

Nigeria's Christian Leader Criticizes US Decision On Islamist Group

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The head of Nigeria's Christians says the U.S. decision last month to declare only three Boko Haram leaders as terrorists does not go far enough.

Ayo Oritsejafor, president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, told a U.S. congressional committee Tuesday that refusing to list the whole group as a foreign terrorist organization was equivalent to designating Osama bin Laden a terrorist, but failing to designate al-Qaida a terrorist organization.

Oritsejafor said the reluctance to blacklist the group is sending a wrong signal.

“By refusing to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization, the United States is sending a very clear message not just to the federal government of Nigeria, but to the world that the murder of innocent Christians and Muslims who reject Islamism – and I make a clear distinction here between Islamism and Islam — are accepted losses.”

Oritsejafor spoke at a hearing of a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee meeting on U.S. policy toward Nigeria.

He noted that Boko Haram was responsible for the death of 58 people near the city of Jos this past weekend, and said that the group is threatening more attacks on Christians as it seeks to impose strict Islamic law in Nigeria.

Earlier Tuesday, Boko Haram claimed it was behind the attack on a funeral in central Nigeria that killed dozens of people, including two prominent politicians. In an emailed statement to journalists, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the attacks in Plateau state, saying it will “continue to hunt for government officials wherever they are.”

Police had blamed ethnic Fulani herdsmen for those attacks.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson defended the U.S. decision, saying the group is “not homogenous” . He called on the Nigerian government to address the problem by alleviating poverty and providing better governance to all Nigerians.