



## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **CHRI condemns Nigerian crackdown calls for Judicial Commission to investigate violence, initiate police reforms**

New Delhi/Accra, October 23, 2020 - The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) condemns the excessive police violence against peaceful protestors in Nigeria and calls on the Government of Nigeria to stop the crackdown that has taken a toll of over 60 lives, ensure accountability for excesses by security forces and guarantee the right of its citizens to protest peacefully.

“CHRI denounces the disproportionate use of force against peaceful protestors by the Nigerian security forces, without heeding principles of necessity and proportionality, in violation of Constitutional obligations and international conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory,” said Sanjoy Hazarika, CHRI’s International Director. He urged the Nigerian Government to set up an independent judicial commission under a Supreme Court judge to investigate all aspects of the violence and killings and also recommend steps for police reforms.

On Tuesday, October 20, the Nigerian security forces reportedly fired at two peaceful demonstrations without any prior warning, killing 12 people. While the Nigerian military has denied any responsibility for the shootings and dismissed it as “fake news”, CHRI is concerned that these incidents highlight the extensive violence against protestors seeking to end police brutality.

The protests began earlier this month against the alleged abuses committed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which has been accused of human rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings. This resulted in the #EndSARS movement against police violence and widespread protests across the country seeking reform and accountability. Due to the growing protests, the Government announced on October 11 that it had dissolved SARS with immediate effect and would work to reform the police by putting in place a new arrangement.

However, while CHRI welcomes this announcement, it notes that these measures were felt to be insufficient and campaigns demanding accountability continued. There are eyewitness accounts, images and video footage showing the police and security forces firing tear gas at the demonstrators, beating them with batons and sticks as people defied the curfew in large numbers. Two private TV channels were allegedly pulled off the air temporarily. This culminated in the indiscriminate firing at an unarmed crowd of protestors on Tuesday night.

Mina Mensah, Director of CHRI’s Africa office, noted that “Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted in 1979, that sets out the basic standards for policing agencies across the world. The right to peaceful demonstrations and freedom



of assembly are not only guaranteed by international human rights law, but are constitutionally mandated rights and must be respected and protected. By opening fire on peaceful protesters, there has been a flagrant violation of the Nigerian people's rights to life, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly“.

The protection from abuse of human rights is recognized in international law: people have the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Their rights are protected by Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR).

CHRI calls on the Government of Nigeria to:

- end its crackdown and open a transparent dialogue with the leaders of the protests
- free those who have been arbitrarily detained
- ensure access to justice and provide effective remedies to the families of those killed and wounded and ensure those wounded receive full medical care
- institute a National Commission of Inquiry headed by a senior Justice of the Supreme Court to immediately investigate the violence and killings including the role of state agencies, and recommend time bound measures for police reform
- file criminal cases against the policemen involved in the firings and deaths of protesters, and remove them from active duty till their role is fully investigated so they cannot influence the course of investigations

CHRI is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit, organisation headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in London, UK, and Accra, Ghana. CHRI is a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation and has Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC. Since 1987, it has worked for the practical realisation of human rights through research, strategic advocacy, capacity building, engagement and mobilisation within the Commonwealth.

CHRI specialises in the areas of access to justice, with a focus on police and prison reforms, and access to information. It works to address pressures on the freedom of expression and on media rights, as well as building the capacity of civil society in small states to access UN human rights mechanisms. CHRI also works to support the achievement of SDG Target 8.7 and the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking through research and grassroots mobilisation.

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