

Counter-Terrorism: Nigeria's Commitment to Criminal Justice and Rule of Law

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As part of its dedication to the Global efforts to combat terrorism, Nigeria as co-chair with Italy, hosted the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) Criminal Justice and Rule of Law (CJ-ROL) Working Group (WG) Workshop and Plenary Meeting with the theme: ***“Good Practices for the Protection of Witnesses and Criminal Justice Officials,”*** from 22 to 23 May, 2024 in Abuja.

At the event, the National Coordinator, National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), Major General Adamu Garba Laka expressed the need for unwavering dedication and collective action of all in the fight against terrorism and organised crimes.

According to him, in Nigeria, as in many other nations around the globe, the fight against terrorism and organised crime presents multifaceted challenges that demand unwavering dedication and collective action of all. The mass trial in Kainji, Niger State which is being conducted in phases has recorded a total number of 380 convictions and the fourth phase will come in due course.

He called on countries under the umbrella of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) to harness the power of collaboration and cooperation in advancing their shared goals of justice, security and peace, noting that the imperative of the protection of witnesses and criminal justice officials who play pivotal roles in the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of terrorism related cases could not be over-emphasised.

It could be recalled that that Nigeria has remained a co-chair of the GCTF CJ-ROL WG since 2017. It co-chaired with Switzerland from 2017-2022 and currently with Italy from 2022-2024. The latest joint mandate between the two nations has been extended from 2024-2026.

Nigeria and Switzerland co-chaired in 2018 to develop the Abuja Recommendations on Collection, Use and Sharing of Evidence for the Purposes of Criminal Prosecution of Terror Suspects, which was endorsed at the 2018 GCTF Ministerial Meeting on the sidelines of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly. It also co-organised the First Expert Meeting of the Working Group for the development of a set of recommendations on Rule of Law-Based Administrative Measures in the Counterterrorism Context held at The Hague, the Netherlands.

The Abuja Plenary Meeting of the forum was the second to be hosted under the Working Group Co-Chairs, Nigeria and Italy. In relation to the CJ-ROL Working Group work plan for the period of 2022-2024, the Meeting provided a veritable avenue for the member nations to highlight the CJ-ROL WG's main priority areas which are among others, criminal justice responses to the linkages between terrorism, transnational organised crimes, and international crimes; putting existing CJ-ROL resources into practice; as well as Criminal Justice and Gender.

The Working Group, under the joint leadership of Nigeria and Italy, is dedicated to supporting the development of effective criminal justice systems within a rule of law framework that fully supports human rights. It aims to ensure that persons, who plan, perpetrate or support terrorist acts are summarily brought to justice. To further show its commitment, currently, there is a witness protection bill before the National Assembly yet to be passed into law.

The CJ-ROL Working Group spurred by Nigeria and Italy is focusing on the critical role played by the criminal justice sector in combating terrorism with the forum's commitment to support rule-of-law based and human rights compliant approaches, including activities guided by the Rabat Memorandum on Good Practices for effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector and other relevant Framework Documents under the Working Group's Work Plan.

Nigeria has had to contend with threats of terrorism, violent extremism and other violent crimes with successive administrations adopting different approaches both kinetic and non-kinetic to nip the challenges in the bud. The approaches have however been commended. However, many terrorist cases have been thrown to the dust bin for want of evidences and witnesses, and this has been a major concern that ignited this new commitment.

It is pertinent to state that the government of Nigeria, through the Office of the National Security Adviser's National Counter Terrorism Centre, has remained resolute in its resolve to restore hope in the efforts to contain terror across the length and breadth of the nation. The latest event was a further testament to the nation's commitment to the fulfillment of the present administration's avowed renewed determination to ensuring a peaceful and resilience community across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria, this time around, by upholding good practices for the protection of witnesses and criminal justice officials in line with global standard.

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