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NIGERIA: "Our lives will never be the same again"



Photo: Aminu Abubakar/IRIN
Volunteers arrange corpses to be buried in a mass grave at Naraguta cemetery in northern Jos

KANO, 22 January 2010 (IRIN) - In Kuru Karama village, 30km from Nigeria's central city of Jos, only four of some 3,000 residents remain; the rest have fled or been killed, said village chief Umar Baza. Every home has been destroyed.

Resident Amadu Moussa, a commercial truck driver, was away on a job when violence broke out in Kuru Karama on 19 January. He returned when his brother called to tell him 10 family members had been killed.

Moussa broke down as he watched his 73-year-old father's corpse being retrieved from a well.

Some 60 bodies were thrown into wells in two days of violence, according to village chief Baza. IRIN also saw bodies in bushes and in the remains of burnt houses and compounds.

"Our lives will never be the same again, having lost our loved ones and everything [we had] having been destroyed," Moussa told IRIN. "I can't see us rebuilding this village. It's just impossible. We will have to move on

and find somewhere safe to stay."

Kuru Karama is a predominantly Muslim village with several Christian families, situated in a predominantly Christian part of Plateau State. Having heard of sectarian violence erupting in other parts of Jos on 17 January, religious leaders in Kuru Karama met to make a pact with the police to defend any attacks by outsiders.

But several hours later youths armed with machetes attacked the village. The Christian minority residents had cleared their homes of their possessions before the gangs arrived, suggesting they had received warning, Baza said.

Several hundred dead

The number of people killed in Jos and 20 surrounding villages remains unknown, but accounts by residents and aid workers put the number at about 400. Some 18,000 people have been displaced, according to the Nigerian Red Cross.

Violence erupted on 17 January in the Dutse Uku neighbourhood of the predominantly Christian Nassarawa Gwom district of Jos. Though accounts vary, several residents told IRIN the clashes followed a dispute over a Muslim resident's reconstruction of his home that had been burned down in [February 2008](#) riots.

The violence was carried out by mobs of young men armed with guns, bows and arrows and machetes, according to reports provided to [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW).

Several mass burials have taken place over recent days, said Shittu Tanko, Hausa community spokesman, who coordinated a burial for 101 people in a Jos neighbourhood.

Help

Displaced people are living in makeshift camps in military and police barracks, mosques and churches all over Jos and its outskirts.

Thousands of people have lost their homes and now have no access to food or water, Nigeria Red Cross head Awwalu Mohammed told IRIN.

"We have limited resources. We are doing all we can to provide for these people, but the numbers are staggering," he said. "We are appealing to other local and international donor organizations to help us."

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) delivered relief materials to some

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displaced people on 21 January but they do not have enough supplies, Mohammed said.

Blame

Jos has repeatedly been hit with sectarian violence over the past decade. The latest violence comes just over a year after Christian and Muslim clashes and a crackdown by security forces left more than 700 dead in Jos.

Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Reverend Chong Dabo in Jos, blamed the killing of some 50 members of his community on the military who he said responded with excessive force.

But a military official who requested anonymity told IRIN: "Soldiers are drafted to quell the killings and destruction. They are duty-bound to prevent anyone they see armed [and] attacking another person. I am sure anybody shot by security forces was among the troublemakers."

In a statement HRW called on the government to take stronger steps to control sectarian violence. "This is not the first outbreak of deadly violence in Jos, but the government has shockingly failed to hold anyone accountable," said Corinne Dufka, West Africa researcher with the rights organization. "Enough is enough. Nigeria's leaders need to tackle the vicious cycle of violence bred by this impunity."

Vice President Goodluck Jonathan on 21 January called on the Nigerian armed forces to take over security in all affected areas of Jos.

As of 22 January Jos residents were beginning to venture out into the streets on foot and in cars, though businesses remained closed.

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