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## **Statement**

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**Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor**

**Lagos, Nigeria**

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I am very pleased to be back in Nigeria, a country I first visited in the 1990s. As always, I have been struck by the energy, vitality and openness of the Nigerian people. I have had a very productive trip, and I want to thank the Government and members of this country's vibrant civil society for sharing their views with me over the past four days. I have had the opportunity to meet with the Foreign Minister, the Attorney General, senior police and national security officials, and members of the National Assembly. I have met with religious leaders, lawyers, labor leaders, journalists, human rights advocates, and other members of civil society. I also met with representatives of companies, civil society, and the National Assembly working on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. These meetings have given me a good view of both the progress that has been made and the challenges still facing this great country.

Nigeria is a very important partner to the United States. We are committed to working with the Nigerian Government and people to help you build a stable, prosperous democracy. We strongly support efforts to consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and to build professional security forces capable of protecting citizens and respecting basic human rights.

Nigeria's vast potential and the talent of its people was evident everywhere we traveled. The 2011 elections provided a solid foundation upon which democracy can grow and people we met inside and outside of government are exploring additional electoral reforms to support free, fair elections in 2015. Nigeria continues to have a very lively and vigorous civil society, a free media, and new media - essential elements of any sustainable democracy. Increasingly, Nigerians are demanding increased openness and accountability from their Government, and working to take meaningful measures to combat corruption.

At the same time, we are very concerned about the worsening security situation in the North. We strongly condemn the brutal actions of Boko Haram, and its targeted attacks against Nigerian people. Boko Haram has attacked churches, schools, mosques, and communities, as well as those who speak out against this violence. This violence has

resulted in thousands of deaths of innocent people. Boko Haram's targeted attacks have also killed hundreds of police and other security forces.

Those responsible for these acts, and those who support and protect them, need to be brought to justice for their criminal acts.

We are also seriously concerned about abuses by members of the Nigerian security forces in combating Boko Haram's extremist violence. We have received numerous reports of mass arrests, extra-judicial killings, torture, and prolonged detention without due process of law. While officials have initiated investigations in some of these cases, all too often those responsible have not been held accountable. Many Nigerians believe that the excessive use of force by security forces, often operating through Joint Task Force patrols, has alienated local populations and fueled support for Boko Haram.

In recent years we have seen that governments that adopt a multi-faceted response to terrorism and violent extremism are most successful in combating it. Such strategies include the disciplined use of force, in which security forces abide by clear rules of engagement and distinguish criminal insurgents from sympathizers and innocent bystanders. These strategies also include sustained and inclusive efforts to reach out to local communities and address their basic needs. Many of those most affected by Boko Haram violence in Northern States seek increased economic opportunity, enhanced social programs and more meaningful political engagement in shaping their own destiny. The Nigerian Government's commitment and ability to meet these legitimate aspirations will be critical to the country's future stability and security.

If Nigeria successfully pursues this approach and commits itself to enhance good governance and the rule of law, the country will be well positioned to leverage its abundant human and natural resources to become a model for other democracies in Africa and a source of great pride for its citizens. As you chart this course the United States stands ready to help you in this journey. Thank you.

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