



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
2170 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
[www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)

October 5, 2020

His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari  
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria  
Yakubu Gowon Crescent  
The Three Arms Zone  
Abuja, FCT, Nigeria

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our concern over the recent spike in violent attacks against commercial vessels and their crews in Nigerian territorial waters and in the broader Gulf of Guinea and respectfully request that your Government undertake enforcement actions to address these increasing attacks. Stability and safe passage in the Gulf of Guinea would help the Nigerian maritime economy and boost the relationship between Nigeria and the United States.

The Gulf of Guinea has become increasingly dangerous for commercial shipping. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) of the International Chamber of Commerce, the region accounted for over ninety percent of maritime kidnappings worldwide in 2018 and 2019. The IMB recorded thirty-five incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea between January and June 2020, including vessel hijackings, crewmember kidnappings, and theft of cargo, cash, valuables and ship property. Nigeria remains the hotspot for maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. In early September, for example, pirates reportedly attacked a Liberian-flagged vessel en route to Lagos, Nigeria, and kidnapped two of its crewmembers.

The Liberian-flagged fleet has a special nexus to the United States, rooted in history, strategic interests, and personal ties. Former U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius was instrumental in establishing the Liberian Ship Registry, and for over seventy-two years this program has been headquartered in the United States. The Liberian Registry today is the second largest ship registry in the world, with over 4,500 vessels, and it is directly responsible for the regulation and safety of these vessels within its jurisdiction. Given its scale, the Liberian flagged-fleet carries a significant portion of internationally traded goods, much destined for the American

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market. Piracy infringes on the safe passage of this trade. In short, attacks against Liberian and other flagged vessels seriously threaten the security and economic interests of the United States of America and Nigeria.

We commend and support the Government of Nigeria in its legislative efforts, successful criminal prosecutions, and other initiatives to prevent and suppress piracy, armed robbery and other unlawful acts against ships in Nigerian and international waters. We also recognize that combatting insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is a multifaceted and multinational effort requiring cooperation from regional and allied naval partners. We strongly encourage your government to make every effort to prevent, contain and minimize economic losses, human casualties and other damage to Liberian and other flagged vessels facing threats in Nigerian waters. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Chairman



MICHAEL T. McCAUL  
Ranking Member



KAREN BASS  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights, and International  
Organizations

Cc:

Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard, U.S. Embassy, Abuja, Nigeria