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Friday, 09 March 2012 16:21

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GIN— Former President Bill Clinton expressed distress at the depth of poverty in Nigeria, and warned that it would fuel the spread of religious violence now tearing the nation. In a speech Monday night in Nigeria’s commercial capital Lagos, Clinton said he was “really worried” about the security challenges in Africa’s most populous nation. “You can’t just have this level of inequality persist. That’s what’s fueling all this stuff,” said Clinton who was attending the annual award ceremony of This Day, a media house run by newspaper magnate Nduka Obaigbena. He was referring to the deadly attacks by the group Boko Haram, an Islamist faction.

A new study by the West African nation’s National Bureau of Statistics, paints a grim picture. According to their latest figures, the number of Nigerians living in poverty rose to nearly 61 percent from 53.7 percent in 2004.

In Nigeria’s northwest and northeast, regions besieged by Islamic insurgents, about 75 percent of the people live in poverty. Absolute poverty is measured by those who can afford only the bare essentials of shelter, food and clothing.

Almost 100 million people live on less than a \$1 a day, despite economic growth, the statistics show.

Referring to the widening divide between Christians and Moslems, Clinton called for Nigerians to embrace their similarities, while also asking the government to speed public works projects such as providing electricity to a nation whose people are long accustomed to running their own generators for power.

Former President Bill Clinton decry rampant poverty in Nigeria during visit Special to the NNPA from the

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It is almost impossible to cure a problem based on violence with violence, Clinton said. "You also have to give people something to look forward to when they get up in the morning."

Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil producer but the sector has been tainted by accusations of corruption.