



Nigeria: New Wave of Violence Leaves 200 Dead ^[1]

Government Should Urgently Protect Civilians, Invite UN Expert to Jos

January 27, 2011

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(Dakar) - A deadly spate of sectarian violence in Nigeria's central Plateau State since December 24, 2010, has killed more than 200 people, Human Rights Watch said today. The victims, including children, have been hacked to death, burned alive, "disappeared," or dragged off buses and murdered in tit-for-tat killings.

The Nigerian government should act swiftly to protect civilians of all ethnicities at risk of further attacks or reprisal killings, and allow the United Nations secretary-general's special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Francis Deng, to visit the state, Human Rights Watch said.

"These waves of senseless killings risk spreading and have taken a terrible toll on the people of Plateau State," said Corinne Dufka, senior West Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The state and federal governments should urgently enlist anyone who can help break this cycle of violence, including Mr. Deng."

The most recent round of violence and reprisal killings was sparked by a series of bomb blasts on Christmas Eve in two Christian communities in Jos, the state capital. Since then, dozens of Muslims and Christians alike have been targeted and killed, often in horrific circumstances, based simply on their ethnic or religious identity. These latest deadly outbreaks follow a year of inter-communal bloodletting in 2010 that left at least 1,000 dead in the state.

In September 2010, Deng formally requested approval from the Nigerian government to visit Jos in October to help community leaders devise measures to reduce the risk of an escalation in the violence. The Nigerian government has not formally replied or authorized the mission.

Targeted and Reprisal Killings

The Christmas Eve explosions, which ripped through two Christian neighborhoods in Jos, and several days of sectarian clashes that followed the bomb attacks, left at least 107 dead, according to Christian and Muslim community leaders in Jos. A militant Islamist website published a statement by Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group in northern Nigeria, claiming responsibility. There has been no independent confirmation of this claim.

The targeted killings and tit-for-tat violence escalated further in January 2011. Eight Muslim youth in a car heading to a wedding were attacked on January 7 after they took a wrong turn and ended up in a Christian village in Barkin Ladi. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the following day the Nigerian army exhumed and returned to their families the corpses of five of them from shallow graves near the village. The three others remain missing.

The following morning, January 8, Muslim youth in Jos indiscriminately attacked Christians, mostly ethnic Igbo market

traders, around the Dilimi market and along Bauchi Road. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that the victims were hacked to death with machetes and cutlasses or burned alive by the mob. Igbo leaders said that 48 Igbo civilians were killed in the attacks, while a health worker at the nearby Bingham University Teaching Hospital confirmed that 18 corpses arrived in the morgue on January 8.

Later that day, at least 14 Muslims were killed by mobs in Christian neighborhoods in Jos and surrounding communities. A passenger on an interstate bus to Jos on January 8 told Human Rights Watch that Muslim passengers were separated from Christian passengers and hacked to death. Four of the passengers were killed at a makeshift roadblock manned by a Christian mob in Ratsat, south of Jos, while two others were killed when the bus arrived at the Gada Biu bus terminus in Jos itself.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that two days later, on January 10, gunmen attacked Wareng village, a Christian community south of Jos, burning homes and killing residents. Four women and seven children were killed in the attack.

Muslim and Christian leaders in Jos told Human Rights Watch that they also knew of dozens of disappearances. They said that, in the past month, 42 Muslims, mostly motorcycle taxi operators in Jos, have been reported missing, while more than 51 Christians have still not been accounted for.

"This terrible cycle of violence and impunity needs to stop," Dufka said. "Both the state and federal governments have shown a disturbing lack of urgency in addressing the violence and tackling the underlying causes of these deadly outbreaks."

The federal and Plateau State governments should take concrete steps to break the cycle of violence by ending discriminatory state and local government policies that fuel inter-communal tensions, providing adequate protection for vulnerable communities, and ensuring a speedy and effective investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators of the violence, Human Rights Watch said.

Origins of the Crisis

Plateau State is in an area of central Nigeria known as the Middle Belt that divides the predominately Muslim north from the largely Christian south. Local political elites have long battled for power and control of limited resources and have stoked religious tensions to those ends. Widespread poverty and unemployment, fueled by endemic government corruption and mismanagement, have created an explosive social mix as competition intensifies for scarce opportunities to secure government jobs, education, and political patronage.

These tensions have been exacerbated by state and local government policies that discriminate [4] against members of ethnic groups classified as "*non-indigene*" - those who cannot trace their ancestry to what are said to be the original inhabitants of an area. Non-indigenes, in Plateau State and elsewhere, are openly denied the right to compete for state and local government jobs and are subject to discriminatory admissions policies at state-run universities, denying them important avenues of socio-economic mobility. Discriminatory government policies have effectively relegated thousands of Plateau State residents to permanent second-class status.

Religious and ethnic identity often overlap in Nigeria. The main actors in the deadly struggle for power and resources in Jos have been the Hausa-Fulani and the Berom ethnic groups. The Hausa-Fulani, the vast majority Muslim, are the largest

ethnic group in northern Nigeria. They are classified as non-indigenes in Jos, though many are from families that have been there for several generations. The Berom, predominately Christian, along with the Anaguta and Afizere ethnic groups, are designated indigenes.

A Decade of Suffering

In the past decade, more than 3,800 people have been killed in inter-communal violence in Plateau State, including as many as 1,000 in 2001 in Jos [5] and more than 75 Christians and at least 700 Muslims in 2004 in Yelwa [6], southern Plateau State. In November 2008 [7], two days of inter-communal clashes following local government elections in Jos left at least 700 dead.

In January 2010, several hundred people were killed in sectarian clashes in and around Jos, including a massacre on January 19 of more than 150 Muslims in the nearby town of Kuru Karama [8]. On March 7, at least 200 Christians were massacred in Dogo Nahawa [9] and several nearby villages. Over the next nine months, more than 120 people died in smaller-scale attacks and reprisal killings leading up to the Christmas Eve bombings and renewed sectarian clashes.

Inter-communal violence in Plateau State and northern Nigeria has a history of spreading to other regions. Following the 2004 violence in Yelwa, reprisal killings in Kano State left 200 Christians dead. Muslim attacks against Christians in the northern city of Maiduguri in 2006 led to reprisal killings of more than 80 Muslims in eastern Nigeria.

Members of the security forces have also been implicated in serious abuses. In November 2008, Human Rights Watch documented 133 cases of unlawful killings [7] by the federal police and army sent to Jos to quell the sectarian violence.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that, on January 10, 2011, at least one soldier was seen participating in the attack on Wareng village, which left 15 Christians dead.

Unbroken Cycle of Violence

The federal and Plateau State governments have not only failed to tackle the root socio-economic causes of the violence, they have also failed to break the cycle of killings by holding those responsible to account. In all but a handful of cases - 17 Hausa-Fulani men were convicted by the Federal High Court in Jos in December 2010 - the perpetrators have not been brought to justice. In the absence of effective redress through the courts, communities that have suffered violence frequently resort to vigilante justice and exact revenge by inflicting commensurate harm on innocent members of the other community.

Over the years, the federal and Plateau State governments have set up various committees and commissions of inquiry that have examined these issues, but the reports from these bodies, and the occasional government white paper, have mostly been shelved. Despite repeated outbreaks of violence, the government has largely ignored the findings and failed to implement the recommendations.

The federal government, however, has taken some steps to beef up security in Jos and surrounding communities since early 2010. While the military presence has had some effect in deterring and responding to attacks, the underlying causes of the reoccurring outbreaks of violence remain.

Witness Accounts

A Hausa-Fulani driver described to Human Rights Watch how the eight members of a Muslim wedding party were

attacked on January 7 after they took a wrong turn leading to a Berom village south of Jos:

At around 4 p.m. on our way to a wedding in Mangu two of the cars took a wrong turn in Barkin Ladi local government area. The first car, a small Mazda, contained eight people. I was driving the second car. We were all Hausa-Fulani from Jos. The other car was ahead of us. I stopped to ask for directions. We were near Dorawa-Tsohuwa village, a Berom community. When I stopped, some people surrounded the car. There were three people on a motorcycle behind us and four people came out of the bush, two on each side. I am thinking they will tell us the actual direction. We were talking with them in Hausa but they were conversing in Berom language. They said we should come down [from the car] and they were calling others on their phones. I realized that something was going to happen and slammed down the throttle. The two in front of the car stepped aside and we escaped from the danger. I called Jamilu, who was in the first vehicle. Jamilu's mother is the senior sister of the groom. He told me: 'We have been surrounded by people. They killed two of us. Me, I am running. They want to kill me.' I heard the sound of something crash and the phone went off. I called him again but the phone was off.

We went back to Mangu and informed the soldiers what happened. They sent a lieutenant and 10 soldiers in a Hilux [pickup truck] back to the village. They allowed me to come because I knew the exact place where we stopped. We went back but did not see any corpses. The next day we went back again with the security. We entered Dorawa village but the people did not talk. Some of them ran and the soldiers caught two of them. One of them said he was coming back from Barkin Ladi and saw people burying something but he didn't know what. The security went to the place and found a hole used to explore tin. The security dugged and found the corpses of five people. I saw the corpses. Jamilu was among them. They had cut the necks of three, one they broke his head, the other they cut his body and removed his penis. The soldiers took the corpses to the air force base. Up until now the three other corpses have not been found.

An Igbo pharmacy technician described to Human Rights Watch how he was attacked by a Hausa-Fulani mob on January 8 in Jos:

On the 8th of January, some minutes to 11 a.m., I was on my way in a taxi to Terminus Market on Bauchi Road. I saw people block the road. They were beating and burning people. I saw them burn two people. I opened the door of the vehicle to get out. I was wearing a suit. One Hausa man ran across the road and said, 'Let us kill this unbeliever.' There was nowhere I could go. They rushed me and beat me with machetes and cutlasses. I defended myself with my hands but I got weak and fell down. After that they sliced my head and they used a dagger to stab me in the rectum. When they were satisfied with the bleeding they said I was dead. They then dragged me to the Bauchi Road bridge and threw me over it. There is no water there in the dry season and I landed on the ground. The Hausa came in groups and looked at my corpse. When they would come I would seize my breath. They thought I was dead. I cried in my mind 'Jesus, Jesus, save me.' My body had no life but my mind was very strong. I did this for three hours. The soldiers came around 2 o'clock. I opened one of my eyes and said to them, 'Kindly help me.' The soldiers said, 'This man is not dead.' One of the young soldiers jumped down, picked me up and took me to hospital. I was cut all over my body. My right hand was shattered. My head was cut around six places. They stabbed me in my anus. My

stomach was all scraped up. I went to theater [for surgery] four times. They operated on my hand, but I cannot use it for anything now.

An Igbo shop owner in Jos described to Human Rights Watch how eight men were killed in Jos on January 8:

My shop is in Dilimi, a Muslim area. I deal in electrical parts. I was in my shop around 11 a.m.-12 p.m., when I saw about 40 Muslim youths coming with machetes, daggers, and firewood. There was a man in a Plateau State government vehicle with his son. He was buying from the boys selling clothes in front of my shop. I don't know whether he was Berom but he was a Plateau man. He looked back and saw them break the glass on the car. He said they should stop. He didn't know there were so many of them. They hit him with a plank and then set him on fire. His son ran away.

I ran to my neighbor's shop. He is a Hausa man, a Muslim. He protected me. I stayed in his shop one hour. I was seeing everything that was happening outside. They [the Muslim youth] were chasing everyone who was a Christian. I saw them dragging people. They were going with fuel and machetes. I didn't see any guns. They blocked everywhere you could run. Some [of the Christians] had blood on their bodies and were running.

I saw them gather four people together and burn them. They smashed their legs and dropped them together, and then put them on fire in the street. I saw them kill two people inside a jeep. They didn't allow the men to get out. They broke the glass and poured fuel on them. One was an Igbo man. I know his shop. They killed another man across the main road. I saw them roast the body. I saw eight people killed that day.

Around 1:30 p.m. the army come and rescued us. Others that hid themselves came out as well. There were almost 20 or 30 other Christians. The soldiers walked us to the boundary dividing the Muslim and Christian area.

A Muslim passenger traveling on an interstate bus on January 8 described to Human Rights Watch how the Muslim passengers were separated from the Christian passengers and killed:

On January 8, around 2 p.m., I boarded a bus in Lafia, Nassarawa State. It was a Marcopolo bus carrying 64 passengers. At around 6 o'clock [that evening] we were stopped by a roadblock in Ratsat in Jos South [local government area]. The people put a tree and stones in the road. There were about 200 people - men, women, and children. They were Berom. They told us to all come down from the bus and asked, 'Where are the Muslims?' They identified four Muslims because they were wearing *kaftans* [traditional Muslim dress] and asked them where they were coming from. They said they were coming from Lagos. The crowd then started beating them. The people on the bus were all crying that they should leave them. They first beat them with sticks then used their daggers and machetes and killed them. They threw their bodies in the bushes. The driver told us to enter the bus and that we should go, so we left the corpses there. Four of us Muslims survived - two men and two women. We didn't identify ourselves as Muslims.

I was afraid but the Christians on the bus told us not to be afraid and advised us not to talk. They told us we should identify ourselves as Christians. From there, there were heavy [military] checkpoints on the way. At one point we didn't move for almost three hours. The driver tried to tell the military what had happened but the soldiers told the driver to 'go, go, go.' They didn't want to hear anything.

Around 11 p.m., we reached the bus terminus at Gada Biu in Jos. As we came down from the bus a group of people surrounded us. They said, 'Where are you coming from?' They divided the Muslim passengers from the Christian passengers based on the mode of dress. I was wearing jeans and t-shirt. They asked me my name. I said my name was Daniel. They asked me to pray in Christian and I prayed. I had attended mission school so I knew how to pray. I said, 'In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' They then said I should tell them the story of John the Baptist. I said I know the story but that I didn't remember it. I told them I could tell them the story of Jesus Christ. They said ok and said I should step aside. That is how I escaped.

The group that surrounded us took the two Muslim passengers wearing *kaftans* to one side. They were a Fulani man and woman on their way to Gombe [State]. The other Muslim woman on the bus was wearing a jacket because it was cold and they didn't confirm she was Muslim. I just kept quiet and was watching them. The men then hit the two Muslims with machetes, cutlasses, and daggers. They killed them there in the terminus. The other passengers were running. After they were finished, the soldiers came in their vehicle and the group ran away.

A Berom man in Wareng, a Christian village south of Jos, described to Human Rights Watch how armed men, including at least one soldier, attacked the village on January 10, killing 15 people:

At around 11:30 p.m., I heard shooting of guns. I didn't know what to do. The attackers were many. They were speaking Fulani. They came to my house and broke the door. As they entered the house they were shooting. I hid in the second room. They entered inside but didn't find me. It was God that hid me. One of the attackers was a soldier man. I saw him as he passed by my window. He was wearing the new uniform of the soldiers - not the green uniform but the brown uniform. Later when we were looking around we saw an ID card of a soldier on the ground. Our councilor reported it to the chairman of the local government.

Fifteen people were killed in the attack: four men, four women, and seven children. Thirteen people died that day, two died later at the hospital. The men were killed with gunshot. They killed the women and children with knives. One of the babies died from the smoke when they burned the house. My brother and his wife and two of their children were killed. Their third child was cut on his head. I took the boy that very night to the hospital. They sewed his head and now it is better. I will try to take care of him if I am alive.

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