

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 25, 2019

Ambassador Sylvanus Adiewere Nsofor
Head of Mission
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
3519 International Court, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Ambassador Nsofor,

We write to express strong concern about closing media and civic space in Nigeria. There have been a number of troubling reports about Nigerian security services assaulting and detaining journalists, using excessive force on non-violent protestors and taking other actions that inhibit freedom of expression, and otherwise prevent Nigerians from fully exercising their fundamental constitutional rights.

Journalists and activists such as Omoyele Sowore, Jones Abiri, Kofi Bartels, Samuel Ogundipe, and others investigating and speaking-out about politically sensitive problems like corruption or insecurity have been harassed and detained; with reports that some have even been tortured. In at least one instance, the Department of Security Services has ignored a court order to release a detained activist. Restrictions and deadly crackdowns on non-violent protests since 2015 have similarly reflected a lack of apparent commitment to civic freedoms which is beginning to negatively impact the image of Nigeria's government, both at home and abroad. Security forces used live ammunition on Shiite protestors in Zaria, Kaduna State in 2015; on protestors in Onitsha, Anambra State in 2016; again on a Shiite procession in Abuja in 2018; raided the offices of the Daily Trust, and arrested the editor in January 2019; and shot and killed Precious Owolabi, a journalist covering a July 2019 protest in Abuja. These crackdowns have collectively killed hundreds of Nigerian citizens, and serve as troubling demonstrations of the excessive force used by the military. The alleged perpetrators of these abuse have yet to be brought to justice.

Mr. Ambassador, Nigeria has a critical role to play in preserving peace and stability in West Africa, and as the most populous democracy on the continent it could serve as a shining example of how countries can best observe the rights enshrined in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. However, failure to respect the rights in the Charter and those in Nigeria's own constitution undermine your nation's ability to lead in this area. We urge you to ensure that the rights and liberties contained in the constitution are observed for all citizens, and to take strong action against further closing space for journalists, political opposition, and those in civil society. The rights of all citizens must be respected without the threat of government reprisal. We look forward to seeing progress on this critically important issue.

Thank you for your attention on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress