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Extended Response to Information Request

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Nigeria: State protection available to potential victims of ritual violence or individuals threatened by cult members since the change of government in late May 1999

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

This Extended Response provides information since June 1999 on crimes in Nigeria apparently related to activities of cults or practitioners of ritual murders and the factors affecting the ability of the police and courts to deal with them. For related information, please see also the January 1999 Research Directorate publication *Nigeria: Selected Issues Related to Corruption*.

Government sources have acknowledged that crime is on the increase in Nigeria (*The Guardian* 16 Sept. 1999b; *ibid.* 11 Jan. 2000; *ibid.* 14 Jan. 2000a). Vice President Atiku Abubakar stated in January 2000 that the administration is facing "more than its fair share of acts of lawlessness in some parts of the country by some militant groups," adding that police officers are occasionally "attacked, killed or maimed" by members of these groups under the guise of protecting ethnic interest or advancing human rights (*ibid.*). A meeting of high-level police officials in September 1999 looked at the need to address "inter-communal clashes, violent crimes and cultism" (*ibid.* 16 Sept. 1999b).

An article in the Lagos daily newspaper *The Guardian* expresses the view that the general upsurge in crime is due to high youth unemployment (11 Jan. 2000). Clement Nwankwo, Executive Director of the Constitutional Rights Project, stated that much of the street violence in Nigeria is caused by "young unemployed men who basically need that kind of activity or atmosphere to achieve their own ends," not necessarily due to their affiliation with any particular group (28 Feb. 2000). An official with the Police/Community Relations Committee for two areas stated that criminality is being exacerbated because the militia established under General Sani Abacha has not been successfully eliminated and much of their armaments remain unaccounted for (P.M. News 1 Sept. 1999).

Off-campus activities of university cults

Mr. Nwankwo stated that university cults were very active and "quite, quite dangerous" on campuses approximately 18 months ago, but that activities have decreased in the past year or so with increasing numbers of students publicly denouncing their cult membership (28 Feb. 2000). He noted that "the feeling was that most of these cults were supported by either the