exchange rates – measures that immediately resulted in soaring costs of

production and living. This further exacerbated the already deteriorating economic situation in the country.

It is against the backdrop of ravaging insecurity, arbitrariness exhibited by state institutions and deepening levels of poverty that the status of human rights protection in the year 2023 is examined. This report highlights key incidents of human rights abuses, as a pointer to the trajectory of human rights this year.

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), as an advocate for the rule of law, respect for human rights and constitutional democracy, issues this Nigeria Annual Human Rights Report for a number of reasons. For one, Nigeria, as a nation, subscribes to constitutional democracy based on the separation of powers among the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. It is a design intended to forestall the emergence of tyrants. Also, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, on which the current political and civic order is based, accords considerable respect to the citizens' 'Fundamental Rights' that are articulated in Chapter 4 of the Constitution. These include the right to life, the right to the dignity of the human person, the right to personal liberty and the right to fair hearing. The provisions also guarantee the right to family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as freedom of expression and of the press. They give the right to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom from discrimination and the right to acquire private property while prohibiting compulsory acquisition of a person's property.

Not only are these constitutional provisions made to protect human rights, but they are also crafted to reflect Nigeria's accession to international treaties that protect these rights, making their observance

equally an international obligation. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Conventions on the rights of women and children. These treaties, which Nigeria voluntarily subscribed to, form part of the Nigerian State's solemn obligation to do justice to every citizen and protect their legitimate rights. They provide the basis for assessing Nigeria's 2023 performance in complying with its human rights obligations.

This 2023 report was made with a chronological approach, largely dictated by the nature of the events that unfolded in the course of the year. Major events that clearly impinge on human rights will be discussed to illustrate patterns of behaviour, cases of impunity and egregious abuse. A more detailed glossary of incidents is provided in the appendix.



Image source: Daily Trust



Image source: Amnesty International



PERSONAL FREEDOM

The Nigerian Constitution guarantees the right to life, the right to dignity of human person and the right to personal liberty.¹ In the year 2023, several incidents are reported of the violation of these rights. These violations range from the deprivation of personal liberty and extend to torture, extra judicial killings, killings by security personnel, deaths arising from insecurity and failure of the government to provide safety and security for its citizens.

The violations of the rights that guarantee personal freedom are further worsened by the apparent lack of remedies for the victims, whether in the form of compensation or access to justice for the wrong done. This shows the absence of accountability in the system, which enthrones arbitrariness. With increasing cases of human rights abuses occurring unabated and with no one held to account, citizens' trust in the Nigerian system continues to dwindle, making it difficult for victims to come forward and seek justice.

Violations by State Actors

The recklessness exhibited by security personnel in the course of their operations has cut short the lives of innocent citizens.

At the beginning of the year, on January 1, 2023,

¹ Sections 33, 34 and 25 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999

two teenagers were killed, and another injured by gunfire from a policeman at a wedding party in Tudun Matawalle, Sabuwar Unguwa in Katsina State. According to the Police command in the State, some of its officers were on a crime-bursting patrol when the 'accident' occurred.

In the same vein, 15-year-old Pelumi Sulaimon was shot and killed by soldiers attached to 'Operation MESA' around Makoko, in the Yaba area of Lagos State on February 26. The soldiers on an operation in the area, opened fire and began shooting indiscriminately when a bullet hit and killed Sulaimon, who was going to get drinks for his friends to celebrate his birthday. They also shot and killed a tricycle operator, identified as Aloma, whom they mistook for one of their targets.

On July 13, a two-year old boy was hit and killed by a stray bullet during an operation by officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at the Okpanam area of Asaba, Delta State.

Operatives of the NDLEA shot two persons dead including 22-year-old Gafar Yusuf, in the Idioro area of Mushin, Lagos State. The NDLEA operatives stormed the community around 10:00 pm on July 26 to raid a drug den when they started shooting sporadically in a bid to achieve their aim. Stray bullets from the operatives hit and killed two persons.

Two traders in Ogbete Market, Enugu State, were shot dead on July 26 while protesting the sealing of their shops by the State government. The Enugu State Government sealed two commercial banks and 107 shops for observing the Monday ‘sit-at-home’ order in the State, which the Governor had banned. The State Government had announced that all the sealed shops and banks would remain closed for one week and would only be considered for reopening if the owners produced tax clearance certificates and other relevant documents. Frustrated, the traders, protested the government’s action, calling for the reversal of the decision. A combined team of the police and military shot at the protesters, killing two persons. The Police’s defence is that the protest was initially peaceful but was later hijacked by hoodlums who made it violent.

When troops opened fire on the night of 20 October, 2020 on unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, anecdotal reports followed of scores people killed or missing. Yet, when the dust settled, there were denials by both the government and the military authorities that people had been killed. Then in July 2023, almost three years after, a leaked government memo revealed that the Lagos state government was planning to bury 103 people bodies found in the aftermath of the #EndSARS protest in Lagos.² The planned mass burial was however suspended, with the explanation that the State Government is giving time to allow people to come forward to identify the bodies of their relatives.

In the meantime, human rights groups are demanding that the all the victims be identified first before burial.

² Adelagun, O. (2023, July 24). #EndSARS: What Lagos govt said about 103 recovered bodies and what we know. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://tinyurl.com/3amrcsaf>

Unidentified gunmen attacked and killed at least eight security operatives, and also set ablaze two vehicles in Oriagu, Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. The security operatives included soldiers, policemen and personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Security operatives were said to have carried out reprisal attacks during which tens of houses were razed to the ground and properties destroyed.

Miscalculations and negligence on the part of the Nigerian military in the fight against terrorism has left many civilians dead and several others injured and rendered homeless.

On January 24, the Nigerian Air Force rained bombs on some herders from Nasarawa State who went to Makurdi, the Benue State capital to recover 1,250 cows impounded by the State Livestock Guards, mistaking them for terrorists and killing about 27 herders instantly. The death toll from the incident later rose to about 40. The Nigerian Air Force eventually took responsibility for the attack in June 2023, five months after the incident.³

Similarly, the Nigerian Army has also owned up to an accidental bombing in Tudun Bichi community in Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State on December 3, which reportedly left 85 persons dead at the time of the incident.⁴ Further reports indicate that more people were killed during this incident with the death toll rising to 120 and 81 persons hospitalised.

³ Ejekwonyilo, A. (2023, June 7). Nigerian Air Force belatedly owns up to airstrike that killed 39 along Nasarawa-Benue border – Report. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/603038-nigerian-air-force-belatedly-owns-up-to-airstrike-that-killed-39-along-nasarawa-benue-border-report.html>

⁴ Reporters (2023, December 5). Outrage as warplane kills 85 in Kaduna village bombing. Punch Newspapers. <https://punchng.com/outrage-as-warplane-kills-85-in-kaduna-village-bombing/>

Security operatives also engaged in harassing and extorting individuals going about their regular activities. In some cases, injuries were inflicted or individuals killed arbitrarily.

On January 14, 23-year-old fashion designer, Paul Arowolo never made it home following his encounter with policemen and a civilian accomplice who were unlawfully collecting money from motorists in the Ojuelegba area of Lagos State. Arowolo's 'crime' was refusing to pay 'toll' to the security operatives in the process of earning a living with his father's tricycle. He was consequently detained at the police station, where he sustained unexplained injuries that led to his death.

On March 20, a soldier shot and killed a commercial motorcycle rider and his passenger, a nursing mother and her baby, in Babanna community in Borgu LGA of Niger State for refusing to pay the bribe demanded by the soldier. The rider and his passenger were returning from the Monday Babanna market and heading back to their residence in Benin Republic.

Four operatives of the Rivers State Police Command arrested three men and extorted the sum of N6.5 million from them on July 3. They picked the men from Omoluwabi in the Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, tagged them 'Yahoo boys' and took them to Delta State where they reportedly dispossessed them of the said amount after detaining them for one day.

A 17-year-old senior secondary student, Abdullahi Tukur Abba died after being tortured by security personnel attached to 'Operation Farauta' in Yola, Adamawa State. The SS 2 student was arrested on August 5 after a neighbour lodged a complaint

with the task force over a missing phone and was allegedly beaten to stupor before he was admitted at the Modibbo Adama University Teaching Hospital, Yola where he died.

It would appear that persons of interest have also suffered the breach of their rights at the hands of law enforcement agencies.

The Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele and the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Abdullahi Bawa were suspended from office by President Bola Tinubu in June 2023 and promptly arrested and detained by operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS). The duo were detained long beyond the constitutionally allowed period without any charges brought against them. When Emefiele was eventually charged for illegal gun possession, it appeared it was merely a tactic to prolong his detention. He was however later charged for misappropriation of public funds. Bawa on the other hand, was eventually released after about four months in detention. However, it has not been clear if the government intends to prosecute him.

Insecurity

Insecurity has continued to manifest in virtually all parts of the country in the form of banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and communal conflicts, resulting in the loss of lives and property. This underscores the failure of the government and the security forces to fulfill the social contract owed to citizens, to ensure their security and protect them against lawlessness.

In South Eastern Nigeria, the disruptive activities of non-state actors has continued to take a heavy toll on the rights of the population. Equally wreaking havoc on the people is the contest between security forces and allied gunmen, with their fundamental rights violated frequently by both sides. However, the state of lawlessness in the region became all too apparent when the separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) called off the Monday ‘sit-at-home’ order introduced by its leader, Nnamdi Kanu about two years ago. However, another faction of the group led by one Simon Ekpa, who is said to be based in Finland, insists that the order subsists. This faction even went further to enforce the order in some States in the South East using gunmen who patrol communities, forcing people to stay in the confines of their homes on Mondays, thereby taking a huge toll on economic and social activities. This ‘sit-at-home’ order continued despite Nnamdi Kanu’s declaration from prison, that Mondays are now ‘Economic Empowerment Day.’

One or two of the South Eastern States governments have also been accused of procuring non-state actors to inflict destruction and killing in the sub-region and blame it on IPOB.

In Northern Nigeria, particularly the States in the North West, banditry and terrorism have remained unabated, with frequent attacks on communities becoming common place. The abduction of school girls in Chibok, Borno State in 2014 and Dapchi, Yobe State in 2018 were considered an aberration but now, attacks on educational institutions in the North by bandits are rampant.

In other parts of Nigeria, kidnapping appears to be the order of the day – an enterprise undertaken for pecuniary gain.

The President of Igueben Area Customary Court, Precious Aigbonoga, was abducted by gunmen around Ugoneki axis on her way to Court in Igueben Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State on January 9. She was however rescued by a joint military-police team a few days later.

On January 15, terrorists set ablaze a Catholic priest, Isaac Achi in his residence in the Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Achi was attached to St. Peters and Paul Catholic Church, Kafin-Koro. A colleague of the Reverend Father identified as Father Collins was also shot in the shoulder while trying to escape from the scene.

Terrorists killed three persons and abducted three others in the Kuta area of Niger State on January 23, when they attacked about seven communities in the State. They were also said to have emptied the food barns of the villagers and rustled cattle in large numbers.

On February 2, gunmen murdered Nnaemeka Ugboma, Chairman of the Ejemekwuru Customary Court in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, while he presided over a court session. This brought the session to an abrupt end as lawyers, court staff and litigants scampered for safety.

Gunmen on February 14, kidnapped 15 members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Anambra State. The corps members were abducted by the hoodlums at a filling station in Ihiala, in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. the corps members had just completed their three-week orientation programme in the State, and were travelling to Lagos when they were abducted.

Gunmen suspected to be herders invaded three communities in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State in the early hours of Sunday, February 26 and killed 13 people.

On March 14, bandits abducted 56 farmers abducted in Adunu, Kwagana and adjoining communities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. The abductees included women and children. The bandits demanded for the sum of N200 million ransom for their release.

Gunmen kidnapped Amadi Osaronu, Secretary of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. Osaronu was reportedly abducted by gunmen dressed in police uniforms from his residence in Aluu, Ikwerre LGA on March 15.

On April 30, bandits killed at least 36 persons, including six mobile policemen in Dan Umaru in Zuru area of Kebbi State and four others in Shinkafi village in Zamfara State on the same day.⁵

On May 18, gunmen attacked a United States Embassy convoy in the Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, killing at least four out of nine persons in the convoy, comprising five Nigerian employees of the U.S. Mission to Nigeria and four personnel of the Nigeria Police Force. They were on a visit to a U.S.-funded flood response project in Anambra.⁶

The Parish Priest of Saint Margaret's Catholic Church, Ajegbe Awume in Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue state, Reverend

⁵ *Bandits kill 40 in Kebbi, Zamfara - Daily Trust.* (2023, May 1). Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/bandits-kill-40-in-kebbi-zamfara/>

⁶ *Attack on U.S. Convoy in Nigeria - United States Department of State.* (2023, May 17). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/attack-on-u-s-convoy-in-nigeria/>

Father Anthony Adikwu was kidnapped from his residence by armed men on June 15.⁷

Over a two-week period in June 2023, at least 50 persons were killed, and 170 houses razed by gunmen in Izombe community in Oguta, Imo State.⁸

On July 8, gunmen killed nine persons and razed six houses in Sabon Gari community in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. Many people were still missing in the wake of the attack.

On July 9, at least eight persons, including an eight-month-old baby were killed by gunmen in Farin Lamba community of Vwang District of Jos South Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State.

Gunmen numbering about 6 kidnapped two persons in the Mpape area of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) on Sunday, July 16.

On July 17, gunmen killed Eze Nnamdi Durujiaku, the traditional ruler of a community, Nguru Nweke in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State.

At least 20 people, including women and children have been confirmed killed by assailants in separate attacks in Batin and Rayogot villages, Heipang district of Barki Ladi LGA of Plateau State on August 10. Many others sustained various degrees of injuries while several houses were also burnt in the process. The attack also resulted in the death of four of the vigilante

⁷ N. (2023, June 16). *Armed men kidnap Catholic Priest in Benue.* Vanguard News. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/armed-men-kidnap-catholic-priest-in-benue/>

⁸ *'50 killed, 170 houses' razed as Imo community boils - Daily Trust.* (2023, June 25). Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/50-killed-170-houses-razed-as-imo-community-boils/>

operatives who tried to repel the assailants.

Bandits invaded a mosque at Saya-Saya Village in the Ikara Local Government Area of Kaduna State and killed five worshippers and two other persons in the village on September 1.

Bandits raided Dogon Noma village in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, killed at least two persons and kidnapped three others on September 15. The bandits took away six motorcycles in the course of the attack.

On October 4, eight persons were reported dead, following the communal clash between Ifon and Ilobu communities in Orolu and Irepodun Local Government Areas of Osun State. The communal clash also left four policemen, including the Divisional Police Officer for Irepodun Division, injured, while trying to mediate over the crisis.

Bandits kidnapped a former Chairman of the Ngeski Local Government Area of Kebbi State, Garba Hassan, alongside 12 other people. Hassan and the others were passengers in a commercial vehicle when they were whisked away by the gunmen along the Tegina – Kontagora Road in the State on October 19.

On October 29, three persons were killed in Tse Gamber, Sengev Council Ward in Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State by armed herders, who attacked the village and destroyed properties in the process.

Several persons died following a terrorist attack on a Maulud procession at Kusa village in Musawa Local Government Area of Katsina State on November 5. At least 30 people were reported to have sustained injuries, while 21 others were said to have been abducted, including women

and children. The terrorists were reported to have surrounded the venue of the Maulud procession and began firing gunshots into the crowd.

Gunmen killed four people including security operatives in the Aguluzigbo community in the Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State on November 28. The gunmen invaded the community and started shooting, leading to exchange of fire with security operatives.

Attacks on Schools

Attacks on educational institutions in Nigeria are also impinging on the safety of Nigerian students and the enjoyment of their right to education. In response to the menace of attacks of schools, the Nigeria Police headed by the Inspector-General, IGP Kayode Egbetokun, announced the establishment of a unit to be known as the Schools Protection Squad (SPS) in July 2023, to provide protection for schools across Nigeria. In August, the Police also launched a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) manual to guide the operations of the squad.⁹

However, in the year 2023, several attacks occurred in educational institutions in various parts of the country.

Eight female students of Government Secondary School, Awon in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State were kidnapped by bandits on April 3.¹⁰

⁹ Bankole, I. (2023, August 9). IGP Egbetokun inaugurates SOP on Safe Schools Protection Initiative in Nigeria. Vanguard News. <https://tinyurl.com/42wzcdvy>

¹⁰ Eight Kidnapped Female Students Escape From Captivity In Kaduna. (n.d.). Channels Television. <https://tinyurl.com/36ce75rd>

About 24 students of the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State were abducted by terrorists who attacked three female hostels in the university on September 22.

Gunmen abducted a female student of the Isa Mustapha Agwai Polytechnic, Nasarawa State on September 25 from a residential area in the vicinity of the school. One student and a prospective student sustained bullet wounds in the course of the attack. After an initial demand for the sum of N50 million, the gunmen later released the abducted student on September 27 upon receiving the sum of N300,000, airtime recharge card and packs of beverages from her family as ransom.

At least, five female students of the Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA), in Katsina State were abducted by suspected terrorists, in their residence located behind Mariamoh Ajiri Memorial International School along Tsaskiya Road, on October 4.

On October 15, terrorists abducted two students of the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State in Sabon Garin Damba area of the State, where some of the students' off-campus hostels are located.

On October 24, armed robbers invaded private female hostels in Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ogun State the school, dispossessed the occupants of their valuables and allegedly raped four students. Following this, the university suspended its second-semester examinations which were on-going at the time of the incident.

Right to Fair Hearing and Mob Action

While several violations of human rights are perpetrated by state institutions and their agents, in other cases, individuals have taken laws into their hands in jungle justice style. Some of the motivation for mob action as opposed to reporting to appropriate authorities, is based on the citizens' diminishing trust in the ability of the government to deliver justice.

In Cross River State, Martina Okey Itagbor, a 70-year-old woman was accused of witchcraft and for causing the death of several youths in her community, including two men who died in a road accident. On the basis of these accusations, she was beaten, her fingers were cut off and she was set ablaze by some youths on June 18.

Usman Buda, a butcher was accused of blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed in the course of a conversation and was subsequently lynched to death by a mob in an abattoir in Sokoto State on June 25.

On July 9, a 32-year old man, Ebimotimi Freeborn was accused of stealing 'madiga', a local delicacy in Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital and was lynched. The Police arrested three persons connected with the mob action. Freeborn, who graduated from university in 2018, was also said to be unemployed. He was also known to be having mental health issues and being emotionally unstable.

An unidentified man was caught in Lapai Local Government Area of Niger State on August 18, was set ablaze by a mob for allegedly kidnapping two children. He was carrying the children away to an unknown destination when he was accosted

by some residents of the area who asked him where he was taking the two children to. Unable to give a satisfactory answer, they beat him up and set him ablaze.

A female lawyer, Uduak Adams demanded justice after being attacked by a mob that would have lynched her over a false accusation of kidnapping a boy. The incident occurred on September 16, 2023, on Aborisade Street in the Surulere area of Lagos State when she went to inspect a house and asked the boy for directions. The boy's mother raised a false alarm, accusing Adams of kidnapping her son when she could not find him,

causing a crowd to gather. The crowd beat Uduak up and was preparing to set her ablaze when the said boy returned, causing the crowd to disperse.

The vigilante Chairman in Ughewwughe community of Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State was beaten to death for accidentally killing his colleague at a burial ceremony on November 18. He was said to have been shooting sporadically at the ceremony when a bullet hit and killed his colleague. The family members of the deceased stormed the house of the vigilante Chairman, where he was beaten to death in retaliation.



Aftermath of a reprisal attack on a Community in Ehime-Mbano LGA of Imo State by Security Agents



Image source: The Guardian Nigeria News



Image source: African Centre for Media & Information Literacy



THREATS TO CIVIC SPACE AND OF EXPRESSION

In the year 2023, Nigeria's shrinking civic space remained a major concern. Using uncertain powers, supposedly assumed from Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act, 2015, government and security officials pounced on citizens and organisations to perpetrate abuse of human rights. Criticisms on social media by individuals of public officials are increasingly being met by high-handed application of the Cybercrimes Act. Individuals and activists who question officials with allegations of corruption or abuse of power, are often clamped down on.

Activist and publisher of Cross River Watch, Agba Jalingo was arraigned at the Federal High Court in Abuja on March 27 for what the prosecution alleged to be the offence of cyberstalking under the Cybercrimes Act. The charge was brought in relation to an article he published about the sister-in-law of the former Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayade. In August 2022, Jalingo had been arrested for a similar allegation.

The reckless and arbitrary use of political influence and deployment of state security apparatus by public office holders and their associates to deal with issues that can otherwise be pursued and resolved through civil legal action, raise serious concern. This amounts to the

violation of the rights of their perceived critics and abuse of power.

A former Chairman of Ijebu East Local Government of Ogun State, Wale Adedayo was detained by the Department of State Services (DSS) for alleging that Governor of Ogun State, Dapo Abiodun was diverting local government funds, in a letter he wrote to a former Governor of the State, Segun Osoba, and repeated in petitions to two federal anti-corruption agencies. He was arrested by the DSS command in the State and detained due to his refusal to withdraw the allegation levelled against the Governor.¹¹

Restriction on civic space has also manifested in the form of disruption of protests by security agents or government sponsored counter-protests, to shut down genuine, peaceful protests by citizens who assemble to speak up against government actions or activities. This was the case on November 1, 2023, when Imo State Government workers assembled in Owerri, the State capital, to protest poor working conditions, including non-payment of salaries and pensions by the Imo State Government. The workers were violently dispersed by thugs under the watch of security operatives. In the chaos that ensued,

¹¹ Akinlotan, O. (2023, September 3). *Falana demands release of suspended Ogun LG boss from SSS custody*. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/619391-falana-demands-release-of-suspended-ogun-lg-boss-from-sss-custody.html>

President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Joe Ajaero who was present to lead the protest, was arrested by security operatives aided by the thugs, blindfolded, taken to an unknown location and beaten up.

The ability of civil society organisations to function without restraint and encumbrance is a continuing concern. Increasingly, the regulatory environment for Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) operations is resulting in shrinking of civic space. In 2020, the Nigerian Government passed a new Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) that increased the burden of operations of CSOs in the country. CAMA introduced reporting requirements for CSOs exceeding even that of commercial enterprises and companies, thus imposing major constraints for CSOs. CSOs registered under Part F (Incorporated Trustees section of CAMA) are now required to report twice to government. Under CAMA, CSOs also face the risk of government take over. The powers reserved in the Act allow for their activities and operations to be seized by government, their trustees sacked and replaced by government appointees. This certainly goes against the grain of the concept of non-governmental organisations that CSOs are.

As CSOs continued to be overstretched with the burden of compliance with multiple laws and regulations, the Executive Secretary of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) of Nigeria, Dr. Rabiun Olowo in November, announced that a code of conduct for the public sector and not-for-profit sector to 'enhance efficiency in corporate reports' will be unveiled in the first quarter of 2024. According to him, this is to address the concern that "a number of entities and government

institutions are falling short of the high standards expected under the FRC Act 2011."¹²

Freedom of Expression and of the Press

In the year 2023, the government did not relent in tackling journalists, activists, critics and media. The media particularly faced high-handed clamp down for publications critical of government. The independent broadcast media particularly became target of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). Using so called powers of monetary fines and penalties, the National Broadcasting Commission targeted broadcast stations, especially those with wide reach and viewership, imposing arbitrary fines and subjecting them to constant harassment.

The National Broadcasting Commission imposed a fine of N2 million each on Arise News and TVC on February 3, for alleged breach of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code, in the countdown to the 2023 general election. It accused TVC News of allowing derogatory and unfair comments to be broadcast on its station. It accused Arise News of giving prominence to unfair content.

On March 27, the NBC fined Channels Television, the sum of N5 million for alleged violation of the Broadcasting Code, for a statement made by the Labour Party Vice Presidential candidate, Datti Baba-Ahmed in a programme, which the NBC defined as capable of inciting public disorder.¹³

¹² Aro-Lambo, B. (2023, December 1). FRC To Unveil Code Of Conduct For Public Sector, NGOs. Leadership News. <https://leadership.ng/frc-to-unveil-code-of-conduct-for-public-sector-ngos/>

¹³ Suleiman, Q. (2023, April 1). NBC fines Channels TV N5 million over Datti's "ending democracy" comment. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://tinyurl.com/mry4nd3c>

In October 2023, the NBC issued what it described as a “final warning” to Arise News over the “preponderance of derogatory and incendiary remarks” by the guests that appeared in one of the station’s programmes on October 5.¹⁴

However, in May 2023, a Federal High Court in Abuja ruled that the NBC does not have judicial powers to impose penalties, as it cannot act as complainant, judge and jury in determining allegations of infractions by media houses. The court issued an order of perpetual injunction restraining the Commission from imposing fines on broadcast stations in the country.¹⁵ This decision arose from a suit instituted by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA) in reaction to the NBC’s imposition of fines on 45 broadcast stations in March 2019.

Also, the Court of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on October 23, 2023 ruled that the Nigeria Broadcasting Code used by the National Broadcasting Commission to impose sanctions and fines on broadcast stations violates freedom of expression. It further held that the Nigerian Government had failed in its responsibility to align its domestic legislation with its international obligations. The decision arose from a suit instituted by a non-governmental organisation, Expression Now Human Rights Initiative.¹⁶

¹⁴ Nigeria, G. (2023, October 7). NBC serves Arise TV final warning on alleged violation of Broadcasting Code. The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News. <https://guardian.ng/news/nbc-serves-arise-tv-final-warning-on-alleged-violation-of-broadcasting-code/>

¹⁵ M. (2023, May 29). mraadmin. <https://mediarightsagenda.org/media-rights-agenda-wins-suit-challenging-nbcs-power-to-impose-fines-on-broadcast-stations/>

¹⁶ Oloniran, G. (2023, November 21). *NBC code violates freedom of expression – ECOWAS court*. Punch Newspapers. <https://tinyurl.com/ehhsj2rj>



Image source: National protection | ISHR



THREATS TO JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

The Nigerian Judiciary has come under intense public scrutiny in recent times. Since January 2020, when the Supreme Court intervened in the elections conducted in Imo State and removed the incumbent at the time, Emeka Ihedioha, replacing him with Hope Uzodinma, the fourth-placed candidate in the 2019 general elections, the credibility of the Nigerian Judiciary has continued to be questioned. Recent judgments arising from the Judiciary regarding the 2023 general elections have further deepened questions about the Judiciary's conduct and questions around its non-partisanship and independence from political interference. Although no specific allegation of corrupt practices has been investigated or verified, public perception has continued to interrogate the ability of the judiciary to rise above these allegations.

The Judiciary was put on trial as soon as hearings opened on election disputes, particularly the Presidential election. The legal challenge mounted by opposition parties against President Bola Tinubu's emergence revolved around failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to follow its own regulations, and adhere to the provisions of the Electoral Act, as well as constitutional provisions on issues of eligibility; documented cases of voter intimidation, violence, bribery of the electorate, and dual nomination. The courts either dismissed the evidence put

forward or made excuses for the culpable.

Equally embarrassing for the Judiciary has been the conduct of the courts over the Kano State Governorship election. The electoral victory of the opposition New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP) was overturned by the Kano Governorship Election Petition tribunal in favour of the ruling All Progressives Congress. However, the ruling on its appeal turned controversial. While the Court of Appeal orally announced that it upheld the verdict of the tribunal on November 20, certified true copies of the judgment revealed that the Appeal Court actually ruled in favour of the opposition NNPP, with its ruling appearing to have been hurriedly and untidily changed at the last minute.

Disobedience of Court Orders

The problem of government disobedience of court orders is also of continuing concern. The Nigerian government's disobedience of court orders raises questions about the rule of law, separation of powers and effectiveness of the judicial system. The rule of law is a fundamental principle that underlines the equality of all individuals before the law and accountability of government and citizens. Nigeria's Constitution recognises the principle of separation of powers

bestowing Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers on different arms of government to avoid abuse of power. Disobedience of court orders certainly undermines the principle of separation of powers and government accountability, with the consequence that public trust in Nigeria's legal system could be severely affected. It also breeds arbitrariness and undermines government's responsibility to uphold the rule of law and respect the independence of the Judiciary. There is also the downstream impact of government's disobedience of court orders, as it could build public and citizens' perception that the legal system is ineffective or that the government is lawless. It could further result in the breakdown of a country's overall stability. The disobedience of court orders in Nigeria are enumerated in several instances involving human rights, political issues and public policy.

A few instances where court orders have been flagrantly disobeyed by government in 2023 include the arrest and detention of suspended CBN Governor, Godwin Emefiele. Even on the occasions he was granted bail by the courts, he was always swiftly re-arrested on one excuse or the other, an indication of the political undertone of his prosecution. Similarly, Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) remains incarcerated despite court orders for his release.

In February 2023, amid the chaos occasioned by the CBN's Naira Re-design policy, some State Governments approached the Supreme Court to seek an order invalidating the policy and to declare it unconstitutional. On February 8, two days before the CBN's deadline for the use of the old naira notes, the Supreme Court granted an interim order suspending the policy and further ordered that the old notes and their

newly designed versions should remain legal pending further hearing of the suit. However, former President, Muhammadu Buhari went on to restore the validity of the old N200 notes for a 60-day period and insisted that the old N500 and N1,000 banknotes had ceased to be valid, in clear violation of the order of the Supreme Court.¹⁷

¹⁷ Adesomoju, A. (2023, March 3). Buhari is a disobeyer of court order – Supreme Court. Premium Times Nigeria. <https://tinyurl.com/msjzv6cm>



Image source: Independent Newspaper Nigeria - Women protesting Court of Appeal Judgement in Kano State



peoples
gazette



DWINDLING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Since the arbitrary and uncoordinated announcement of removal of fuel subsidy by President Tinubu during his inaugural speech as President on May 29, citizens have witnessed an incredible plunge in their conditions of living. On inauguration, President Tinubu announced the immediate end to the fuel subsidy that had been in place in Nigeria since the country became a major oil exporter in the 1970s. This was followed by a subsequent announcement that the government had decided to float the naira, thus also ending the subsidy regime for the country's currency. While experts praised the decision of the government as bold and making economic sense, its effect on living conditions was terrible. The corruption surrounding the country's import of subsidised fuel and the arbitrary allocation of foreign currency to family, friends and cronies of government officials had taken its toll on Nigeria's economy. The removal of oil subsidy and preferential allocation of foreign exchange was intended to dismantle the web of corruption surrounding these two issues. Unfortunately, it appeared that beyond the announcements that were made, no meaningful thought had been put into making this work in a way that protects citizens. The effect was the damning consequence of economic conditions of the country – inflation jumped, prices of food, goods, commodities and services rose astronomically, and businesses have been severely affected. Lots of companies have

shut down or cut back on their activities. Job losses have been reported in exceedingly high numbers. All of these have impacted on how citizens live in the country.

There has also been the added problem of insecurity. Rising unemployment has meant that the level of crime has risen.

Following the harsh effects of the removal of fuel subsidy and the inflationary impact of naira devaluation, the cost of living shot up dramatically. In reaction to this development, the two main labour union coalitions in Nigeria, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), threatened a general strike to back demands for reversal of these policies. In response, the government promised palliatives to ease the burden of its new policies on citizens. With the hardship still biting and the government's promise of palliatives yet to be fulfilled, the restiveness in the labour movement persisted. The unions eventually chose the occasion of the country's independence anniversary to assert the rights of workers in the face of excruciating living conditions. President of the NLC Joe Ajaero declared an indefinite strike from October 3. The strike was suspended for 30 days after the government promised to increase wages and make a number of welfarist concessions for workers in formal employment.

The decision of the CBN under the leadership of Godwin Emefiele to re-design and replace currency notes just ahead of the 2023 general elections exacerbated living conditions at the beginning of 2023. The apparently ill-advised and poorly implemented policy engendered massive economic disruptions, inflicting various indignities and, even torture, on the mass of the population. Three people were shot dead by security forces in the city of Benin, the Edo State capital during the February 15 protests against the hardship caused by the currency swap.¹⁸

Another issue that agitated citizens was the Federal Government's increase of fees in unity schools by over 100%, from N45,000 to N100,000 and increase of tuition fees at a similar rate by some federal tertiary institutions,¹⁹ which came at a time when Nigerians were grappling to adjust to the increased cost of living occasioned by the removal of fuel subsidy and foreign exchange rates unification. This worsened the economic hardship that was already confronting citizens and has implications on access to education.

¹⁸ Reporters (2023, February 16). *New naira crisis: Violence spreads in states, three killed, banks burnt*. Punch Newspapers. <https://punchng.com/new-naira-crisis-violence-spreads-in-states-three-killed-banks-burnt/>

¹⁹ Tough Times For Parents As Unity Schools, Varsities Increase Fees amid fuel price hike - Daily Trust. (2023, July 21). Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/tough-times-for-parents-as-unity-schools-varsities-increase-fees-amid-fuel-price-hike/>



Image source: Guardian Newspaper



SHRINKING DEMOCRACY

The 2023 elections generated a lot of hope and enthusiasm. These were mainly pinned on the reforms and provisions which went into a re-enactment of the Electoral Act 2022. Two new provisions in particular appeared to excite citizens and prospective voters. One required biometric identification and authentication of voters before they could vote, and another permitted the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to utilise technology in elections.

Most Nigerians decided that these provisions offered some guarantee that votes will count in the 2023 elections, given that past elections were primarily marred by illegal thumb printing of ballots by unverified voters, snatching and destruction of opponents' ballots, as well as falsification and alteration of results. Biometric identification of each voter and the upload of polling unit results on a result viewing portal, it was reasoned, will forestall such acts of cheating.

Encouraged by the law, there was a surge of new voter registrations that added 9.5 million new voters, 70% of which were young people between 18 and 35 years. Voter enthusiasm was also fuelled by the emergence of a viable third-party Presidential candidate, which offered a chance to break away from the two-party mould that had dominated recent Nigerian politics. In all, there were 93.46 million registered voters,

out of which 87 million actually collected their Permanent Voter's cards.

Registered voters between 18 and 34 years were the single biggest demographic, constituting 39.65% of all voters, followed by those between 35 and 49 years constituting 35.75%. In other words, under-50 voters represented more than 75% of the voting population, with those over 50 years accounting for less than 25%. As INEC Chairman Yakubu declared while presenting these numbers, that 2023 was going to be an election to be determined by young people.

Indeed, ahead of the vote, INEC gave assurances that it was ready and had put in place arrangements to ensure the integrity of the vote. In its Regulations and Guidelines issued ahead of the elections, INEC clearly indicated that no one would cast their ballot without biometric authentication and that polling unit results would be uploaded to INEC's Result Viewing (IReV) portal to promote transparency and forestall electoral fraud.

Despite high hopes that the 2023 elections would be different, there were voices of caution. The ruling All Progressives Congress candidate, Bola Tinubu, in a leaked video told his supporters that political victory is not served "a la carte." Rather, "you have to grab it, snatch it and run

with it.” International non-profit organisation, Human Rights Watch noted that the authorities in Nigeria remained unaccountable for past election abuses, as well as the insecurity that had for long pervaded the land and warned that they did not bode well for the elections.

“There is a thick veil of violence shrouding the 2023 elections that undermines people’s fundamental right to vote,” said [Anietie Ewang](#), Nigeria researcher at Human Rights Watch. “It is important for the authorities to swiftly restore public confidence in their ability to hold those responsible for electoral violence accountable and ensure the safety and security of all Nigerians.”

The organisation’s statement observed that abuses perpetrated with impunity by security forces and other accomplices during the 2019 general elections went unpunished. These abuses may well manifest themselves once more, the rights group said. Those observations subsequently proved to be prescient.

A few days before the election in Lagos State, one MC Oluomo, a well-known supporter of the ruling party candidate, Bola Tinubu, issued a threat on social media that anybody who did not intend to vote for his candidate should not come out on the election day in their own interest. Upon the expression of outrage by members of the public at such impunity, Lagos Police spokesman, Benjamin Hundeyin declared that Oluomo was only joking. No attempt was made to arrest or censure him.

Yet, in 2019, the same Oluomo had been mentioned as undertaking a similar conduct on behalf of the ruling party. Gangs of thugs allegedly under his control, attacked opposition strongholds to disrupt voting and ensure that opposition votes

did not count. He faced no consequences then, as then President Muhammadu Buhari appeared to have gained from his antics.

Election Day

On the Presidential and National Assembly election day, February 25, people were out in large numbers for an election that witnessed about the lowest turnout since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999. Yet in many parts of the country, voters were frustrated and unable to cast their ballots either due to disruptions by thugs, inadequate provision of electoral materials or even non-appearance of electoral officials.

True to Oluomo’s threats, and contrary to police explanations, thugs supporting the ruling party attacked opposition strongholds in more numbers than in 2019, beating up voters and shredding ballots. There was no police intervention in many of the incidents posted on social media and reported by journalists.

Similar violence aimed at the opposition was also reported in other parts of the country, notably Kogi and Rivers States, and on a relatively smaller scale from virtually all parts of Nigeria.

What first became obvious on election day was the late deployment of electoral materials. For an election in which voting was supposed to start at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2 p.m., only 26% of the voting centres opened on time, according to the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, coalition of more than 70 rights and civic groups that observed the process nationwide.

Even then, there were regional disparities. Situation Room reported that while 37% of polling units started casting ballots on time in the North East, it was 33% in the North West, 32% in the South West, 30% in North Central, 16% in the South-South and 6% in the South East. At several polling points, INEC officials were reported to have told voters that they did not have enough ballot papers, with the result that many eligible voters were unable to vote. There were also reports of election officials not showing up at all in a number of polling units.

Concerns were also raised about the unlawful behaviour of ruling party officials, including President Buhari, who openly displayed his ballot, along with his wife, to show that he voted for Tinubu, in violation of electoral law provisions for secret balloting and prohibiting campaigning on election day.

In one of the most blatant cases, thugs and policemen allegedly working for the Rivers State Government, took over collation centres and emerged with results showing the ruling party candidate had won, despite evidence to the contrary. Hopes that the Electoral Commission would reject the mutilated result sheets were dashed.

There was widespread concern that the Electoral Commission did not deliver on its commitment promising real-time upload and display of results once voting and counting were completed at polling units. Instead, for more than eight hours after voting and counting were concluded, no results were uploaded to INEC's Results Viewing portal. When eventually results were uploaded, they were only those for national legislative elections and none for the Presidential, a failing

INEC glibly explained away as being due to “a glitch.”

Complaints that the results being announced were in many cases at variance with signed results recorded at polling units were ignored by INEC.

With tempers rising, the Labour Party, the resurgent outsider, favoured by some opinion polls to win, called for the cancellation of the results, saying its victories were being doctored in favour of the APC, often with the connivance of electoral officials and security personnel. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) made similar allegations, saying it had lost confidence in the INEC Chairman, Yakubu and accusing him of working for the ruling APC.

On social media, citizens posted video evidence of electoral officials altering and doctoring results, mostly in favour of the ruling party. Party agents also posted original results they signed at polling units, showing different numbers from what was being announced by the Electoral Commission. Still, INEC went ahead to declare the ruling party candidate, Tinubu, as the winner of the election. Opposition parties that complained were advised to take their complaints to the courts.

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room election observer group stated that failure to upload results as expected “eliminated the most important guarantee of transparency and credibility” for the 2023 elections. “The seemingly highhanded manner in which the Chairman of INEC, who served as the National Returning Officer for the Presidential Election, handled proceedings during the results collation exercise further eroded public confidence in the elections,” the group concluded.

As European Union election observers noted in their report, INEC did not “publish the manner of calculation of the declared Presidential and National Assembly winners, the turnout per State, number of accredited voters, total votes cast, rejected ballots, votes attributed to each party or the list of polling units where elections were cancelled, postponed, or not held. The absence of this information undermined the possibility for independent verification.”

With this precedent of INEC disregarding its own rules already set in the Presidential vote, the State governorship elections that followed on March 18 followed the same template. There was even more violence, ethnic profiling, vote suppression and falsification of results often with the active role of compromised electoral officials.

Unmet Thresholds

“As I have said repeatedly, the Commission’s allegiance is to Nigeria. Our loyalty is to Nigerians who want free, fair, credible and verifiable elections supported by technology, which guarantees transparent accreditation and upload of polling unit results for citizens to view in real-time on Election Day. It is for these reasons that the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) were introduced. There is no going back on the deployment of BVAS and IReV for the 2023 General Election.”

The above are the words of INEC Chairman Yakubu in a press statement he personally signed, which was released on November 16, 2022, underlining the minimum standards and

the expectations for the 2023 elections. With all considered, INEC, the electoral umpire, failed to meet expectations. It failed to meet all the key thresholds it set for itself for ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in 2023. In the view of both local and foreign observers, the country took many steps backwards.

Signs of problems with election administration were already obvious during the voter registration process. There were problems of ethnic profiling in different parts of the country, whereby some Nigerians were not being allowed to register to vote in areas where they are not considered indigenous, despite being born there or having lived there for decades. Similar problems were also reported during the distribution of voter’s cards, particularly in the country’s main city of Lagos.

There was no evidence of INEC taking firm action to ensure that justice was done to all intending voters. For this reason, such discriminatory actions were carried over to the election days, with people suspected of not supporting the ruling or dominant party prevented from casting their ballots in many places.

After the signing of the 2022 Electoral Act (that prescribes the authentication of voters and INEC Regulations and Guidelines that provide for upload of polling unit results on a portal), there was a surge of new registrants motivated by the expectation that the votes would count. INEC did not do its best to accommodate the new registrations, and instead appeared apprehensive of the growing interest of new voters. The Electoral Commission ended the voter registration exercise months ahead of the time prescribed by the Electoral Act, thereby disenfranchising millions of Nigerians who could

no longer complete the process they had started or even start it at all.

On the election days, the indication from the reports received from election observers was that there was a substantial improvement in the working of the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) used for voter accreditation and upload of polling units results. They had worked fairly well in off-cycle elections in Osun and Anambra States, prompting the general belief that they would work well in the Presidential and other elections. Both election observers and the political parties seemed to agree that the devices worked well, with INEC being accused of deliberately sabotaging the technology to achieve pre-determined ends.

All the assurances INEC made about the integrity of the Voter Register being guaranteed by biometric authentication was somewhat undermined by the presence of evidently underaged voters at many polling units across the country. Even less so was the pledge of transparency in the collation and announcement of results. INEC has yet to publicly demonstrate how it arrived at the figures it gave as the result of the Presidential election, which remain at variance with the records of opposition parties' agents and election observers. The results for the Presidential election were not uploaded in real time as promised by INEC.

Another key failing observed is the outsize powers allowed some State governors that are of the ruling party or aligned with them to interfere in the electoral process. There was the widely reported case of security agents working in Rivers State taking over collation centres and driving out agents of political parties.

The 2023 general elections has led to near total loss of faith in the democratic process in Nigeria, with citizens worried that elections in the country may have become a farce.

This conclusion remained even after the three recent governorship elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States.



Consultative Meeting on Strategy for Engaging with the National Assembly Committees on Human Rights



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The PLAC 2023 human rights report finds that the human rights situation in the country continues to be of concern. The persistent problems of human rights violations that manifest in denial of civil liberties, police and security agencies' abuse of citizens, shrinking civic space and deepening economic and social deprivations, receding judicial independence and denial of fair hearing in the courts, among others, remain serious concerns. The report also finds that Nigeria's failure to deliver credible elections resulting from serious abuse to the electoral process has escalated. The levels of impunity and breakdown of the institutions of governance pose major threats to Nigeria's democracy.

Similarly, there are growing encroachments on the fundamental rights for freedom of speech and expression, with public officials showing increasing intolerance.

The year opened with reports of attacks on unarmed civilians by insurgents and other non-state actors on one hand, and the security forces on another. It is also ending the same way. In one incident, scores of people were killed in Kaduna in a mistaken air strike on December 3. There are also many reports of extra-judicial killings by security forces. Life in general has remained insecure in most parts of the country, with troops

deployed in virtually all of the country's 36 states. Other security threats from non-state actors have persisted, and in some cases taken a turn for the worse.

Recommendations

Nigeria needs to return to the path of respect for human rights and the rule of law in order to preserve its democracy. Practices that impinge on personal freedoms need to be expunged. For years, police abuse of human rights has remained a challenge in the country. The government will need to implement Police reform in order to bring the Police and other security agencies into conformity with international and national laws and best practices that emphasise respect for human rights.

There is also an urgent need for the government to respond to the worsening insecurity in the country and improve the nation's security environment. Special reforms need to be introduced to strengthen the ability of security forces to fulfil their responsibility of securing citizens and the nation. It will also be important to hold security officials to account for abuse of human rights and of their position.

Secondly, government institutions need to be made more accountable and responsible, obeying established laws that safeguard human rights and civic space. Provisions of the law, including the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA), which impose undue burden on non-governmental organisations and affect their ability to operate freely, need to be reviewed.

There is also an important need to ensure that regulatory agencies supposedly responsible for the media in the country are reined in, away from their arrogant and arbitrary use of regulatory powers to infringe on the right to free press and of expression.

Citizens' trust in the Judiciary needs to be reinstated and measures taken to ensure that the Nigerian Judiciary is able to operate without political influence and interference. It is also important to ensure that judges who abuse their office or use same for pecuniary gains are held to account.

Nigeria's electoral process and institutions responsible for elections management need urgent reform. The 2023 elections in the country show declining confidence in the election system. Citizens' confidence in the electoral process needs to return. This can only happen if the process of nominating and appointing officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is made to be truly independent, excluding partisan political interests and representation in the Commission.

Finally, Nigeria's economic and social conditions are worsening owing to poorly implemented reform measures. While the removal of fuel subsidy and flotation of the country's currency may appear to be desirable and bold measures

to revamp the economy, these need to be well managed to give the desired results. The government will need to introduce measures to counter the current huge level of unemployment and failing businesses, rising inflation and worsening living conditions of citizens. In popular Nigerian parlance, the delivery of 'democracy dividends' is imperative for citizens to continue to have faith in Nigeria's democratic process.

APPENDICES



Key Incidents of Human Rights Violations in 2023

This non-exhaustive list of incidents include some of the human rights violations observed in the year 2023, to provide an insight into the trend of human rights abuse for the year. The incidents cut across a variety of rights that were abused.

Violations by Security Operatives

January 1

Two teenagers were killed and another injured by gunfire from a policeman at a wedding party in Tudun Matawalle, Sabuwar Unguwa in Katsina State. According to the Police command in the State, some of its officers were on a crime-bursting patrol when the ‘accident’ occurred.

January 14

A 23-year-old man, Paul Arowolo, was beaten to death by two Policemen attached to Area ‘C’ Surulere and a civilian accomplice in the Ojuelegba area of Lagos State. The deceased, a fashion designer, was said to have taken his father’s tricycle and the family’s only means of livelihood to work on January 14. Arowolo resisted the Police personnel who tried to collect

‘toll’ from him. He was said reportedly taken to the station but never made it back home, as he died from unexplained injuries.

January 24

The Nigerian Air Force rained bombs on some herders from Nasarawa State who went to Makurdi, the Benue State capital to recover 1,250 cows impounded by the State Livestock Guards, mistaking them for terrorists and killing about 27 herders instantly. The death toll from the incident later rose to about 40. The Nigerian Air Force eventually took responsibility for the attack in June 2023, five months after the incident.

January 25

Policemen were reported to have invaded the residence of a 28-year old fashion designer in Osun State at about 2:00 am January 25 and shot him dead. According to eyewitnesses, the officers broke into the 16-room building where Nurudeen Quadri lived and were trying to force entry into every room in the house while looking for Quadri. His young wife had to comb hospitals by dawn, to find her husband’s body. The Police claimed he was an ex-convict.

February 26

A 15-year-old boy, Pelumi Sulaimon, was shot and killed by soldiers attached to 'Operation MESA' around Makoko, in the Yaba area of Lagos State. According to residents in the area, the soldiers were hired by political thugs to carry out a reprisal on their opponents in the community. The soldiers had opened fire, shooting indiscriminately in the community when their bullet hit 15-year old Pelumi who was going to get drinks for his friends to celebrate his birthday. They also shot and killed a tricycle operator, identified simply as Aloma, whom they mistook as one of their targets.

March 20

A soldier shot and killed a commercial motorcycle rider and his passenger, a nursing mother and her baby, in Babanna community in Borgu LGA of Niger State for refusing to pay the bribe demanded by the soldier. The rider and his passenger were returning from the Monday Babanna market and heading to their residence in Benin Republic.

July 13

A two-year old boy was hit and killed by a stray bullet during an operation by officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at the Okpanam area of Asaba, Delta State.

July 26

Operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) shot two persons dead, including 22-year-old Gafar Yusuf, in the Idioro area of Mushin, Lagos State. The NDLEA operatives stormed the community around 10:00 pm to raid a drug den when they started shooting sporadically in a bid to achieve their aim. Stray bullets from the operatives hit and killed two persons.

July 26

Two traders in Ogbete Market, Enugu State, were shot dead while protesting the sealing of their shops by the State government. The Enugu State Government sealed two commercial banks and 107 shops for observing the Monday 'sit-at-home' order in the State, which the Governor had banned. The State Government had announced that all the sealed shops and banks would remain closed for one week and would only be considered for reopening if the owners produced tax clearance certificates and other relevant documents. Frustrated, the traders, protested the government's action, calling for the reversal of the decision. A combined team of the police and military shot at the protesters, killing two persons. The Police's defence is that the protest was initially peaceful but was later hijacked by hoodlums who made it violent.

July 31

Four operatives of the Rivers State Police Command arrested three men and extorted the sum of N6.5 million from them. They picked the men from Omoluwabi in the Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, tagged them ‘Yahoo boys’ and took them to Delta State where they reportedly dispossessed them of the said amount after detaining them for one day.

August 5

A 17-year-old senior secondary student, Abdullahi Tukur Abba died after being tortured by security personnel attached to ‘Operation Farauta’ in Yola, Adamawa State. The SS 2 student was arrested after a neighbour lodged a complaint with the task force over a missing phone and was allegedly beaten to a stupor before he was admitted at the Modibbo Adama University Teaching Hospital, Yola where he died.

September 9

A Police Inspector, Oliver Akang and five other policemen attached to the Anti-Kidnapping and Anti-Cultism Police unit in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State stormed Ibong Otoro village during a raid, and shot aimlessly, when a bullet hit a farmer, Umog Charlie. On reporting the matter to the Akwa Ibom State Commissioner of Police, Olatoye Durosinmi, gave the family of the victim the sum of N1.2 million and forced them to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to stop legal proceedings on the killing of their brother. According to the victim’s family, the Police threatened that they would accuse them of being

criminals, if they refused to take the money and forget about the matter.

October 13

Chibueze Nwakor was shot and killed by Police officers attached to the Area Command in Onitsha. Chibueze, a father of three, was shot dead without provocation by three policemen, led by one Jude Utazi, around his residence in Anambra State on his way to his place of business.

November 28

A Police Inspector in Kano State was arrested for shooting at groups of rival restive youths, in Kurna Quarters, Fagge Local Government Area of Kano State, leading to the death of one and leaving two others injured.

Insecurity

January 9

The President of Igueben Area Customary Court, Precious Aigbonoga, was abducted by gunmen around Ugoneki axis on her way to Court in Igueben Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State. She was however rescued by a joint military-police team after a few days.

January 10

Gunmen killed four persons on Nzomiwu Street in Eziani community, Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State.

They invaded the area and shot indiscriminately into the air, thereby killing three males and a female, who was said to be pregnant. The reason for the attack could not be ascertained.

January 12

Gunmen attacked and set ablaze, the secretariat of Ihiala Local Government Area in Anambra State.

They were said to have invaded the secretariat, setting five buildings in the complex ablaze with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and petrol bombs. and killing three vigilante operatives who were guarding the complex.

January 14

Three persons were killed in an attack on the country home of the spokesman of the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP), Ikenga Ugochinyere-Imo in Umukegwu community, Akokwa, Ideato North Local Government Area of Imo State. Ugochinyere-Imo was the candidate of the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the State, for the Ideato North and South Federal Constituency election. Some vehicles and campaign materials within the premises were also set ablaze.

January 15

Terrorists set ablaze a Catholic priest, Isaac Achi in his residence in the Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Achi was attached to St. Peters and Paul Catholic Church, Kafin-Koro. A colleague of the Reverend Father identified as Father Collins was also shot in the shoulder while trying to escape from the scene. Following the death of the priest, aggrieved women and youth burnt down the Kafin-koro Police Divisional Office. This occurred when the Police tried to disperse people who had gathered to peacefully protest the death of the priest.

January 15

Terrorists attacked the New Life For All Church in Jan-Tsauni, Gidan Haruna community in Kankara Local Government Area of Katsina State. The terrorists riding on motorcycles invaded the church, kidnapped worshippers and left the pastor with injuries.

January 23

Terrorists killed three persons and abducted three others in the Kuta area of Niger State, when they attacked about seven communities in the State. They were also said to have emptied the food barns of the villagers and rustled cattle in large numbers.

February 2

Gunmen murdered Nnaemeka Ugboma, Chairman of the Ejemekwuru Customary Court in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, while he presided over a court session. This brought the session to an abrupt end as lawyers, court staff and litigants scampered for safety.

February 26

Gunmen suspected to be herders invaded three communities in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State and killed 13 people.

March 14

Bandits abducted 56 farmers in Adunu, Kwagana and adjoining communities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. The abductees included women and children. The bandits demanded for the sum of N200 million ransom for their release.

March 15

Gunmen kidnapped the Secretary of the All Progressives Congress in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State, Amadi Osaronu. Osaronu was reportedly abducted by gunmen dressed in police uniforms from his residence in Aluu, Ikwerre LGA.

April 30

Bandits killed at least 36 persons, including six mobile policemen in Dan Umaru in Zuru area of Kebbi State and four others in Shinkafi village in Zamfara State on the same day.

July 8

Gunmen killed nine persons and razed six houses in Sabon Gari community in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. Many people were still missing in the wake of the attack.

July 9

At least eight persons, including an eight-month-old baby were killed by gunmen in Farin Lamba community of Vwang District of Jos South Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State.

July 16

Gunmen numbering about six kidnapped two persons in the Mpape area of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

July 17

Gunmen killed Eze Nnamdi Durujiaku, the traditional ruler of a community, Nguru Nweke in Aboh Mbase Local Government Area of Imo State.

August 10

At least 20 people, including women and children were killed by assailants in separate attacks in Batin and Rayogot villages, Heipang district of Barki Ladi LGA of Plateau State. Similarly, many others sustained various degrees of injuries while several houses were also burnt in the process. Residents of the community narrated that the attackers invaded the community while they were sleeping. The efforts of vigilante operatives in the community were not enough to ward off the attackers who had superior firepower. The duel with the attackers resulted in the death of four of the vigilante operatives.

August 14

Armed bandits attacked the headquarters of Bungudu Local Government Area of Zamfara State, killing one person and abducting 7 others including the son of the Emir of Bungudu, Abdulrahman Hassan and the former State Programme Officer of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Abubakar Bungudu.

August 19

Gunmen abducted eight members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) along a highway in Zamfara State. The victims were kidnapped while traveling from Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, to Sokoto State, to take part in the mandatory national service when their vehicle was intercepted along a highway in Zamfara State.

August 31

Gunmen suspected to be kidnappers opened fire on two commercial buses and abducted scores of the passengers near Ochonyi village, along the Abuja-Lokoja highway.

September 1

Bandits who invaded a mosque at Saya-Saya Village in the Ikara Local Government Area of Kaduna State and killed five worshippers and two other persons in the village on.

September 7

Two members of Benue State Community Volunteer Guards and a lady have been reportedly shot dead by unknown gunmen at Ugba and Abeda-Shitile in Logo Local Government Area of the State. The two attacks also left several persons injured. The armed men were said to have stormed the communities on motorbikes and opened fire.

September 15

Bandits raided the Dogon Noma village in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, killed at least two persons and kidnapped three others. The bandits took away six motorcycles in the course of the attack.

September 22

About 24 students of the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State were abducted by terrorists who attacked three female hostels in the university.

September 25

Gunmen abducted a female student of the Isa Mustapha Agwai Polytechnic, Nasarawa State from a residential area in the vicinity of the school. One student and a prospective student sustained bullet wounds in the course of the attack. After an initial demand for the sum of N50 million, the gunmen later released the abducted student on September 27 upon receiving the sum of N300,000, airtime recharge card and packs of beverages from her family as ransom.

October 4

At least, five female students of the Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA), in Katsina State were abducted by suspected terrorists, in their residence located behind Mariamoh Ajiri Memorial International School along Tsaskiya Road.

October 10

Four students of the Nasarawa State University, Keffi were abducted from their hostel in Angwan Kaare in the Keffi Local Government Area of the State by armed men.

October 15

Terrorists abducted two students of the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State in Sabon Garin Damba, area, where some of the students' off-campus hostels are located.

Bandits kidnapped a former Chairman of the Ngeski Local Government Area of Kebbi State, Garba Hassan, alongside 12 other people. Hassan and the others were passengers in a commercial vehicle when they were whisked away by the gunmen along the Teginia – Kontagora Road in the State on October 19.

October 24

Armed robbers invaded private female hostels in Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ogun State, dispossessed the occupants of their valuables and allegedly raped four students. Following this, the university suspended its second-semester examinations which were ongoing at the time of the incident.

October 29

Three persons were killed in Tse Gamber, Sengeve Council Ward in Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State by armed herders attacked the village and destroyed properties in the process.

November 5

Several persons died following a terrorist attack on a Maulud procession at Kusa village in Musawa Local Government Area of Katsina State. At least 30 people were reported to have sustained injuries, while 21 others were said to have been abducted, including women and children. The terrorists were reported to have surrounded the venue of the Maulud procession and began firing gunshots into the crowd.

November 6

At least 11 persons were killed by bandits in two separate attacks in Gidan-Buwai and Maikujera villages of Gandi District of Rabbah Local Government Area of Sokoto State within one week. Over 300 animals were rustled in the attack. The bandits razed many houses, over 60 silos, 10 motorcycles, and five vehicles, while seven people sustained various degrees of injuries. They also burgled several shops and stole essential commodities and food items. The first attack occurred November 6, with the second attack following a few days later.

November 28

Gunmen killed four people including security operatives in the Aguluzigbo community in the Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State. The gunmen invaded the community and started shooting, leading to exchange of fire with security operatives.

Attack on Security Agents

January 9

Bandits killed seven personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and six vigilante operatives attached to them, in a local mining site in Manini in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

February 2

Gunmen killed a police officer and a vigilante operative in Obosi community, Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The gunmen were said to have attacked a police facility used by the Anti-cult operatives, shooting sporadically and threw petrol bombs in the station. Police operatives repelled the attack and recovered unexploded explosives and other dangerous materials from the attackers.

February 3

Gunmen attacked Abagana Divisional Police Headquarters in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. The gunmen were said to have fired several gunshots during the attack, before setting the police facility ablaze. Fire fighters in the State responded quickly and put out the fire. Two vigilante operatives patrolling the community were killed by the gunmen during the attack, while many others sustained injuries.

February 10

Three Police officers attached to the Delta State Government House were ambushed and killed in Anambra State on their way to Abia State, on official duty. The officers were Inspectors Lucky Aleh, Celestine Nwadiokwu and Jude Obuh, who were attached to the Explosives Ordnance Disposal Unit in the Delta State Government House, Asaba.

March 5

Bandits in large numbers attacked the Maru Police Division in Zamfara State. In an attempt to repel the attack, the Divisional Police Officer, SP Kazeem Raheem and another Inspector attached to the Division, Inspector Rabi'u Umar were killed.

March 27

Gunmen killed three personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) at Ekeisu market in Obiangwu Community in the Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State in.

August 13

At least 13 soldiers were killed by bandits in Kundu, Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. About 50 bandits were reported to have been killed in the encounter with the soldiers. A military helicopter deployed to the site for rescue operations crashed near Chukuba Village in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State.

September 8

The Divisional Police Officer of Ahoada Police Division in Rivers State, SP Bako Angbashim was killed when he led his team to raid the hide out of a cult group, which resulted in the exchange of gunfire between the Police and the cultists.

September 19

Unidentified gunmen attacked and killed at least eight security operatives, and also set ablaze two of their vehicles in Oriagu, Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. The security operatives included soldiers, policemen and personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). The security operatives were however, said to have carried out reprisal attacks during which tens of houses were razed to the ground and properties destroyed.

November 3

Seven personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were killed by heavily armed suspected sea pirates on Bakana River in the Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State. The NSCDC personnel were on a pipeline surveillance patrol on the river which is about 12 kilometres from Bakana town when they were ambushed by the sea pirates.

Right to Fair Hearing and Mob Action

June 18

In Cross River State, Martina Okey Itagbor, was accused of witchcraft and for causing the death of several youths in her community, including two men who died in a road accident. On the basis of these accusations, she was beaten, her fingers were cut off and she was set ablaze by some youths.

June 25

Usman Buda, a butcher was accused of blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed in the course of a conversation and was subsequently lynched to death by a mob in an abattoir in Sokoto State.

July 9

A 32-year old man, Ebimotimi Freeborn was accused of stealing 'madiga', a local delicacy in Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital and was lynched. The Police arrested three persons connected with the mob action. Freeborn, who graduated from university in 2018, was also said to be unemployed. He was also known to be having mental health issues and being emotionally unstable.

August 18

An unidentified man caught in Lapai Local Government Area of Niger State, was set ablaze by some residents for allegedly kidnapping two

children. He was carrying the children away to an unknown destination when he was accosted by some residents of the area who asked him where he was taking the two children to. Unable to give a satisfactory answer, they beat him up and set him ablaze.

September 16

A female lawyer, Uduak Adams demanded justice after being attacked by a mob that would have lynched her over a false accusation of kidnapping a boy. The incident took place on Aborisade Street in the Surulere area of Lagos State when she went to inspect a house and asked the boy for directions. The boy's mother raised a false alarm, accusing Adams of kidnapping her son when she could not find him, causing a crowd to gather. The crowd beat Uduak up and was preparing to set her ablaze when the said boy returned, causing the crowd to disperse.

November 18

The vigilante Chairman in Ughewwughe community of Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State was beaten to death for accidentally killing his colleague at a burial ceremony. He was said to have been shooting sporadically at the ceremony when a bullet hit and killed his colleague. The family members of the deceased stormed the house of the vigilante Chairman, where he was beaten to death in retaliation.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

January 4

a 36-year-old man allegedly raped his 18-year-old daughter inside his shop in the Ikotun area of Lagos State.

February 19

A 40-year old man was reported to have defiled a 15-year old girl in the Shasha area of Lagos State.

March 7

A 38-year-old teacher was arrested for defiling four pupils aged 8, 9, 12 and 14, respectively, between January and March 2023 in an Islamic school in Gombe State, where he taught.

May 12

A 25-year-old woman, Chinyere Ifesinachi was arrested by the Police in collaboration with the Anambra State Ministry of Women and Social Welfar, for torturing her house help, identified as Idinmachukwu, with a pestle and cane.

October 12

A 40-year old man, Lekan Sunday was alleged to have broken into the Orioke Aanu Oluwa Gbohunmi church in Ilogbo Adu, Kemta in Ogun State, armed with weapons and raped a prophetess. He was arrested by the Ogun State

Police command after the survivor made a report at a nearby police station.

November 13

A 30-year-old man, Buguwa Kwaji was arrested by the Adamawa State Police Command after confessing to raping a two-year-old girl, and blaming his action on alcohol intoxication.

November 18

The Ogun State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Adijat Adeleye, announced the arrest of a 76-year-old man, for allegedly raping and impregnating a 16-year-old lady.



CALLS TO ACTION BY PLAC IN 2023

In the year 2023, PLAC issued several calls-to-action on human rights incidents. This is one of the methods deployed by PLAC to raise awareness on identified human rights violations and enjoin citizens to call on the appropriate authorities to intervene in these matters.

1. CALL TO ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERN

Highlights of Human Rights Violation

Activist and publisher of Cross River Watch, Agba Jalingo was arraigned at a Federal High Court in Abuja on March 27 for what the prosecution alleged to be the offence of cyberstalking under section 24 (1) (b) of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act 2015. The judge remanded him in Kuje Custodial Centre and did not take any application for bail upon his arraignment. An application for bail is expected to come up on March 30. In the meantime, Jalingo remains in prison. The charge is related to an article he published about the sister-in-law of Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayade.

It will be recalled that in August 2022, Jalingo had first been arrested on this same charge at his house in Lagos State and moved to Abuja from where he was released. The current charge appears to be a continuation of his earlier arrest.

The reckless and arbitrary use of political influence and deployment of State security apparatus by public office holders and their associates to deal with issues that can otherwise be pursued and resolved through civil legal action, raise serious concern. This amounts to the violation of the rights of their perceived critics and abuse of power.

Action

Dear Citizen, we ask that you make your voice heard by writing to the National Assembly Committees on Human Rights in the Senate and House of Representatives to intervene in this issue. Write your petition using the format below and send it to nassrightsaction@placng.org or click here: <https://bit.ly/40BfwF6> to submit your petition.

Letter Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ am concerned to learn of the arrest, arraignment and detention of activist and publisher of Cross River Watch, Agba Jalingo for publishing an article alleged to defame the sister-in-law of the Cross River State Governor, Ben Ayade.

I enjoin you to:

Call on the Federal Government to drop the charges preferred against him and ensure his immediate and unconditional release.

Name of Complainant:

This message is brought to you by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

2. CALL-TO-ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERN

In a letter dated March 27, 2023, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) fined Channels Television the sum of N5 million for violating the Nigeria Broadcasting Code in an interview with Datti Baba-Ahmed, Vice Presidential Candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 general elections. The NBC's action appears to be a response to a petition against the interview by Bayo Onanuga, Director of Media and Publicity of the All Progressives Congress (APC) Presidential Campaign Council, who described the views expressed by Baba-Ahmed as divisive and inflammatory, and called for the television station to be sanctioned. The NBC in recent times has been imposing fines on media organisations for what it calls breaches of the broadcasting code.

Although the NBC is empowered to sanction media establishments, the arbitrary imposition of fines on broadcast stations deemed to have violated the broadcasting code is capable of posing a threat to the right to freedom of expression and the press guaranteed in section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution. This may stifle free speech and information dissemination.

Action

Dear Citizen, we ask that you make your voice heard by writing to the National Assembly Committees on Human Rights in the Senate and House of Representatives to review the power of the NBC to sanction broadcast stations as contained in the National Broadcasting Commission Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004. Write your petition using the format below and send it to nassrightsaction@placng.org or click here <https://forms.gle/FnoqPxxvCAenmfN5JA> to submit your petition.

Letter Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ express concern over the power of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to unilaterally indict and impose sanctions on broadcast stations for violation of the broadcasting code.

I enjoin you to:

Review the National Broadcasting Commission Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, with a view to amending it to curb the power of the NBC to determine and impose sanctions on broadcast stations without an opportunity for hearing.

Name of Complainant:

This message is brought to you by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

3. CALL TO ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERN

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution defines education as an objective for government to fulfil. However, in 2017, a Federal High Court ruled that every Nigerian child has a right free and compulsory basic education by reason of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, 2004 made pursuant to the constitutional provision on education. This Act provides for 9 years of free and compulsory education up to junior secondary school. It is important for this Act to be reviewed to provide for a further three years of free senior secondary education to improve access to education for Nigerian children.

Action

Dear Citizen,

Make your voice heard by calling on the Human Rights Committees of the National Assembly in the Senate and House of Representatives, to intervene in this matter. Write your petition using the format below and send to nassrightsaction@placng.org.

Report Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ am concerned about the fulfilment of the right to education in Nigeria. In addition to free and compulsory basic education for Nigerian children up to junior secondary school, I enjoin the Committee to:

- » Amend the UBE Act, to provide for three years of free and compulsory senior secondary school education.

This call-to-action is issued by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

4. CALL TO ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Usman Buda, a butcher was accused of blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed in a conversation and was subsequently lynched to death by a mob in an abattoir in Sokoto State on June 25, 2023.

In Cross River State, Martina Okey Itagbor, was accused of witchcraft and for causing the death of several youths in her community, including two men who died in a road accident. On the basis of these accusations, she was beaten, her fingers were cut off and she was set ablaze by some youths on June 18, 2023.

These incidents violate the right to life, the right to fair hearing and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, guaranteed by sections 33, 36 and 38 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, respectively.

A little over a year ago, in May 2022, a university student, Deborah Samuel Yakubu was stoned to death and set ablaze on allegation of religious blasphemy. Several incidents of mob action against fellow citizens for unfounded claims were recorded across Nigeria, including in Lagos State and in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in 2022. Till date, the perpetrators of these acts have not been

brought to book. If punitive measures are not taken against the perpetrators by those in authority, these incidents will most likely continue to occur undeterred.

Action

Dear Citizen,

Make your voice heard by calling on the Human Rights Committees of the National Assembly in the Senate and House of Representatives to intervene in this matter. Write your petition using the format below and send to nassrightsaction@placng.org or click here: forms.gle/XBNQcyfAT3fGzC xv9 to sign and submit your petition.

Report Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ am concerned to learn of the brutal murder of Usman Buda by a mob in Sokoto State, under the guise of religious blasphemy, as well as the gruesome murder of Martina Okey Itagbor based on allegation of witchcraft.

I enjoin you to:

- » Call on the leadership of the Nigeria Police to thoroughly investigate these incidents, apprehend suspects and charge them to court.

This call-to-action is issued by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

5. CALL TO ACTION: UNLAWFUL DETENTION AND OTHER INCIDENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

There is growing concern that arresting authorities and even the courts are keeping suspects who should be presumed innocent until proven guilty, in custody in disregard of the philosophy behind bail.

Constitutional safeguards of release on bail within 24 or 48 hours is constantly breached and the courts are increasingly delaying or adjourning applications for bail for unduly long periods, thus denying citizens a key fundamental right.

Citizens are enjoined to raise concerns about denial or delay in granting bail to suspects who should ordinarily be presumed innocent until found guilty. Bail is a constitutional right, and every citizen is entitled to it.

Write to the National Assembly Committees on Human Rights in the Senate and House of Representatives through nassrightsaction@placng.org or fill this form: <https://forms.gle/VXQnyNFrOrLHsBm98> to report incidents of unlawful detention and other human rights violations for legislative action.

This message is brought to you by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

6. CALL TO ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Highlights of Human Rights Violations

On September 19, gunmen attacked and killed members of a Joint Security Task Force comprising personnel of the military, Nigeria Police and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Umualumaku, Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. In a reprisal attack, security operatives destroyed the properties of residents of the community.

The frequent attacks on security agents, government facilities, traditional rulers and other citizens in the South East State, as well as reprisal attacks by security agents, raise serious concern and call for immediate intervention.

Action

Dear citizen,

Make your voice heard by calling on the Human Rights Committees of the National Assembly in the Senate and House of Representatives to intervene and investigate this matter. Write your petition using the format below and send to nassrightsaction@placng.org or click here: <https://forms.gle/S7zTRZbSKMhvyVGa7> to sign and submit your petition.

Report Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ am concerned to hear about the killing of security operatives in Umualumaku in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State by gunmen, as well as the destruction of properties in the community by persons identified as security operatives in a reprisal attack.

I enjoin your Committee to call on the leadership of security agencies to:

- » Conduct in-depth investigations into this attack on security operatives and bring the perpetrators to book;
- » Identify the security operatives responsible for the reprisal attack on the community and bring them to account;
- » Call their security operatives to order and to stop the incidence of reprisal attacks in the future.

Name of Complainant:

This call-to-action is issued by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

7. CALL TO ACTION ON DISRUPTION OF PROTEST AND ARREST OF NLC PRESIDENT

Issue

On Wednesday, November 1, 2023, Imo State Government workers assembled in Owerri, the State capital, to protest poor working conditions, including non-payment of salaries and pensions by the Imo State Government. The workers were violently dispersed by thugs under the watch of security operatives. In the chaos that ensued, President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Joe Ajaero who was present to lead the protest, was arrested by security operatives aided by the thugs, blindfolded, taken to an unknown location, beaten up and later released.

This incident violates the rights of the protesting workers to peaceful assembly and association as guaranteed by section 40 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The illegal arrest, torture and brief detention of the NLC President by security agents violate his rights to dignity of the human and freedom from torture guaranteed by section 34 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution.

Action

Dear Citizen, we ask that you make your voice heard by writing to the National Assembly Committees on Human Rights in the Senate and House of Representatives to ask that the incident is thoroughly investigated and perpetrators brought to account. Write your petition using the format below and send it to nassrightsaction@placng.org or click here: <https://forms.gle/BDk7eHdXGHchRWSD6> to submit your petition.

Letter Format

Dear Distinguished/Honourable Chairman,

I, _____ do hereby express deep concern over the attack on Imo State Government workers who assembled to protest the failure of the State Government to pay salaries and pensions. I am further concerned about the arrest and brutalisation of the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Joe Ajaero, by security operatives in concert with thugs.

I enjoin you to call on the Inspector General of Police to:

- » Thoroughly investigate the attack on peaceful protesters by thugs under the watch of security operatives, as well as the illegal arrest, torture and brutalisation of the NLC President by security agents acting in concert with thugs.
- » Identify the perpetrators and bring them to account.

Name of Complainant:

This message is brought to you by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) as part of its Human Rights project.

8. CALL TO ACTION ON DISABILITY INCLUSION

Did you know that the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019:

- » Prohibits all forms of discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and includes sanctions for defaulters?
- » It also guarantees PWDs the right to free and inclusive education up to secondary school level;
- » And requires that PWDs make up at least 5% of employees in public organisations.
- » Persons who suffer discrimination may also institute civil action.
- » The Act forbids approval of public building plans that make no provision for accessibility facilities and requires transport service providers to make provisions for PWDs.

- » Public buildings and structures in the country are mandatorily required under the Act, to be modified before the end of January 2024, in order to meet the needs of PWDs.

Dear Citizen,

Let us join hands to build an inclusive society!

- » Please call on governments at all levels to ensure that all public facilities are modified to be accessible to PWDs.
- » Enjoin State Governments that are yet to domesticate this Act, to do so and ensure full compliance before the end of January 2024, as prescribed by the Act.

Let us play our part and respect the rights of PWDs

Remember, there is Ability in Disability!

ABOUT PLAC

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organization committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions, and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making process.

The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy. PLAC receives funding support from donors and other philanthropic sources.

