

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Boko Haram--Emerging Threat to the Homeland***

November 30, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Boko Haram--Emerging Threat to the Homeland”:

“Today, we are here to examine whether the Nigerian group, known as ‘Boko Haram’, poses a threat to the United States. This is a difficult question because we have a very limited amount of information about Boko Haram.

We know that the group has ties to al Qaeda. We also know that Boko Haram’s capabilities have increased. But we do not know the size, organizational structure, agenda or resources. While we do not know much about this group, we do know a great deal about Nigeria.

With 158 million people, Nigeria is the 8th most populous country in the world. About one half of Nigerians practice Islam and about 40% of Nigerians are under 14 years of age. Currently, Nigeria is experiencing its longest period of civilian rule since its independence. In many ways, Nigeria is a young democracy.

And in 2008, the civilian authorities in this oil rich country began pursuing economic reforms. But as we know, the path of change is not easy. Every nation has found that the road forward is often riddled with the remnants of the past, the stumbling blocks of the present and the distracting dreams of the future. We also know that those who benefit from the status quo will resist change. These universal truths are alive and well in Nigeria also.

It is clear that Boko Haram, with its unknown number of followers and unclear agenda has become a source of strife. The military, which formerly ruled this country, have been clear about their concerns. But the Nigerian people have expressed a desire to move forward. As part of its efforts to reach out, in January 2010, Nigeria assumed a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2010-2011 session.

In August 2011, Boko Haram set off a suicide car bomb at the United Nations headquarters in Nigeria. Some see this UN attack as an attack on Western interests. However, given Nigeria’s prior position on the Security Council, the meaning of this attack is far from clear.

For many years, some of my friends on the other side of the aisle have supported defunding the United Nations because they claimed that the UN did not support US interests. And now we are claiming that an attack on a UN building in Nigeria is an attack on US interests? I guess things change. However, what does not change is our need for clear and certain information before we commit to a position.

At this point, we cannot answer the question, Is Boko Haram capable of striking the U.S. or any of its interests? To find the answer to this question, we need to work with the Nigerian government to increase the intelligence capabilities in their country. We also need to reach out to the vast Nigerian community in this country and seek their help and guidance. We must not paint Nigeria as a nation of terrorists. Our message goes beyond these walls. And our message today should be we need to learn more.”

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