



*For immediate release*

**Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the worsening security situation in Nigeria**

(New York, 2 February 2023) The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, expresses her strongest condemnation of the air strike on 24 January 2023 resulting in the killing of reportedly at least 40 civilian herders predominantly from the ethnic Fulani community and the injuring of scores more in Rukubi village, at the border of Nasarawa and Benue States. Recalling another airstrike that in 2017 resulted in 54 civilian casualties in an IDP camp in Borno state, the Special Adviser is appalled that once again civilians are targeted in an indiscriminate manner in Nigeria. The Special Adviser urges the Nigerian authorities to ensure that counterterrorism operations are conducted in full respect of international human rights and humanitarian law and calls on the authorities to promptly fulfill their obligations to investigate the airstrike and hold accountable the perpetrators of this heinous attack, which could amount to serious violations and abuses of human rights.

“I am particularly concerned about the situation in the North-West and North Central regions of Nigeria, where the air attacks resulting in casualties from the Fulani community took place. These dynamics of targeting communities along identity lines, if unaddressed, risk further fueling intercommunal tensions, recruitment by armed groups and retaliatory attacks, with obvious impact on civilians” the Special Adviser adds.

The Special Adviser is also deeply concerned about the worsening security environment in Nigeria characterized by the politicization of transhumance, and increasing divisions among communities, including based on stigmatization along religious and ethnic lines. These are all indicators of increasing risks of atrocity crimes as established by the [UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes](#) developed by the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. “In this extremely volatile environment, it is important that the general elections scheduled to be held on 25 February 2023 do not trigger violence and even atrocity crimes” the Special Adviser warns.

The Special Adviser also reiterates her concern for increasing trends of hate speech along identity lines and incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence that permeates the political discourse in Nigeria. “I call on all political actors and authorities to abide by the National Peace Accord they signed that includes their commitment for peaceful campaigns in Nigeria. I also encourage all actors to respect the rule of law, and discard stigmatizing and discriminating narratives targeting communities” the Special Adviser highlights. She also urges Nigerians to use their country’s judiciary system to address disputes instead of recurring to violence and the incitement thereof in the context of elections and beyond.

Recalling the Global Consultation organized by her Office in Abuja in May 2022 on the role of traditional leaders in preventing atrocity crimes the Special Adviser calls on religious and traditional leaders and actors in Nigeria to do their utmost to appease tensions, prevent incitement to violence and address the risk of atrocity crimes in view of the upcoming general elections and beyond.

The Special Adviser also expresses concerns about the manipulation of transhumance in the political discourse particularly in the West Africa and Sahel region. “Continuous high levels of violence targeting communities in relation to transhumance, including with hate speech and incitement to violence, are particularly concerning in view of upcoming elections in many countries in the region. I call on all actors to urgently take action to address conflicts, prevent atrocity crimes and allow for peaceful elections to take place” she warns.

In Nigeria and the wider region, the Special Adviser also emphasizes the importance of the prevention role played by the African Union’s Panel of the Wise and the ECOWAS’ Panel of Elders in their advisory and mediation capacity.

The Special Adviser reiterates her continuous support towards strengthening existing Nigerian prevention mechanisms, including the judiciary and early warning mechanisms, as well as to address and counter hate speech trends in the country. Moreover, she recommends that protection and accountability gaps be promptly addressed by Nigerian authorities who bear the primary responsibility to prevent atrocity crimes from being committed.

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