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NIGERIA | Progressive National Baptist Convention urges US to designate Boko Haram as terrorist group, protect religious minorities

The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), a group of US-based Baptist churches, adopted resolutions yesterday urging the United States government to designate Nigerian Islamist sect Boko Haram as a terrorist group, and to support religious minorities in the Middle East, North Africa and South-Central Asia.

The PNBC adopted Resolution 18 at its 51st Annual Session, which states that since its inception in 2002, Boko Haram has “sought the elimination of Christianity and the Nigerian Federal state and its replacement with a Shari’a state governed by an extremist orthodoxy defined by its leader, Mohammed Yusuf.”

“Boko Haram currently conducts hit and run drive-by murders of government officials, imams, traditional rulers and individuals deemed to have betrayed or oppose it, the group has also given Christians, including those indigenous to the north and centre, the alternative of conversion or death and has mounted massive attacks on Christian suburbs and homes, and gun and bomb attacks on church services.”

The PNBC also adopted Resolution 19 urging the US government to appoint a special envoy at the State Department focused on the plight of religious minorities in the Middle East, North Africa and South-Central Asia.

The resolution highlights the plight of Christian communities in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, including the case of Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani. “Conflict and political instability has had a negative impact on religious minorities in the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan and Afghanistan with acts of persecution increasing and high levels of religious minorities fleeing these countries.”

The PNBC urged the US government to “actively promote religious freedom as a fundamental part of its policy in its relations with the countries of the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan and Afghanistan, to ensure that aid and political cooperation is conditioned on the respective governments taking concrete steps to protect religious minorities and uphold religious freedom in their countries.”

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW welcomes the PNBC’s recommendations. A special envoy at the State Department would help to coordinate efforts to support religious minorities in the regions where they are vulnerable. We also support calls for Boko Haram to be designated as a terrorist organisation, a move that would release much needed funding and support to combat the threat that this group poses to both within Nigeria and beyond her borders.”

For further information or to arrange interviews please contact Kiri Kankhwende, Press Officer at Christian Solidarity Worldwide on +44 (0)20 8329 0045 / +44 (0) 78 2332 9663, email kiri@csw.org.uk or visit www.csw.org.uk .

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is a Christian organisation working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Progressive National Baptist Convention, which was founded in Ohio in 1961, is the church convention of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.