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## Human Rights Council

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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

## **The situation of IDPs in Nigeria in times of Covid-19 and the deteriorating conflicts in the Middle Belt**

The situation of the civilian population in large parts of Nigeria and especially in the north and the Middle Belt is rapidly deteriorating. Only between May to the end of July 2020, 2,700 people died in the whole country due to violent conflicts. Moreover, the number of people fleeing within Nigeria has also increased significantly in July 2020. The week from 13 to 19 July 2020 is an alarming example when 1,709 people had to flee in the north-west and the northern Middle Belt. Long-standing tensions between ethnic and linguistic groups, attacks by criminal groups, banditry as well as conflicts between herders and farmers led to a new wave of population displacement. Together with the ongoing conflicts with the Islamist militia Boko Haram in the north-east, many people continue to feel threatened in their daily lives. As of 31 July 2020, the UNHCR assumes that not only the number of IDPs is around 2 million but also that the number of people leaving Nigeria for the neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroon is continuously growing and already amounts to 290,000 people.

Undoubtedly, such a situation is intolerable in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Especially the numerous informal, as well as formal IDP camps in the BAY states (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe), are overcrowded, and some of them offer only one square meter per person. The urgently needed social distancing can hardly or not at all be practised under such circumstances. Besides, there is a lack of water and sanitary facilities, which further worsens the hygienic conditions and makes the camps high risk-areas for the spread of the virus. Direct extensions and protective measures are indispensable at this point. In addition, attacks like the one in neighbouring Cameroon on the border to Nigeria on 2 August 2020 at the IDP camp in Nguetchewe show that Boko Haram does not stop at these camps. According to UNHCR, 18 people died in this attack, with many more injured and a total of 1,500 people leaving the camp and their village for fear of further attacks. Consequently, the special protection of those who fled, as well as humanitarian aid workers, must be a top priority.

However, short-term measures do not provide a solution to the problem. While the fight against the Boko Haram and other Islamist splinter groups has attracted a great deal of attention in the past, conflicts between numerous groups are also swelling in the north-west and the Middle Belt. Although attacks such as the ISWAP in Borno on 10 June 2020, when 69 villagers were killed, are proof that the danger of Islamist attacks has by no means been averted, the conflicts in the Middle Belt and especially in the Kaduna State are highly relevant as well. In an extremely heterogeneous field of conflict, particularly clashes between cattle herders and farmers destabilise the region. Numerous armed groups attack settled farmers or steal their cattle, forcing many of them to leave their homes. In addition, the continuing desertification and climate change are causing migration movements of Fulani herders, who conflict with local farmers in the Middle Belt over water and grazing land. Socio-cultural, as well as religious clashes, cause recurring escalations with fatal consequences for the civilian population and an ongoing growth in the number of IDPs.

The problem is that the state structures in this region are only weakly developed and that, on the one hand, the civilian population often feels defencelessly exposed to violent attacks and, on the other hand, perpetrators are rarely caught and persecuted. As a result, one can observe cycles of impunity producing more attacks and reprisal attacks. Cheap arms and a low level of state authority enforce the problem of deepening mistrust and exacerbating violence.

Thus, urgently needed measures in Nigeria are not limited to improving the living conditions of IDPs in the camps but are much more likely to require fundamental structural interventions in the north of the country and the Middle Belt. Without the establishment of stable state structures and institutions, conflicts will not be resolved, but will increasingly spread. The growing number of displaced people not only poses an enormous risk of spreading the Covid-19 virus but also further threatens the already precarious food security. Hence, it is now not only the north-east of the country, where many farmers have had to give up their arable land due to the long-standing threat of Boko Haram but also increasingly farmers in the Middle Belt. The fact that this region, which is rich in agricultural produce, is also facing problems in food production through the

displacement of farmers is primarily not only a problem for the local population but an overall threat to the security of supply for entire Nigeria.

Consequently, the task must be to take measures in the interests of the Nigerian civilian population that can both alleviate the acute threat of displacement and the Covid-19 virus in the short term and contribute to de-escalation in states such as Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Plateau, Yobe, Borno and Adawa in the long term. Only if structures are established that can intervene and moderate the conflict, and if perpetrators are punished, real improvement can be achieved. State weakness and poor governance are the main drivers of banditry.

Therefore, the Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to call upon the Nigerian government and the UN to take the following measures:

- Official registration and spatial expansion of existing camps to a size that allows for the maintenance of necessary social distance. In addition, creation of several new IDP-camps to avoid huge camps with a high-risk of virus spreading.
  - Increased information of the citizens about the Corona Virus - deliberately spread misinformation by Boko Haram is a great danger
  - More sanitation and essential hygiene services in the IDP camps, with increased military support to ensure that camps in the Marte and Abadam LGAs, which were previously difficult to reach, can be supported as well
  - Protective measures against attacks on IDP camps
  - Disarming of militant pastoralist groups
  - Training and adequate equipment of security forces, both in the north-east of the country and in the Middle Belt and north-west
  - Building effective legal institutions and judicial commissions to persecute aggressors against civil society
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