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Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca





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• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Because of our time constraints, we are going to get started now. By “time constraints”, I mean that there may be bells around 1:30 p.m. or so. Those will be 30-minute bells, so I'm asking for consent to go 15 minutes beyond those bells before we suspend. Do I have consent from members?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Welcome, everybody, to the third meeting of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights. Pursuant to the order of reference of October 27, 2020, the subcommittee is meeting for a briefing on the current situation in Nigeria.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference. To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either “floor”, “English” or “French”. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. I will remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on “mute”.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. As an individual, we have Obianuju Catherine Udeh, DJ Switch; from Amnesty International Nigeria, we have Osai Ojigho, the country director; and from Biafrans in Canada Community Association, we have Tim Okafor and Stella Kemdirim.

Welcome to all of you.

You will each have five minutes to make your deputations, and then it will be open to the members for questions. We'll hold to those five minutes, so we can have as much time as possible for questions from the members.

DJ Switch, you may commence.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh (DJ Switch, As an Individual):** Hello, everybody. Thank you for having me.

I'll give you a really quick background on Nigeria and Nigerians. It is a great country with great people, spirited people. Whatever good and bad is out there, of course, I will tell you from my personal experience is as a result of the government's handling of the

country of Nigeria, how we have responded and reacted. There are no excuses.

Specifically to the day of October 20, 2020, we had such Nigerians there. They were spirited, focused, united in one goal against injustice, against police brutality, against bad governance. What started out as a protest against police brutality, especially the unit called SARS, unfortunately just degenerated into something that I still find hard to reconcile within my heart.

I remember being at the protest. I was onstage with some beautiful organizers of that particular day's event, and we were informed that there was a curfew for 3:00 p.m. I do remember that there was outrage on Twitter because it was short notice. I think we got the curfew information at about noon that day, so we said, “Look, people have come from all over Lagos. There are thousands of people here. The best thing we can do if people can't make it home is sit still, not do anything, not move. We'll sit still and we'll sleep overnight.” It was at the toll gate.

We also got information later that the governor wanted to see me and six other people. I remember saying to them that we had no leader, and that if the governor wanted to speak to us, he should kindly come to the toll gate and address Nigerians, because we had been out for over 11 days. Then the lady who came to give us the information—I do not remember her name at this time—left. She came back some 30 minutes later to inform us that the curfew had been cancelled and moved to 9:00 p.m. I remember telling the people there this information, and people cheered.

While this was going on, another member who was standing behind me came up to me and said, “Someone is taking out the cameras from the toll gate.” I said, “Do you recognize who?” That was because we had, I think, the real hearts of Nigerians there. We did not destroy anything, except for graffiti. We did not take anything. We did not take anything from the toll gate. We cleaned up after ourselves, so I wanted to be sure that it wasn't a protester who was doing that.

Then we found out that it was one of the staff who had an LCC uniform. Those are the people who manage the toll gate. We took a picture just to keep and to use as proof that we didn't destroy or take anything.

Then we realized that the big billboard that was over the toll gate had been turned off. Just before 7:00, maybe a quarter to seven—I'm not too sure of the exact time, but about seven o'clock—we heard gunshots coming from behind. At first it was chaotic, because we didn't know where the gunshots were coming from and we didn't know what the gunshots were about. Then the lights went off.

I think the rest of that is just the most tragic thing.... I thought I was going to die. I thought we were all going to die. It was in that moment that I said, "Let me go live on Instagram so that people will see what happened to us, people see where we were killed." I just believed that was what was going to happen.

I remember that the military came in first. They stopped shooting at some point, and I walked up to one of them and asked him why he was shooting at us. He said that he had express orders from above and that I was coming too close to him and that if I came too close, it would be considered an attack on him and he would have to shoot, so I moved back and asked everyone to move back.

In maybe another 10 minutes, the shooting started again. I remember seeing seven people who had been shot down. We were telling people on my live Instagram to please help us call ambulances, to please help us call CNN, Al Jazeera, Fox News, BBC, anybody, just so that people would see what was going on.

When we noticed that people were.... Obviously, people had called ambulances. We just saw an ambulance coming the first time, but then we noticed the ambulances were stopped by another set of military at the back. We didn't realize it was a three-line formation, so there were military people behind us, in front of us, and another line behind the ones in front of us.

• (1310)

They stopped the first ambulance. They sent it back. I remember saying on my live Instagram that they were turning the ambulances away. The second one came; they turned it back. The third one came from behind our backs. I really don't know how he got in, but he got in. We had to rush. There was an elderly man who was shot on the side. We had to rush him to the ambulance.

After this part, everything died down—

**The Chair:** DJ Switch, we will get an opportunity through questions to hear more of your story.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** Okay.

**The Chair:** It's very compelling. We do want to hear it, but we are going to move along so that we can get through the witnesses and then get into the questions.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to move to Osai Ojigho.

You have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Osai Ojigho (Country Director, Amnesty International Nigeria):** Thank you very much, Chair, for the opportunity to shed a bit more light on the current situation in Nigeria.

I would like to begin by stating that on the face of it, Nigeria is very compliant with human rights. It has ratified many international

treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, human rights violations and abuses are prevalent. The #EndSARS protest movement arose due to widespread human rights violations, including torture and extrajudicial killings by the police in the country.

It all started when a viral video of a man shot by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, of the Nigeria Police Force, on October 3, 2020, in Delta State, was trending online. It elicited a lot of anger because people were just shocked by the brazen acts of SARS. While the campaign for #EndSARS was not new, it was the first time, in October 2020, that street protests were made under the banner.

Earlier in the year, in June 2020, Amnesty International Nigeria released a report, "Time to End Impunity", in which we documented at least 82 cases of abuse by SARS between January 2017 and May 2020. The findings showed that SARS officers carried out torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as punishment on detainees, or as a tool for extracting information and for extortion. They seized money and property from suspects to enrich themselves rather than to bring criminals to book. Our research showed that young persons, especially young men between the ages of 17 and 30, were most at risk of arrest, torture or extortion by SARS. Even journalists were harassed, coerced and threatened, especially when they were covering stories or failing to disclose sources to the officials.

The Nigerian government adopted the Anti-Torture Act in 2017. This law criminalizes this torture in Nigeria. However, no SARS officer—or any police officer, for that matter—has been convicted of torture in the Nigerian court, despite the fact that torture is actually quite pervasive by security agents.

The impact of the #EndSARS protests was huge. Nearly 30 out of the 36 states had hosted at least one protest. Lagos had the most venues and the largest number of people gathering to protest against this brutal tactical unit.

On Tuesday, October 20, 2020, which we now call "Black Tuesday", Nigeria's military forces opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos. There were other shootings by police in other communities in Lagos that day, leaving at least 12 people dead in Lagos. Amnesty International noted that at least 56 people had died across the country since the protests began, up until October 20. In many cases, when the security forces intervened in the protests, they had used excessive force in an attempt to control or stop the protests. There was evidence that thugs were not stopped, especially when they were trying to disrupt this protest.

It's important to stress also that there have been several panels set up by the government to resolve these issues, yet they have never followed up on the recommendations.

There have been threats against human rights defenders, activists, NGOs and Amnesty International for speaking against injustice. Recently, just on Wednesday, November 4, Amnesty International was threatened by an unknown group suspected of being sponsored by the Nigerian military. They have given Amnesty International Nigeria seven days to leave the country; otherwise, they are going to inflict violence on us and our premises.

The atmosphere of fear is distracting and preventing many human rights defenders and activists from demanding accountability. It also puts front-line advocates at risk of being attacked by non-state actors. Nigeria needs to be reminded of their international obligations to protect everyone within their territory without discrimination.

We hope our testimony today will help the committee in arriving at what sort of pressure to put on Nigeria to do the right thing.

I thank you.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Ms. Ojigho, thank you.

Now we move to the Biafrans in Canada Community Association. We have Tim Okafor and Stella Kemdirim.

You will have five minutes between you.

**Mr. Tim Okafor (National Coordinator, Biafrans in Canada Community Association):** Thank you, committee members.

I want to specifically talk about the aftermath of the #EndSARS movement and protests.

After the protest, we saw a large number of people arrested by the Nigerian government. A lot of them haven't been processed, but I will now specifically bring attention to what is happening in Oyiibo in Rivers State.

This is a fallout from the #EndSARS protest. Many police stations were burned, throughout southern Nigeria mostly, in most of the states. Youth had reacted to what witnesses have described to us as high-handedness by the SARS group and other military groups and security agencies: extrajudicial killings, torture and all kinds of atrocities that are made against people.

The governor of Rivers State imposed a curfew and made a declaration that Indigenous People of Biafra—and I represent the organization of the Biafrans who live here in Canada—had committed crimes of killing police or army people or burning police stations. Because of that, he placed a curfew on four communities: Oyiibo, Ikokwu, Mile 1 and Old Mill. I want to point out that these particular communities are inhabited by Biafrans and Igbo especially.

We know the ethnic composition of Nigeria. So many times Nigerians are blinded by ethnicity. They do not see themselves as one country, so the government uses that. It brings one community up against another, and that again kills the nationalistic philosophy of the nation.

Let me state here that the reason I'm saying that is that while we look at what happened before, my attention is focused on what is happening right now. The people on the ground who speak have told us that at least 300 young men have lost their lives since the government imposed this curfew. What it did is that it left people in their houses without proper food or medication for three weeks now. If you come out because you run out of food or medication, and you're a young man between 18 and 30 years of age, you are shot or you are arrested and brutalized. There are all kinds of pictures and videos that are watched on social media.

I have spoken to the person we have on the ground, their pastor, and the kinds of things he narrated and the number of people who are dying, who are being killed or shot or arrested.... In one specific incident, an ambulance had come to carry a corpse. The military men torched the ambulance and set the ambulance on fire with people inside it.

I got the information yesterday to speak to you today on a short notice. I have spoken to a few people on the ground, and I intend to have names, times and all the things we can document so that after this meeting, I will make available to this committee the names of the people who were killed, the impact on their families and what happened.

One of the striking things they told me is that when they do this, the first thing they do is to make sure nobody gets a picture of them, so if you were using a cellphone to capture this incident, they would come down with a sniper.

The federal government sends at least 3,000 soldiers to each state of South East and South South Nigeria. My appeal is to stop the killing going on right now before we can get to other things, because people are falling. They are human beings, and their lives matter just like the lives of every single individual matter.

There are all kinds of things taking place as I speak to you now. I will send in documents, videos and audio, so if this committee can send someone down to verify the veracity of this information, that would be very helpful.

• (1320)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Okafor.

On being able to send in documents, please send any documents or any information that you would like to provide through the clerk.

Now we're going to move to questions. The members are going to have an opportunity to ask the witnesses questions.

We're starting with Ms. Iqra Khalid, from the Liberal Party, for seven minutes.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I thank all of the witnesses here for your very compelling testimony.

I would like to start by giving Ms. DJ Switch the opportunity to finish her narrative of the events that Ms. Ojigho also highlighted. Ms. Switch, take your time, but I hope that you'll leave me some time to ask some follow-up questions. In your remarks, please also address the Cybercrime Act in Nigeria and its impact on your advocacy in the online space.

Please go ahead, Ms. Switch.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** Just to quickly round that up so that I can leave you some time, we were able to hold our ground. Then the military left after a commandant came and we got his name. We just guessed they must have found out there were a lot of people who were watching what was going on. Forty-five or 50 minutes later, the police came and did the same thing, and actually killed people. That's just to wrap it up as quickly as possible.

With regard to cybercrime in Nigeria, if I understand your question, yes, it's a problem. Just as I said when I started speaking, something about Nigerians is that we're very hard-working. We have this survival instinct at every level. There's this desperate need to survive. I'm not excusing that act, because it is criminal, but all I'm saying is something led to something. There's not enough sensitization. There's not enough education for people to understand what they can use their skills for. It's a broad scope. It's something that needs to be addressed, because there are intelligent people in Nigeria who don't use it for anything but criminal things online.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Ms. Switch, can you identify and highlight for us what your life has been like since that fateful day, and how you are doing after that fact?

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** I've been on the move, because two days after my live feed, the first threat came in. I thought it was a joke. I sincerely thought it was a joke. I was on my way home. I had been on the street for two days straight. Some of my colleagues in the same industry as I am tried to come get me out of the hospital, where I was vouching for one of the boys we took there. He had been shot in the neck by a policeman. Just as I left, I got a phone call telling me I should please leave the vicinity because there were military men at the hospital. I think they found that out because in my story I was thanking the manager of the hospital for letting us into his hospital and treating us for free. I think that's how they got that information.

I had to abandon my home. I moved between people's homes and different places. I stayed in someone's property that they hadn't lived in for a long time and then, just to get out of Nigeria, I literally... I made short videos of my trip, just getting to where I am today, and I'm still travelling. I'm not even done with my trip. It's like being in a forest just to get out of Nigeria.

I put a cotton bud in my left ear because I bleed from there. I have a picture of that as well. I've been trying to document everything. I barely sleep. It's crazy. I can imagine parents who actually can't find their kids now because they've moved bodies, so....

I don't know....

• (1325)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you for sharing that, Ms. Switch. I really hope that things improve.

I'll turn to Ms. Ojigho with respect to your comments about Amnesty International and your ability to operate in Nigeria.

You mentioned that you've been asked to leave the country. You also mentioned that this #EndSARS movement is not new. What is different in this instance that has brought such large volumes of

protest; that has really highlighted this issue within the Nigerian people?

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** I'll start with your last question.

A lot of things have been building up in Nigeria over the last couple of years. It was in 2017 that #EndSARS started trending online. Last year there was a visit by the special rapporteur of the United Nations on extrajudicial or unlawful killing. In her preliminary observations, she noted the lack of accountability in Nigeria for crimes committed by state officials and that we were actually sitting on a keg of gunpowder.

The early warning signs were there for a pretty long time and kind of peaked, showing that the government needed to address this issue. If people complain, you need to ensure that justice is served. I guess when that video of October 3 was trending, people had just had enough. That month also happened to be the anniversary month of our independence. Nigeria celebrated 60 years of independence, so for young people it was like, "What is the future going to look like?" I think there were a lot of mixed feelings in celebrating our independence from Britain. All of this culminated in....

In addition, we've experienced one of the worst economic recessions of all time. The prices of things have gone up. Meanwhile, people are saying, "We can't even walk free on our streets. We need justice to happen."

With regard to the threat to Amnesty International, it's by a group that we suspect is being sponsored by the Nigerian military. We have not been able to directly link them together, but there are staged protests in front of Amnesty offices whenever we release a report, and we notice that it's always when there's been a report linked to the military that we have protesters in front of our office. We have videos to show that afterwards they go and share money and then they leave.

This threat is particularly worrying for us not because they've asked us to leave Nigeria—they've asked us many times to do that—but because we are coming out of a period when there has been wanton killing and destruction of property across the country. We've been campaigning against the police, so we feel that the people who can protect us might not be in the position to do so.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move to the Conservatives. Mr. Chiu, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.



Nigeria is actually very close to my heart. My father worked in Lagos for a few years, back in the seventies and eighties. I understand the country through him a lot. Of course, it's been quite a long time since.

I'm going to fire off a few quick questions just to update my expectations on the country itself. If any of the witnesses could take that on, it would be appreciated.

First, assuming there is an effective police complaint mechanism, has that path been exercised?

• (1330)

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** I can respond to that question, with the permission of the chair.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** Nigeria has the police complaints response unit. They receive complaints, but generally it's complaints to sexual causes. Those complaints have not led to greater improvements for prosecuting officers when they've committed crimes.

There's also the police oversight body known as the Police Service Commission. There have been a lot of challenges. As a commission, it lacks a lot of power to actually take cases of discipline and prosecution of officers independently. It's often headed by a retired police commissioner.

We believe those are some of the challenges those units have.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you. I appreciate that. You actually answered two of my other questions.

Will government agents, police or military, ever be arrested or charged? I'm trying to assess the independence of the judiciary system in current Nigeria. Again, that is open to any of the witnesses.

**The Chair:** If anyone has an answer or information, please go ahead.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** I think I can say something here.

With regard to police being charged, I'm just going to be straight up and tell you no.

There is the facade of policemen being charged. There is the facade of justice being served, but it's never served. It has devolved to the point where a policeman can actually say, in front of a camera, that he could do anything to you and nothing will happen.

That's the short answer.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you.

**Hon. Abdulrazak Namdas (Member, House of Representatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria):** [*Inaudible—Editor*] one of the witnesses and a member on the national assembly [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** In the interest of time, I'm just going to move on.

My next set of questions is about the free flow of information in Nigeria to date.

Does the government have control of media in general via direct strongarm control or through funded biases, which is soft-arm control?

**Mr. Tim Okafor:** Can I say something on that?

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Tim Okafor:** It will appear on the surface that with regard to freedom of information, the press is free to speak on issues, but that's not really what is on the ground.

Corruption is so deep in the Nigerian society that you can literally.... If you want somebody to write anything in the newspaper, you can call a journalist and give them an envelope. In fact, one of the politicians was rebuked for remarks he made. He was in a press conference and somebody asked him questions. He told the journalist that he was one of those people who gets envelopes from people.

The state of journalism has been gradually dying. There were days of Dele Giwa, a renowned journalist who did investigative journalism. The government sent him a letter bomb and he died. It was just a way to intimidate people, and that has continued. Then you put into the mix that there are supra-ethnic groups in Nigeria competing. There are these biases that will frame this question.

In summary, there's no press freedom.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Hon. Abdulrazak Namdas:** I would like to add something to that, please, if you don't mind.

My name is Abdulrazak Namdas.

I've also practised journalism in Nigeria for close to 20 years, and I happen to be....

Can you hear me now?

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Yes.

**Hon. Abdulrazak Namdas:** The question, if I heard him right, is if the government has control over the media. I want to say that in Nigeria, the government has to liberalize the media. People have electronic and print media in their houses. Of course, the government also owns its own media, which is NTA, which they control. The practitioners won't have a problem if they collect a bribe and then write for people. That would not be blamed on government. What we're talking about is the state actually stopping people from publishing.

I would say yes, because—

• (1335)

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you, Mr. Namdas.

In the interest of time—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** The time is over. We're pressed for time.

Thank you. We're going to move to the Bloc member, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

I would like to apologize for being late. It was not out of disrespect, but because of a technical problem in my part of the country, in northern Quebec. I'm really sorry about that.

Thank you for being with us today. You are here because you need help at the international level. Your presence here is proof of that. I know that Nigeria has signed the nine core international human rights treaties, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as international treaties on civil and political rights. In short, Nigeria has formally signed these treaties. If you are with us, then logically, the international community must act.

My first question is for you, Ms. Ojigho. In your opinion, what is the responsibility of the international community with regard to violations of these treaties?

[English]

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** Thank you very much.

The international community's responsibility is to impress upon Nigeria to respect the rights of everyone within its territory and to be in compliance with the international obligations it has under international law. Definitely, whenever there are incidents of extradition and executions and grievous crime that go unpunished, it means that the rest of the world is in greater danger of losing its humanity, so there is a moral duty as well as a legal obligation of the government to ensure that justice is served.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** How should the international community act, in your opinion? How can we help you?

[English]

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** One thing that has worked a lot is messages to the Nigerian president that the violence needs to stop and that protection for human rights must be defended. For justice mechanisms to work, witnesses and human rights defendants should have the safety and protection to be able to appear and share their testimony. As you've heard from some of the witnesses today, they are in hiding because the country is not safe for them anymore and this, I think, is already inhibiting the justice mechanisms that the government has itself set for it to be effective. Without that protection, it cannot happen.

An observation mission to Nigeria would help, because that would prevent situations of witnesses being put on no-fly lists or being in danger when the government does not provide police to protect them so that they can attend and give their testimony and be safe from non-state actors who want to harm them or who want to prevent the truth from happening. An observation mission is something we would encourage at this time.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Today you are talking to us, and we hear your testimonies. However, I imagine that the Nigerian

government, for its part, is also making representations to say that everything is going well in the country and that nothing bad is happening. Do you have some idea of what the Nigerian government is currently doing?

I put the question to all of the witnesses. One of you may be able to answer it.

[English]

**Ms. Stella Kemdirim (Member, Biafrans in Canada Community Association):** Can I respond? It's Stella Kemdirim. I just want to add to what my colleague Ms. Osai Ojigho said. I hope I am saying that correctly.

In addition to what one can expect from the international community—

Can you hear me okay?

• (1340)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Yes, that's fine.

[English]

**Ms. Stella Kemdirim:** An observation mission would be excellent and would address your last question about what the Nigerian government is saying.

The Nigerian government can say one thing, but what they do is another thing, so an observation mission is an excellent idea.

In addition to that, what I would suggest is to impose sanctions. It could be easily done at the international level, and by Canada even, because Canada does have some trade relationships with Nigeria. Imposing sanctions could have a great impact, in my opinion—

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** Sanctions—

**Ms. Stella Kemdirim:** That has always worked in the past, and it can work in this situation. It would send a strong message to the government. Right now the Nigerian government feels it is not accountable to its citizens, to anybody, and that has to stop.

We Nigerians in the diaspora have families there. It's only my immediate family that is here, so every night we're hearing stories and we're afraid for their safety. When it comes to police brutality, there is no excuse. Police are supposed to protect the citizens. For them to turn on the citizens is just not acceptable.

Then in addition, please let me give just one more comment on what would be helpful.

The perpetrators need to be brought to justice. The government and the police department need to be held accountable to answer your questions as to what they are doing. They claim that they have disbanded the SARS unit. They claim they have put up another unit—the SWAT unit, they call it.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** Yes, it's SWAT.

**Ms. Stella Kemdirim:** The violence continues, so to me, these are Band-Aid solutions. They're perpetrators, from the governors to the chiefs of police. They need to be held accountable. They need to be brought to justice.

Those two measures are a start. If we could impose them at the international level, I think we would see an immediate difference in the lives of these people and in their safety.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We're going to move now to the NDP and Ms. McPherson for the short time we have left. You have about four minutes maximum.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of the witnesses who have come and have shared with us.

It's so hard to hear what's happening in your country. I have never been to Nigeria. I've spent a lot of time in Africa and have never made it to your country. I certainly hope to one day.

I think I should just follow up on a few of the questions my colleague from the Bloc has asked in terms of what we can do.

I hear that an observation mission would be appropriate or would be very desirable. Unfortunately, during the current context of COVID-19, that's very unlikely to be possible. I am looking at the things we could do to aid you.

One of my questions is, what have other countries offered? Could you give me a scan of what's been happening at the multilateral level—the history of the statements we have been seeing out of the United Nations and all of those multilateral bodies, as well as support coming from within as well as from outside the African communities?

If any of you could speak to that, it would be great.

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** Let me speak on that.

In terms of an observation mission, we know that you have a consulate in Nigeria, and they have participated in some meetings that the government has set up for the diplomatic community. It might mean liaising with your consulate and with other friendly countries to do some sort of verification of what is happening on the ground. They have observed elections in our country, so perhaps they can also look at the justice mechanisms and raise very serious concerns about what is going on in the country.

Other countries—such as the U.K., for example—have issued very strongly worded statements saying that they are observing and watching. However, the fear is that harm would have already been committed if there's no measure for the government to show that it's doing good by its people.

I guess that is where the missing block is. If this were effective, DJ Switch should not be looking for a way out. In fact, she would

be under some witness protection program and the government would be seeking some justice.

The pressure needs to be that we're seeing what is happening—a breakdown of law and order—and if justice does not happen, it might end up leading to some serious complaints before the Security Council at the United Nations, or even through some of the special mechanisms, to begin to act on the question of what is going on in the country.

• (1345)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Can you tell me whether there has been any move from neighbouring countries to support emergency refugees or offer protection to allow people to travel outside of Nigeria for their own protection at this time? I'm quite worried about all of you and your safety, and obviously we've heard from the witnesses that their families in Nigeria are at great risk.

Has there been that opportunity? Would some sort of immigration or emergency refugee support be an option for you?

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** If I may come in here—

**Ms. Osai Ojigho:** I think that would be useful.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Please go ahead, DJ Switch.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** If I may come in here, from my own little experience getting myself out of Nigeria and also from encountering some military personnel of another country, I can tell you that when they saw my identification, the first thing they did was turn me back.

Now, this is not to discredit that nation. If you notice, I didn't mention the name. On purpose I didn't do that. It was because they didn't even want the trouble.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Yes.

**Ms. Obianuju Catherine Udeh:** When I started, at the beginning of my own testimony, I said that Nigeria is a great nation. It's pretty much the heart of Africa. If we can get our acts together, I believe strongly that Africa will begin to get itself together.

A lot of countries benefit from Nigeria, and that's a fact, but it's just right at the top level. There are people who can't fly out of Nigeria right now, and that's why you literally have to walk out of Nigeria.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I know I don't have any more time—

**The Chair:** I would like to—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I want to say that with leaders like you, DJ Switch, and all of you here today, I have great hope for Nigeria. We will be watching this situation very closely and we will be continuing to study it afterwards.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I know we have to stop for a moment.

**The Chair:** Before we suspend, we would like to echo what Ms. McPherson just said. For your advocacy, your bravery and your courage, thank you so much. Thank you for informing our committee.

This is a British parliamentary system. We are going to suspend members. When we come back, we will be coming back in camera to discuss committee business.

Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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