



INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANISATION FOR  
PEACE BUILDING  
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



# SILENCED VOICES CRY OUT

Stories of FoRB  
Violations in Nigeria.

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# FOREWORD

**A**mongst the diverse and escalating range of mass atrocities plaguing the nation of Nigeria, a particular trend of targeting, abducting and killing of church clergy has been noted.

The effects of these wholesale kidnappings and slaughter of Christian priests on church communities can only be imagined:

palpable fear cover many congregations like an ominous cloud. In many cases, even when the ransom price was paid, the kidnapped victims were still killed in a most gruesome manner. And the ransom money paid in millions of Naira goes further

to impoverish already deprived and poor congregations, villages, and communities, while funding the purchase of more ammunition.

This trend has thrown the hierarchy of some of the churches into 'panic mode' over the safety and long-term tenability of all Christians in Nigeria. The logic appears obvious – in the words of Jesus: “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered...” (Matthew 26:31)

There seems to be an overall method to the madness and little-addressed insecurities in Nigeria- A multi-pronged approach (Terrorism, Jihadism, Kidnapping, Extremism, Criminality, Illegal Taxation, Banditry,



Impunity, excuses, false narratives, breeding of fear, blaming of others and attacks on Human Rights Defenders) all calculated to weaken the fabric of a peaceful, just, united and democratic society, and thereby usher in a 'failed state.'

Such a failure of promise and potential will obviously suit some but all Nigerians, friends of Nigeria, people of good conscience, multilateral institutions and national governments with a genuine desire to

be a 'force for good' in our interconnected world must play their part to 'STOP THE KILLING' and enable Peace and Social Justice to reign.

In this publication, PSJUK shines a light on the plight of Christians, The Clergy and The Church in increasingly wider parts of Nigeria.

# INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2023, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on FoRB in the UK Parliament updated its 2020 report titled 'Unfolding Genocide?'. In it, they found that Nigerian Christians are still experiencing devastating violence, with attacks by armed groups of Islamist Fulani herders resulting in the killing, maiming, dispossession, and eviction of thousands.

In 2021, the US State Department accepted the recommendation from the Annual Report of the United States Commission of International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and ranked Nigeria among the 14 Countries of Particular Interest, stating that “Religious freedom conditions in Nigeria remain poor, with both state and societally perpetrated violations. This inclusion was subsequently reversed in controversial circumstances by President Biden's administration. Despite the

'country's religious diversity, many Nigerians face systematic threats to their right to freedom of belief. Various armed non-State actors, frequently attack places of worship and regularly abduct and execute civilians based on their beliefs.

The list of religiously motivated attacks, which have claimed lives and property, is long. All too often, Nigerians are treated to gory sights of murders with religious undertones. Geo-political experts have suggested that 'Nigeria's unity and maybe its very existence is on the precipice considering the rapidity with which these religious attacks and insecurity are spreading.

In this publication, we have compiled a representative cross-section of stories that clearly depicts violation of the Freedom of Religion and Belief. The stories

document persecution of mainly Christians, but also of people from minority factions of Islam as well as of people of traditional African religions, like the Maguzawas in parts of the North-east region of Nigeria, who have refused to convert to Islam.

This compilation of 20 stories will provide snippets of insight that depict a group of people who are not free to practice their religion, who are targeted, kidnapped, and killed because of their religion, and some who are forced to renounce their faith. We hope that this brief window will help to bring necessary attention and action by shining a light on the dark realities faced by so many helpless and voiceless people, and that the world will rise as one to take concerted action to prevent these attacks on fundamental human rights and freedoms in Nigeria and beyond.

**Ayo Adedoyin, CEO, PSJ-UK**



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# ABDUCTIONS AND KILLINGS OF CLERGY

By Ayo Adedoyin

**T**he abductions and killings of clergymen in Nigeria have thrown the churches' hierarchy into disarray over Christians' safety. The logic is obvious – in the words of Jesus, "*Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*" (Mathew 26:31)

The effects of these extensive kidnappings and slaughter of Christian priests have caused palpable fear over congregations like an ominous cloud. In many cases, even when the ransom was paid, the kidnapped victims were still killed in a most gruesome manner. These ransoms paid in millions of naira go into funding more ammunition while scarcity lingers on in impoverished and deprived congregations, villages, and communities.

The inhumane and illogical manner of the kidnappers is demonstrated in the abduction case of Rev Lawan

Andimi, who was taken when terrorists attacked his town on 2nd January 2020.

He was the Local Council Chapter Chairman of CAN and a pastor with the 'Church of the Brethren at the District Church Council of Michika. Despite raising the ransom demanded by his captors and even after appealing to the government in a viral video, the terrorists proceeded to behead the 58-year-old Reverend leaving behind a distraught widow and nine children.

This highlights the killing spree that has been visited on the clergy of the Nigerian Church. We have not even mentioned the number of churches burnt down during this battle for the life of the Church in parts of Nigeria. Needless to say, these attacks have thrown the Nigerian church into a state of dread and apprehension.

# BELOW ARE A FEW RANDOMLY SELECTED ATTACKS ON CHURCH LEADERSHIP, COVERING APRIL 2021 AND DECEMBER 2022.

**11TH  
APRIL  
2021**

Criminal gunmen kidnapped Rev. Fr. Izu Marcel Onyeocha of Mother Theresa of Kolkata Catholic Church, Owerri, Imo State, along Enugu-Owerri Highway. He regained freedom after one day in captivity.



Rev. Father Izu  
Marcel



Rev. Father  
Alphonsus Bello

**20TH  
MAY  
2021**

Bandits attacked and killed Rev. Father Alphonsus Bello of St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church in Malumfashi Local Government Area of Katsina State. Another priest, Reverend Father Joe Keke, was abducted.



Rev. Father Joe  
Keke



Fr. Elijah Juma  
Wada

**30TH  
JUNE  
2021**

A Catholic priest of Maiduguri Diocese, Fr. Elijah Juma Wada, was kidnapped by Boko Haram, but he managed to escape.



Christ the king Major Seminary, Kaduna



Fr. Joseph Danjuma Shekari



Rev. Fr. Joseph Akete Bako

**11TH  
OCT.  
2021**

Gunmen invaded the Christ the King Major Seminary, Kaduna. They kidnapped three seminarians, who were eventually freed.

**6TH  
FEB.  
2022**

Fr. Joseph Danjuma Shekari of Kafanchan Diocese was kidnapped from his parish house and later released after a day in captivity.

**8TH  
MARCH  
2022**

Rev. Fr. Joseph Akete Bako, parish priest of St. John's Church, Kudenda, Kaduna, was kidnapped from his station in an attack in which one person was killed. Fr Bako died after eight weeks in the 'kidnappers' custody.

**24TH  
MARCH  
2022**

**Rev. Fr. Felix Zakari Fidson**, of the Diocese of Zaria, Kaduna State, who was abducted on 24th March, was released on Tuesday, 3rd May, after 40 days.



Rev. Fr. Felix Zakari Fidson

**27TH  
MARCH  
2022**

A Catholic cleric, **Rev. Fr. Leo Raphael Ozigi**, parish priest of St. Mary's Church, Sarkin Pawa Village in Munya LGA of Niger State, was kidnapped with others. He regained his freedom after the kidnappers were paid.



Rev. Fr. Leo Raphael Ozigi

**19TH  
APRIL  
2022**

**Dr. John Okoriko**, Founder and Pastor of Solid Rock Kingdom Church, was kidnapped in Akwa Ibom State. His abductors released him after a negotiated N10 million ransom was paid.



Dr. John Okoriko



Rev. Fr. Felix Zakari Fidson



Rev. Fr. Felix Zakari Fidson



Rev. Fr. Stephen Ojapa



Rev. Fr. Oliver Okpara

**8TH  
MAY  
2022**

**Rev. Fr. Alphonsus Ubob** was seized from his station at St. Pius X Parish, Ikot Abasi Akpan in Mkpata Enin LGA of Akwa Ibom. His kidnappers demanded ₦100 million ransom to free him. He was released four days later after an undisclosed amount was paid to the kidnappers.

**22ND  
MAY  
2022**

An Anglican cleric, **Venerable Olu Obanla**, and his son were abducted in the Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State. They were released after a negotiated ransom of ₦1 million was paid. Their kidnappers had initially demanded a ₦10 million ransom.

**25TH  
MAY  
2022**

Bandits invaded Patrick's Catholic Church, Gidan Maikambo, in Kafur LGA of Katsina State. They kidnapped two Catholic priests, **Rev. Frs. Stephen Ojapa and Oliver Okpara**.

29TH  
MAY  
2022

The Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, His Eminence Samuel Kanu, was kidnapped along with the Methodist Bishop of Owerri, Rt. Rev. Okechukwu Michael and the 'Prelate's chaplain, at the Umunneochi LGA, Abia State, along Enugu-Port Harcourt Highway. They were released days later after a hefty ransom of ₦100 million (£187,300.00) was paid. His Eminence was fortunate because, as a statement from the National President of CAN, Dr. Ayokunle Samson stated, the abduction of clerics and other innocent Nigerians had become incessant. He mentioned that after his release, "Not fewer than ten clerics have been kidnapped this year (2022) alone, and the security agencies rescued none."

5TH  
JUNE  
2022

Jihadist militia attacked Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) parish on Pentecost Sunday in Kajuru, Kaduna State. They killed 32 Christians and many more went missing.



His Eminence Samuel Kanu



St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State



Rev. James Kantoma



Fr. Christopher Onotu



Rt. Rev. Oluwaseun Aderogba

**12TH  
JUNE  
2022**

Two Catholic priests, Rev. James Kantoma and Fr. Christopher Onotu, were kidnapped. Rev. Kantoma was the Local Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Jos East; while Rev. Onotu was of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Kogi State.

**5TH  
JUNE  
2022**

In what has been described as a massacre, a hoard of ISWAP Jihadists attacked St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, with explosives and guns. Not less than 40 innocent worshippers were killed in the gruesome

**12TH  
JUNE  
2022**

Gunmen kidnapped the Anglican Bishop of Jebba Diocese, Kwara State, Rt. Rev. Oluwaseun Aderogba, alongside his wife and driver on the Oyo-Ogbomosho Expressway, Oyo State. The kidnapers demanded a ransom of ₦70 million.

**25TH  
JUNE  
2022**

The Chaplain of the Catholic Community of the Kaduna State Polytechnic, Rev. Fr. Vitus Borogo, was killed by terrorists on his farm off Kaduna-Kachia Road. Fr. Borogo was also the Chairman of the Nigerian Catholic Diocesan Priests Association (NCDPA), Kaduna Chapter.



Rev. Fr. Vitus Borogo



Fr. Christopher Odia

**26TH  
JUNE  
2022**

Forty-one-year-old Fr. Christopher Odia of the Catholic Diocese of Auchi in Edo North was abducted at about 6.30 a.m. He was in his rectory preparing for Sunday Mass at St. Michael Catholic Church, Ikabigbo, in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. Rev. Fr. Odia was the Administrator of St. Michael Catholic Church, Ikabigbo and the Principal of St. Philip Catholic Secondary School, Jattu. Unfortunately, Rev. Father Odia was found a few hours later in the bush, shot dead by his abductors.



Rev. Father Udo



Fr. Philemon Oboh

**2ND  
JULY  
2022**

Two Catholic Priests, Rev. Father Udo of St. Patrick's Catholic Church Uromi and Father Philemon Oboh of St. Joseph Retreat Centre Ugboha, were abducted on the Benin-Auchi Road while travelling to Uromi in Esan South-East Local Government Area of Edo State.



Rev. Fr. Chinedu Nwadike



Rev. Sisters



Rev. Fr. Kunat



**14TH  
AUG.  
2022**

A Catholic Priest, Rev. Fr, Chinedu Nwadike, was abducted along Okigwe-Enugu Expressway in Umunneochi council area of Abia State.

**21ST  
AUG.  
2022**

Four Catholic Rev. Sisters were abducted along Okigwe-Umololo Road, Imo State.

**7TH  
SEPT.  
2022**

A Catholic Priest, Rev. Fr. Kunat was abducted with seven other Christians from Idon and Oil villages in Kajuru Local Government Area.

**19TH  
NOV.  
2022**

A Parish Priest, Rev. Victor Ishiwu was abducted from St. Jude's Catholic Church, Eburummiri, Ibagwa-Aka in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area, Enugu State.

Within the mishmash of multiple insecurity factors in Nigeria, it is clear to see an upsurge in the targeting of clergy in different parts of the country during the snapshot period. There was a time when clergy would walk the streets or get about in their communities dressed in the priestly garbs of the denomination they represented, but this is becoming rare due to ever-increasing threats to their safety. In parts of Nigeria, it is wise for priests to have a change of clothes to swap into as soon as they finish conducting an official

engagement that requires ecclesiastical attire. However, this safety precaution has not necessarily mitigated the attacks. Terrorists will enter into some communities, specifically looking for the churches and the clergy. In some cases, they already know which homes in which to reach the targeted clergy. In other instances, the church leaders get abducted on the road networks as they commute.



# ABDUCTION OF STUDENTS SURGES

By Anthonia Obokoh

**H**igh-level organised school kidnappings began with the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, by the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram in April 2014. Eight years after, 98 girls of those captured are still held in captivity.

Abduction of school children, mainly under the age of 20, is on the rise, particularly in the Northern regions of Nigeria, where victims are mostly girls. As a result, many Christian schools have been forced to close down.

On 19th February, 2018, 110 schoolgirls aged 11–19, were kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group from the Government Girls' Science and Technical

College, Dapchi, Bursari of Yobe State, North East Nigeria. Five of the girls died during the arduous journey; some escaped capture. **This year, one of the abducted Dapchi schoolgirls, Leah Sharibu, turned 19 in captivity. Sharibu was 14 years old when she was kidnapped.** Other girls were released within a few weeks of capture, but Leah was held back because she refused to abandon her Christian faith and accept Islam as demanded by her abductors.

In July 2021, 121 students were kidnapped from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna. Initially, 153 were abducted, but some managed to escape. The state government refused to pay any ransom,



The belongings of abducted students of Bethel Baptist sSchool lie strewn on the ground as parents pray for their children's return. Photograph: Kola Sulaimon/AFP/Getty Image

so the Christian students were kept in captivity until their parents could pay the ransom.

Christian Association of Nigeria President, Samson Olasupo Ayokunle, told *Christianity Today*, "Whether Fulani herdsmen conducted the kidnapping, or bandits or terrorists, Christians in Kaduna State have suffered too much from the hands of their attackers."

Joseph Hayab, the chairman of the Kaduna State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria,

said in a public statement, "In Kaduna, there is no Islamic school that has been attacked in this manner."

Of the more than 1,500 school children who have been abducted in Northern Nigeria since the Chibok attack on 14th April, 2014, very many students remain in captivity. And they are primarily schoolgirls whose fate remains unknown. According to a report by Amnesty International, the recent upsurge in abductions also leads to prolonged shutdowns of schools.

High-level organised school kidnappings began with the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, by the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram in April 2014. Nearly a decade on, over 100 girls of those captured are still held in captivity.



Boko haram



Some of the abducted Chibok girls



1 Students gather at the Government House with other students from the Government Science Secondary school, in Kankara, in northwestern Katsina State, Nigeria following their release on Dec. 18, 2020. (AFP Photo)

2 Ordeal: Some of the children were clearly distressed by the nightmare experience -Photo by Kola Sulaimon

3 A student who was abducted and then released is reunited with her family at the Bethel Baptist High School in Damishi, Nigeria, on July 25, 2021. Armed kidnapers in Nigeria have released 28 of the more than 120 students who were abducted at the beginning of July from the Bethel Baptist High School in the northern town of Damishi. Church officials handed those children over to their parents at the school on Sunday. (AP Photo)



# MARRIAGES FROM HELL: FORCED CONVERSION AND MARRIAGES OF CHRISTIAN GIRLS

By Toyin Akanni

**S**ince Boko Haram shocked the world by abducting 276 girls from a school in Chibok, thousands of young girls have been taken against their will and forced into marriages steeped in agony and abuse. Sadly, this practice doesn't only occur within terrorist groups. Ordinary men who hide under the guise of Sharia Law, aided by some Muslim clerics and traditional authorities, also abduct girls. These mostly underage girls, some as young as thirteen, are kidnapped and taken to places where a "Shahada" (Declaration of Faith) prayer is uttered. They coerce conversation from Christianity to Islam and marry them without

parental consent. In minutes they renounce their Christian faith, become Muslim, and marriage follows. The prerequisite is the girl in question should have attained puberty.

In 2020, a video showing the Governor of Kano, Umar Abdullahi Ganduje, leading two underage Christian girls through the act of becoming a Muslim inside his State Government House in the absence of their parents sparked outrage on Nigerian social media. If a government official can carry out such acts without caution or fear of repercussion, it highlights that this is the norm in these Sharia Law-governed states.



Leah Sharibu as an innocent Christian girl in Northern Nigeria.

*(Source: The GuardianNG, BBC News)*

According to Hausa Christian Foundation (HACFO), numerous Christian girls are abducted every year, and this is on the rise. In April 2021, they published an update on nine girls captured two years prior. The victims were:

- 1) Jamima Solomon
- 2) Christiana Mamman
- 3) Deborah Habila
- 4) Phoebe Dankano



Leah Sharibu in the hands of Boko Haram.

- 5) Rifkatu Markus (rescued)
- 6) Saratu Isah (returned when she went mad after two years)
- 7) Dije Yakubu Nalami (abducted as a married woman and returned when she died)
- 8) Rebecca Ado (returned pregnant)
- 9) Aisha Mani (still in captivity)

Any push back from the Christian community is usually met with extreme violence. Churches and homes are burnt to the ground, and Christians are



Source: The GuardianNG/World Watch Monitor

killed with no remorse. In October 2021, Rev. Yohanna Shuaibu, Chair of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Sumaila, Kano State, was murdered over the alleged conversion of a Muslim man. The attackers also burnt down his family home, the New Life Church, and the mission school.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, a former kidnapped victim recounts her harrowing experience, which paints a picture of what happens after being captured. She stated that many abductions

by Boko Haram were of Christian women and girls. "We were threatened with death or violence if we refused to convert to Islam. When I objected to renouncing my faith, he tied a rope around my neck and beat me with a plastic cable until I almost passed out. An insurgent I recognised from my village convinced me to accept Islam lest I should be killed. So, I agreed."

# 4

# CHRISTIANS FORCED TO ACCEPT SHARIA PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

By Daniel Atori



**S**haria has been instituted in Nigeria as the primary organisation of civil and criminal law in twelve Muslim-majority states since 1999, when the then Zamfara State Governor, Ahmad Sani Yerima, began the push for the institution of sharia at the state level of government. In many states, Christians and Southerners are judged by Sharia Law. The question is, Why? The manner in which sharia should be applied in a modern, secular state has been the subject of dispute globally between Muslim fundamentalists and reformists.

Many argue that as practised in the northern part of the country, the sharia violates the constitution of Nigeria. Sharia is now seen as a distinct and universal legal system in Nigeria that also applies to Christians and non-Muslims.

There have been numerous riots over the implementation of sharia in northern Nigeria, primarily involving non-Muslim minorities in the states implementing the system. One such riot in Kano State led to the death of over 100 people in October 2001. There have also been sharia-related riots in Kaduna State. The Sharia Court of Appeals is recognised as a federal court of appeals by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The Sharia Court of Appeals is the most controversial judicial system that exists within the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria as part of the Unified Courts System.

**STATES THAT PRACTISE SHARIA:** Nigeria is almost evenly split between a predominantly Christian south and a predominantly Muslim north. The twelve states in northern Nigeria that operate the sharia system of justice are: Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina,

Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, Yobe, Kaduna, Niger, and Gombe.

Sharia judges, known as Alkalis, pass sentences such as floggings, amputations, and the death penalty. You could also be executed for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad; the Islamic Police who arrest sharia offenders is called Hisbah. During Ramadan, no one in the northern states where sharia is practised is allowed to eat in public. Restaurants, fast food outlets, and even petty food sellers close up during this period because the sale of food is prohibited; whether you are a Christian or of a different faith, everyone is compelled to adhere to this principle. Defaulters are usually dealt with harshly

In early May 2019, the Commander General of Kano Hisbah, Nabahani Usman, said the aim of arresting public eaters is to get everyone to respect the holy month. In April 2021, Hisbah in Kano State arrested eight people for their alleged refusal to fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

And in April 2022, the Board declared that it would not spare anybody found eating in the daytime.

During President Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure, there was a mass exodus of no fewer than 50,000 non-natives and non-Muslims from the Middle Belt and Southern part of the country following the tension over the bloody sharia riot in Kaduna, which continued to mount in the ancient city.

Reports at that time also indicated growing tension in Adamawa, Niger, and Kwara States and the

Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, where there were stampedes and confusion following rumours of a spillover of the Kaduna riots to the areas. The argument against sharia-related laws is that they are discriminatory in practice, at least from what we are seeing so far in the Nigerian situation.



# TERRORISTS SEIZE, RENAME OVER 100 COMMUNITIES (I)

By Reuben Buhari



A screenshot taken on November 9, 2014 from a new Boko Haram video released by the Nigerian Islamist extremist group Boko Haram and obtained by AFP shows Boko Haram fighters parading with a tank in an unidentified town.

VO/AFP / GETTY IMAGES

**T**he past decade has seen the plight of Christians in Northern Nigeria go from bad to worse. A heightened state of insecurity for Christians has become a byword, particularly in the Middle Belt Central region. Some have read the situation as a steady attempt to eradicate Christians and occupy their land. Jihadist militia has driven out the original inhabitants of several villages and claimed the land as theirs.

Attacking villages and renaming them by Islamist Fulani militia groups has followed that pattern. On 24th February, 2004,

armed Muslims killed more than 75 Christians in Yelwa; 48 of them were killed inside a Church. Soon after the killings, a signpost was put up renaming the community 'Palestine.' Many of the communities the herders have renamed include Rankum, now called Mahanga. Rotchun has been renamed Rafin Acha; Hywa has been renamed Lugere, Maseh renamed Lugel, and Fass renamed Tafawa.

Fulani herdsman annexed Rankum, renamed it 'Mahanga' and constructed a Primary school naming it 'Ardo Mahmud Mahanga Primary School.' The displaced people filed a petition accusing the federal government of backing the annexation. Barr. Solomon Dalyop, the community spokesperson, said, "For the federal government to build a school there called Mahanga, it shows that it is in agreement with the land grabbers. There is no community called Mahanga in Riyom."

By the end of 2021, 102 communities had been annexed and occupied by Jihadist herders. President of Berom Youth Movement, Choji Chuwang, called it "a deliberate economic terrorism and land-grabbing strategy launched against Christians of Riyom and Barkin Ladi daily. The sole aim of is to make the people poor, weak, and destitute in their own land."

The proponents of a politically correct dominant narrative posit that predominantly Muslim-Fulani attacks on Christian farming communities are for economic reasons – to fight for grazing lands. But they have yet to explain why the Christians are killed and displaced from their homes and villages, and the villages are renamed after the conquest.



# TERRORISTS SEIZE, RENAME OVER 100 COMMUNITIES (II)

By Daniel Atori

**T**here is an impending genocide of Christians in Northern Nigeria; the prospect has sharply increased because of the security challenges in parts of North-Central Nigeria which have been termed as the annihilation and land occupation of Christians.

An average Plateau man is proud of his land and community because it is fertile and productive. This is the reason why their lands are targeted by herders who target mostly Christian communities.

They come to ancestral homes where people live, displace the indigenes, and take over their homes. When they target a community, their first tactic is

provocation – to cause a breach of the peace, so they occupy the targeted farmlands with their cows. In time the community is ransacked, and the settlers take over the houses and cultivate the farmlands of those they've displaced. When the people question them, the quarrel that ensues invariably leads to an attack on the communities by the Fulani, who have superior firepower. In the space of a few months, herdsmen attacked a pastor. They injured his five-year-old son, four Christian women were raped, 12 Christians were injured, and two communities were displaced in attacks on 17 villages in the Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas.

Some of the communities, when occupied, are renamed by the herders. One of them, called initially Rankum in the native Berom dialect, has been renamed Mahanga by the herders. Others are Rotchun renamed Rafin Acha. Hywa renamed Lugere, Maseh renamed Lugel and Fass renamed Tafawa, all in Hausa and Fulfulde.

Some leaders among the Fulani admit that the communities originally belonged to displaced Christians.

An account by the son of the first Gbong Gwom Jos and spokesperson for Southern Middle Belt Alliance (SAMBA), Prince Rwang Pam Jr., has it that Plateau has 102 communities occupied" by terrorists. The clashes used to be confined to the mainly Christian Berom farming community in Plateau State engaging in tit-for-tat killings with Muslim nomadic herders.

In an interview with the President of Berom Youth Movement, Choji Chuwang, "We wallow in the false

sense of peace on the Plateau, but a deliberate economic terrorism and land-grabbing strategy is being launched on Christians of Riyom and Barkin Ladi daily with the sole aim of making the people poor, weak and destitute in their own land."

This reflects that in the region, the Muslims have launched a "deliberate economic terrorism and land-grabbing strategy" against Christians. There ultimately seems to go be an agenda to eradicate indigenous tribes through killings and occupation.

Most of the communities displaced are known to be predominantly Christian communities. After attacking the communities, the attackers begin to live there and cultivate the farmlands of those they have displaced.

The residents of these communities, predominantly Christians, are displaced and without a home to call theirs. They still wonder how and when they would return home to start farming and living in their homes without any more attacks.

# 7

## LAND GRABBING

By Hassan John

**G**enerally, Muslim-Fulani herdsmen move from the Savannah in the north to the rainforest regions in the south due to the nature of their nomadic lifestyles. The movement is seasonal to avoid diseases associated with the dry season. However, the current crises are the direct results of a forceful takeover and invasion of predominately Christian communities and settling in them.



Herdsmen allegedly destroy crops worth ₦1 billion in Plateau communities Source: DailyPostNG

A Fulani Herdsman with  
ammunition Source: The  
Guardian NG



This raises the question of the nature of the attack and the radical militia groups involved since most of the nomadic Fulani still carry on this lifestyle. Who are the Fulani that attack and take over these lands, and what are their intentions? What is the motive behind these inhumane land-grabbing activities?

Islamist Fulani militia groups have attacked, destroyed, and taken over 211 villages in Southern Kaduna and Plateau States. Over 500,000 Christians are now refugees in various communities around the region. In Southern Kaduna Peoples Union

(SOKAPU) said 54 communities in Chukun Local Government Area are under Fulani militias' complete occupation; in the entire Southern Kaduna, they are in 109 communities in 5 local government areas!" In Plateau State, 102 villages have been attacked and occupied by Fulani herdsman who have shot and killed any of the people that attempted going back. The invaders also occupied Kampwas, Kasa, Zere, Ninja-Hei, Seh, Nicha, Pwabeduk, Hyai, Kufang, Sharu, Dogo, Ningon, Rantis, and Angio on 7th July, 2012.



Agatu Benue Massacre



Agatu christians protesting the incessant mass killings of their people.



# TARGETING OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN LEAPFROG ATTACKS

By Reuben Buhari



Christians hold signs as they march on the streets of Abuja calling for peace and security in Nigeria. Photo by Kola Sulaimon/AFP via Getty Images.

**A**cross Nigeria, Fulani Jihadists have spread their reign of terror on vulnerable communities, killing, burning, and kidnapping with reckless, yet systematic and calculated abandon. Leapfrogging refers to the fact that attacks by these terrorists are always landing on Christian communities and jumping over/avoiding Muslim communities. On 29th February 2016, several villages in Agatu Local Government were attacked. When the smoke cleared, over 500 people had been killed, including children and women. Six years earlier, on 6th March 2010, the attacks on Dogo Nahawa community in Plateau State claimed a similar number in one night.

Recently, states like Zamfara and Katsina in northwest Nigeria and Birnin Gwari and Igabi Local Governments in Kaduna have come under attacks from cattle rustlers and bandits. Most other communities that the Fulani terrorists have attacked are Christian communities. From Benue, Taraba, Southern Kaduna, Plateau, and Adamawa to some communities in the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria.

In Southern Kaduna, where close to 100 Christian communities have been attacked since 2012, no single village inhabited predominantly by Muslims has ever been attacked. **Dangoma Village**, a community populated by only Hausa-Fulani people in Kaninkon chieftdom, The Jama Local Government Area of Kaduna State, has never been touched even though most of the surrounding villages inhabited by Christians have been attacked.

**Bakin Kogi** has even been attacked three times, with one on Sunday, 11th February, 2018, when four people were attacked and killed on their way from church. Some in the community alleged that

they had wanted to attack them while in church but probably arrived late when they had closed and were on their home. Just before, eight people had been killed on 19th February, 2017.

**Asso Village** has been attacked several times. On 8th January, 2016, the village head, **Chief Benedict Taru**, was waylaid and brutally murdered when he came from another village. In March 2017, Asso was again attacked. And then on Saturday, 15th April, 2017 (Easter eve), gunmen shot into a crowd that had gathered for the Easter procession, killing 12 people.

However, **Kariyo, a Muslim-dominated** village amidst these Christian-dominated communities, has never been attacked. Not once!



Christians hold signs as they march on the streets of Abuja during prayer and penance for peace and security in Nigeria on March 1, 2020.



Mourners attend a mass funeral Sunday in Zabarmari, Nigeria, for 43 farm workers whose throats were slit the day before, authorities said, by Boko Haram fighters in rice fields.



Boko Haram killed at least seven Christians in their latest attack on Christmas Eve in Nigeria (Image: GETTY)



The aftermath of an attack, which claimed hundreds of lives, in the central Nigerian state of Benue, Feb. 2016. World Watch Monitor



Burned vehicles after Good Friday raid on April 7, 2023, in Ngban, Benue state, Nigeria./ Courtesy of Justice, Development, and Peace Commission.



Women mourning after worshippers died in an attack on a church in 2018



# CHRISTIANS ARE UNABLE TO GET JOBS AND ACCESS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

By Ima Jackson Obot

**E**ducation is the fundamental right of every citizen, yet in many parts of Northern Nigeria, it is a right that is being denied to millions. The rights of the Nigerian child to education is enshrined in the Constitution and the Child's Rights Act of 2003 Section 15 says, Every child has the right to free, compulsory and universal basic education, and it shall be the duty of the Government in Nigeria to provide such education.”

However, the inability of Christians to access education in Northern Nigeria is a situation that is out of control.

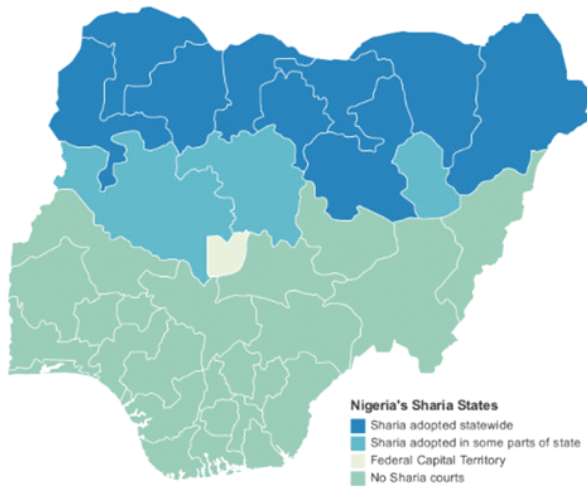
In 1999, 12 northern states adopted sharia, prompting growing intolerance, which has resulted

in widespread discrimination against Christians in the majority-Muslim states.

According to the charity Open Doors, which supports Christians facing persecution, Christians are treated as second-class citizens and are denied basic rights, such as access to education or certain jobs, despite qualifications they may have struggled to acquire

Additionally, their constitutional right to freedom of worship is being stamped on.

Sections 38 and 40 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and other regional and international human rights agreements to which Nigeria is a party. Every person is entitled to freedom of thought,



conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change his/her religion or belief and freedom to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. However, Nigeria has denied many of these rights, according to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

For years, they have been calling on the Yobe State Government, the northeast to reinstate Christian

religious studies in public schools. Despite the constitutional provision for freedom of worship, the teaching of Christian religious knowledge was prohibited by local authorities in Yobe and many other northern states.

It is not just the government roadblocks that are denying Christian's access to education. The explosion in the number of mass kidnappings focused on Christian schools has also derailed the future of many young people, primarily women. Mass kidnappings in Nigeria sparked global outrage in 2014 when Boko Haram took 276 girls from a school in Chibok. Many escaped or were "ransomed" for payment.

In recent statistics, gunmen had abducted 1,500 students, according to the United Nations. In 2021, terrorism put 10.5 million students out of the classroom. Today, an increased number of more than 18 million children have lost access to education; over half of these harrowing statistics are girls. A good number of these girls are kept captive in various places and situations as Christian trophies.



# NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN MEN HAVE BECOME ISWAP EXECUTION TARGETS

By Justina Asishana



On 4th May, 2022, as the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, was visiting Borno State to meet with survivors of terrorism, 20 innocent men believed to come from Kautukari Village in Chibok area were gruesomely killed by the hands of their captors. The masked executioners stood behind their victims, each with a fearsome butcher's knife. As if on cue, they raised their knives in unison, chanted *Allahu Akbar* and slaughtered their hapless victims by the throats in one clean cut.

The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) posted a 56-second video of the bloody event.

They explained that these executions of the innocents were reprisal killings for the deaths of ISIS leaders, including Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, who had died at the hands of the United States special forces in Syria.

The video is one of many that has become a social media staple, especially during times of Christian festivals. A related video of the execution was released by the terrorists in December 2021, when 50 Christians were slaughtered similarly.

Many men, women, and children are regularly murdered in this gruesome way because they follow Jesus. The 2022 report by the International Society for



ISWAP terrorists  
Source:

Civil Liberties and Rule of Law revealed that a total of 6,006 Christians in Nigeria were hacked to death from January 2021 to March 2022. The number of deaths of Nigerians from terrorist groups in the first three months of 2022 has exceeded the 2021 cases, where 5,191 Christians were killed. The 2021 figure includes several priests and pastors who were either murdered or abducted and tortured. There were attacks on and destruction of between

400 and 420 churches and other Christian institutions. Christians are often particular targets because of their faith. It has been said that more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than in the rest of the world combined.

The impact of these killings is economical, emotional, and mental. It means the family has lost their breadwinners as the men are usually targeted, and the families they leave behind suffer perpetually.



# OWO CHURCH MASSACRE

By Toyin Akanni



(Mass funeral of victims of Owo massacre. Source: Punch News)

**T**here is blood on the altar; not the blood of animals offered in sacrifice, but the blood of innocent men, women, and children murdered in cold blood in their place of worship. The sacred ground, a place of refuge, a sanctuary, has become the gory site of a bloody massacre.

The 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022, started out like any other Sunday in the idyllic town of Owo. People went about their usual weekend business. But, unknown to the congregation of St. Francis Catholic Church, it was the day some inhaled their last breath.

Four gunmen stormed the church with guns and explosives just as the sermon was ending. Chaos and panic filled the church; more explosives and



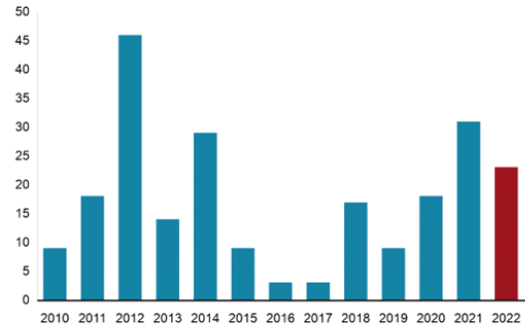
(Picture of Chidiogo Nwani and her father : Source: BBC News)

the altar caved in. In just a few minutes the deed had been done, blood and body parts were everywhere, serenity had reigned.

Forty people died; twice the number remained in hospital with life-changing injuries. Among the dead were four children, including 11-year-old Chidiogo Nwani, who died next to her father. Her older brother escaped but returned to help carry his sister to the nearest hospital. She was pronounced dead on arrival.

Two weeks after the massacre, on Friday 17th June, the Catholic Diocese of Ondo held a mass funeral

### Attacks on churches and Christians in Nigeria



\*Data for 2022 covers January to May

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)



service for victims. At that time, no one had been arrested. Families and loved ones are left with nothing but questions. When did going to church become a death sentence? These people are Christians who simply went to church.

Nigeria continues to be under siege as the insecurity level worsens. The intolerance and attacks on Christians are at an unprecedented high. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the first half of 2022 has seen over 25 attacks on churches alone.



# RAHILA GODWIN

By Ima Jackson-Obot



Sister Veronica Onyeansi with Rahila and her little daughter Peace. Source: missio-hilft



On 11th March, 2019, Nigeria joined 52 other nations to mark Commonwealth Day. However, on that fateful Monday, on which 53 countries celebrated 70 years of the modern Commonwealth, another community in Nigeria was being brutalised by terrorists.

At around 6 a.m., the silence of the early morning was shattered by screams as terrorists entered Rahila Godwin's village in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

A heavily pregnant Rahila, who was just days away from giving birth, struggled but managed to tie her then three-year-old daughter onto her back as her six-year-old son ran out of the house.

By this time, her village was surrounded. As she tried to escape with her daughter on her back and her son by her side, they were grabbed by the men who attacked them with machetes.

Her six-year-old son died from stabs to his neck. She tried to run with her daughter, but the men grabbed them and repeatedly stabbed and slashed them.

As a result, Rahila's hand was cut off. She lost a lot of blood and passed out as the terrorists left her and her daughter to die. By the time she regained consciousness hours later, she had found herself in the hospital with her daughter. As if losing her

son was not enough, that same day, Rahila went into labour and gave birth to a son, who tragically died two days later.

She has since recovered physically, but the scars on her face and body are forever a reminder of the terror of that day and the brutal murder of her son and the death of her baby. During the attack on Rahila's community, her husband and grandmother survived, but her mother-in-law was also killed.

There is an increasing gap between the promise the Nigerian leadership makes to its citizens and the reality experienced by those living there, particularly in vulnerable communities where the attacks are focused mostly on Christians. Sadly, the Nigerian government seems to have turned a blind eye to the continued heinous attacks which are being inflicted on these vulnerable communities.



# VICTORIA DANIEL

By Ima Jackson Obot

**I**magine you are sitting in your living room or kitchen on a weekday evening, and you suddenly hear screams and the sound of gunshots on your street. Your first thought is to dial 999 if you are in the UK, for instance.

When they answer, and you scream down the phone that there are people on your street with guns and machetes attacking people, they then tell you they can send no one as the attackers have more sophisticated weapons. This is just what happened to Victoria Daniel and her community on the 26th of June, 2018, between 3 and 8 p.m. They called for help, but none came.

At about 3 p.m., Victoria saw a large plume of smoke coming from her neighboring village. Soon after, she saw a community member running towards her village, Nghar Community, in the Gashish District of Plateau State.

The men in her village ran out of their homes in search of local security. They found members of the military, but they said they could not help because the terrorists had sophisticated weapons. At that moment, the terrorists stormed her village. Her husband and a church reverend tried to run away. She watched as they were caught and killed. Victoria grabbed her four children and ran into a

room in one of the homes. For five long hours, a terrified Victoria hid in the dark with her children and prayed as she heard screams.

The attackers broke down the door to the room where Victoria was hiding with her children. Luckily, they weren't noticed, but she watched again as her father-in-law was killed.

As morning broke and silence descended on the village, Victoria came out to search for other members of her family, surrounded by smoke from burnt homes. That day she discovered that 18 members of her family had been murdered. The whole village would have been wiped out if not for an Imam who hid some people in the village mosque.

The remaining residents of the Nghar Community are now in IDP camps. The village has been abandoned, and it is now a desolate land.



# THE MURDER OF DEACONESS EUNICE OLAWALE

By Ima Jackson Obot



(Picture of Eunice Olawale. Image on the right is her family at her funeral. Source: Tribune OnlineNG)

**A**s Mr Olawale raced down to the police station with his two sons, he could feel his heart pounding hard against his rib cage. He thought, “Could it be? Was it her? No, it couldn't be, not when she was doing God's work.” He did not want to believe it, but that deep sense of dread would not leave him.

And then, when he arrived at the police station in Phase 4 of Kubwa, a residential district in Bwari, his greatest fear was confirmed. At the back of the police van lay the lifeless body of his wife Eunice Elisha in her bloodied clothes. Olawale stood there with his sons, frozen in time, looking at her body and trying to hold back the hot tears.

He could not process fully what the police were telling him as they tried to explain that her body would be transported to the mortuary. “What happened to her?” He asked. The police explained she had been brutally attacked, cut in the neck and stabbed in the stomach, sometime between 5 and 5.30 a.m. According to residents in the area who saw her body, her legs were injured, and she had been lying in a pool of her own blood before policemen came to move her body. Her crime? That Saturday, she had gone out preaching — a daily activity she was well-known in the community for undertaking — around the pipeline area of Kubwa, one of the suburbs in Abuja. It should have been a morning like any other, except it was not. The day was the 9th of July, 2016.

Several days before her gruesome murder, according to reports, Eunice, a deaconess at the Divine Touch Parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, overheard nearby Muslims comment about her preaching, saying that she should be chased away.

She also overheard another conversation from a mosque behind her home, implying that her preaching about God wasn't true.

After she informed her husband about what she heard, he cautioned her to be careful. Eunice suspended her daily morning evangelism for about a week but then resumed. As a 42-year-old mother to seven children, her brutal murder left a family broken.

As if losing a wife and mother is not the worst thing in the world, the family has been unable to get any closure, as her brutal murder remains unsolved. Meanwhile, the list of Christians who have been murdered or viciously attacked because of their faith continues to grow. Last year, former education minister Oby Ezekwesili said, “Those who kill fellow Nigerians of a different religion for Religious Blasphemy do so because they trust that the establishments of the Nigerian-State will cuddle them and not prosecute them.”



# THE GREAT ESCAPE: REGINA'S STORY

( A PERSONAL ACCOUNT WITH ISWAP )

By Toyin Akanni

It was the middle of the night in the Sambisa Forest. I was surrounded by darkness, but I sat up and glanced around to ensure no one was watching. Reaching out for the razor in my bag, I took a deep breath and started slicing off my long braids. I didn't flinch or pause; I continued till all my hair was gone. There was nothing left, but uneven patches. That was my last shred of defense. This was my silent protest against a forced marriage. It was better to look horrible than to be seen as attractive by a terrorist.

A few days earlier, on 8th July, 2021, I boarded a bus to Maiduguri from the motor park at 10 a.m.

About two hours into my journey, I got a call from my sister, who I chatted with casually. A few minutes later, Boko Haram terrorists intercepted us with a fleet of vehicles. They showed up like an organised army with different people playing different roles in different uniforms. Our driver was ordered to stop and told that if he turned back, a barrage of bullets would rain on our bus.

They stopped two other vehicles before escorting us deep into the Sambisa Forest. We drove for about an hour to the first camp. Immediately, they ordered us to sit on the ground as they patrolled with their guns while the others checked our bags.



جانب من بيعة جنود الخلافة لأمير المؤمنين الشيخ المجاهد أبي إبراهيم الهاشمي القرشي (حفظه الله)

ربيع الأول 1441



WEST AFRICA

(ISWAP Terrorists. Source: The Defense Post)

They found a bible in mine and asked if I was a Christian. I replied that I was. So, they told me to step aside and wait by a Hilux car. Two other women joined me, Madam Christy and Madam Agnes. The three of us were the only Christians in the group. We watched in horror as the Muslims were released, and we were told to stay behind. I was terrified, but I hung on to my faith even though my fate was uncertain.

While waiting, some of them discussed what to eat and how they needed a flask to mix a local delicacy. I told them to check my bag and take mine. They used it and returned it to me. "Keep it," said. They refused and replied, "Anything we want from Christians, we take it by force, not by agreement or free will."

They drove us further into the jungle on a journey that took three hours. When we arrived at the second camp, it was dark, so we were told to sleep in a temporary make-do structure. Early the next day, they put a gun to my head and asked me to

deny Christ. I refused and said, "I am for Christ. If I die, I die for Christ. Even in my grave, Jesus is Lord." They asked me if this Christ I serve is happy that they are killing us. I told them that the Bible makes it clear that we would go through persecution for Christ's sake. They were surprised by this and asked where it says people will persecute Christians. I replied that it is in the Bible. They asked me to show them. I opened my Bible and gave it to them, but they threw it back to my face.

I found out that day that I was abducted by ISWAP, the West African division of ISIS. The commander told me that they don't rape women. Instead, they make them their wives, but that can't be said of the *Shekau Group*, which is notorious for killing women and children. He told us that we would remain in this jungle for the rest of our lives. That night I cut my hair and burnt it in the fire.

Later that morning, they asked for family contacts so they could ask for ransom. I told them my father was an old, retired farmer, so he would not have

any money to give for ransom. The women with me also said they didn't have family members who could pay the requested money. This aggravated them, and they took us to another camp where I met 38 Christian women and some children who did not have parents. They roamed around, fending for themselves, getting the crumbs of sympathy from the women who were victims of abuse themselves.

Our presence in the camp somewhat rejuvenated the spirits of those we met there. Since our capture, all three of us had been fasting and praying. We encouraged the women to join us. Some did, but the guards became annoyed with us. They took us to another camp where we were ruthlessly restricted, we couldn't fast, but we continued praying in muffled voices.

Every week we would be escorted by one of the terrorists to fetch firewood and get water. They gave us rations of guinea corn flour, and we had to forage for local leaves to cook food. After a while, they stopped going with us. They would

argue among themselves or say they were tired, so we started going out on our own. That was when we began to plan our escape. No one in the camp had successfully fled, but I had a dream one night that Madam Agnes and I escaped from the camp. I shared my dream with them, and we prayed for directions. We didn't know how to go about it, but we prayed and waited for the right moment.

On the day of our escape, I didn't carry anything except my Bible tucked inside my shirt, a small bottle of anointing oil, and some money I had kept with me. Madam Christy went first. A while later, Madam Agnes and I asked the terrorists to permit us to fetch water. They agreed and gave us yellow water cans to fill. We left the water cans at the stream and kept walking. Unfortunately, Madam Christy was nowhere to be seen, so we continued on our own.

We found ourselves on the fringes of a more heavily guarded camp in the evening. This place was more dangerous. We proceeded cautiously; somehow

the guards did not see us. However, a teenage boy saw us and said something to us in a foreign language. We kept walking; then he rushed back to inform the terrorists. Soon several terrorists on motorbikes were after us. We decided to hide because there was no way we could outrun them. We stayed plastered to the ground underneath a big tree, camouflaged by brittle shrubs. We could see them desperately searching, but thankfully they could not see us. They searched till it was dark before returning to their camps.

At that moment, we decided that our escape could no longer be during the daytime, so we hid during the day and walked at night. Without a compass or an awareness of where we were going, we kept walking and praying for directions. We continued for days without food and drinking only when we were lucky to find a stream or stagnant water due to the rainy season.

On the sixth day, while it was still dawn, we saw a main road. Ecstatic but cautious, we decided to wait till daylight before trying to get help. As soon

as it was brighter, a car stopped to help us. The look on the driver's face said it all. We were frail, filthy, and our clothes tattered. He offered to put us in his car boot as there was no space in his car. We thanked him and climbed in. He took us to Bui, and we made our way to Madam Agnes' uncle's house using the money we had on us.

When we arrived, no one was home. We lay on the floor, passed out from exhaustion. When Madam Agnes' uncle returned, he jumped for joy when he saw his niece. He called family members to give them the good news. Christians and even well-meaning Muslims from the neighbourhood rallied around us, praising God and rejoicing that we managed to escape. I didn't have any way to contact my family because my phone had been taken. However, there was a prayer line on the bottle of the anointing oil. I called that number, and they linked me with my family. On the 30th of August, 2021, I was finally free.



# THE OTHER FACE OF BLASPHEMY - DEBORAH SAMUEL

By Justina Asishana



On the 12th of May 2022, Deborah Samuel Emmanuel was burnt to death in the name of blasphemy by a mob made up of her classmates in the Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto State. Deborah's ashes were gruesomely left for the public to see because she stood up for her faith as a Christian.

She was the second of seven children and a student of home economics. Deborah's parents scraped every resource they had just to put her through school with the hope that after her education, she would be able



(Source: Tribune OnlineNG)



to sponsor her younger ones' education. This 19-year-old was killed for an alleged 'blasphemy' against Islam and Prophet Muhammad after a voice note that she left on a WhatsApp group responding to another student's post on the theme of Islam enraged her fellow students. She was forcibly extracted from a safe room where the school authorities tried to hide her by a mob, mostly Deborah's colleagues. They beat her repeatedly with stones and clubs before eventually setting her lifeless body on fire, all the while shouting *Allahu Akbar* (God is great). What happened to Deborah is symbolic of the daily religious intolerance experienced in Nigeria.

Barely one week after Deborah was killed in Sokoto, another Christian lady escaped being killed in Katanga, Warji Local Government Area of Bauchi State. The lady was said to have made a blasphemous statement which made the Muslim youths mount a search for her, but fortunately, she was whisked away to safety.

The youths took out their anger on properties belonging to Christians in the area and started destroying them. A few buildings were set ablaze, and some Christians, including an ECWA pastor, were injured.

The voices of suppression that warn that Deborah's blasphemy was a reckless tolerance form of hate speech make essentially the same arguments that were levied against Ahmad Usman, a 30-year-old local vigilante member burnt in the Lugbe area of Abuja weeks after Deborah's death.

Behind the façade is palpable fear; three churches and various Christian-owned stores were damaged and looted. Blasphemous killings are becoming all too common in Northern Nigerian states. Nigeria ranks seventh on Open Doors' annual World Watch List (WWL) of nations where it is the hardest to be a Christian. In many cases, blasphemy is used as justification to promote religious harmony, where in fact, these mobs have worse religious intolerance, despicable discrimination, and vicious violence

Anywhere in the world, killings under the pretext of blasphemy are unjustifiable. Most worrisome is the fact that in Nigeria, most blasphemy-related killings are caused by individuals who decide that another person's statement is blasphemous. Blasphemy allegations are often cast-off to settle personal scores, particularly against Christians. Unfortunately, these events have caused many Christians to be afraid to acknowledge their faith in public.



# THE TARGETING OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

By Reuben Buhari

**N**igeria is currently in the grip of the Fulani militia, one of the world's deadliest militant groups. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, they have left large swathes of communities soaked in blood, littered with burnt villages, mass graves, and dozens of internally displaced peoples' camps.

All across the Middle Belt of Nigeria and parts of the East and Southwest parts of Nigeria, the Fulani militia have extended their reign of terror on vulnerable communities, killing, burning, and kidnapping with reckless abandon.

At one point in Benue State, 14 of the 23 local governments in the state were attacked at various

times. One of the most heinous attacks occurred in Agatu Local Government on the 29th of February, 2016. There were plumes of smoke covering a large area. When the smoke cleared, about 500 people had been killed, including children and women. Few years prior in Dogo Nahawa in Plateau State, raids on the 6th of March, 2010 led to the demise of about 500 people in one night. Unfortunately, to date, attacks such as these have continued.

Recently, states like Zamfara and Katsina, northwest Nigeria, and Birnin Gwari and Igabi Local Governments Areas in Kaduna State have come under attacks from cattle herders and bandits, and most other communities that the Fulani terrorists have attacked are Christian. From Benue, Taraba, Southern Kaduna,



Christians praying in church amidst constant attacks  
Source: Christian Today

Plateau, and Adamawa to some communities in the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria.

In Southern Kaduna, where close to a hundred communities have been attacked since 2012, no village inhabited by Muslims has ever been attacked. Dangoma Village, a community inhabited by only Hausa-Fulani people in Kaninkon chiefdom, Jama Local Government Aarea of Kaduna State, has never

been touched, even though most of the surrounding villages inhabited by Christians have been attacked. Bakin Kogi has even been attacked three times, with one on Sunday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, 2018, when four people were attacked and killed on their way from church. Before then, eight people were killed on 19th February 2017.

Tanda, Asso, Ungwan Mailafia, and Kussom Villages, also in Jama'a LGA, have all been attacked. Asso was attacked several times – in March 2017, then again on Saturday 15th April, 2017 (Easter eve), when gunmen shot into a crowd that had gathered for the Easter procession and killed 12 people. Chief Benedict Taru, the village head of Asso was waylaid and killed earlier on 8th January 2016 when he was coming from another village. But Kariyo, a Muslim-dominated village amid these Christian-dominated communities, has never been attacked. Not once!

Also, all the attacks in Kajuru LGA from 2017 – 2022 have targeted Christian communities. More specifically, in some of these attacks, churches were especially targeted. On 24th July, 2020, Zikpak community was attacked, including an attempt to burn down the ECWA church, but the rain helped to reduce the flames. Sadly, 10 people were killed, including Pastor Kuyet Ishaya, while 11 were seriously injured.

Another example is the attack on St Francis Xavier Catholic church in Owo, Ondo State, southeast Nigeria on the 5th of June, 2022. About 50 were reportedly killed during the Sunday service. Sometimes, converts are specially targeted by these terrorists. For example, on 9th January, 2017, Ibrahim Haruna, a 28-year-old Christian convert, was killed in the evening in his house in Zuturung Gida, Zangon Kataf LGA. Currently, the Christian indigenes of Benue, Borno, Kogi, Plateau, Bauchi, Kaduna, Taraba, and Adamawa still experience these attacks from killers who are a mixture of the local and foreign herdsmen that have gotten the freedom to move across Nigeria's porous borders. Unfortunately, the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol has given the right of free movement to citizens of member countries to graze cattle.



# MILITARY HELICOPTER ALLEGEDLY SPRAYED MAIKORI VILLAGERS WITH BULLETS

By Beevan Goni

I woke up on 5th June to see ‘Owo’ trending on Twitter. Indeed, it was a horror; the pictures confronted and left me dumbfounded. Two days later, I found out that, three hours after the Owo attack, something horrible had happened in one of the villages of Southern Kaduna. The military shot at unarmed villagers who were currently under the Fulani militia's attack in what seemed like a poor attempt to secure the militia.

## THE JOURNEY

I left Abuja a couple of minutes before 7 p.m. and headed to Kaduna to find the truth. I arrived in

Kaduna a few minutes past 11 p.m., and continued my journey the following day to the place where the Nigerian military helicopter was said to have shot and killed defenceless villagers.

## KADUNA-CROSSING-MAIKORI VILLAGE

I had thought the attack happened close to Kaduna City and, at most, somewhere around Kajuru, which is about 60 km from the city, but I was wrong! First, my contact told me he was no longer in the village where the attack happened. He had moved on to the IDP camp in Kaduna but linked me to another survivor, who later met me at ‘Crossing’.

The contact suggested we leave the car at a crossing because the roads were hardly motorable. We pushed on for 25 kilometres before the motorable road ended at Maro. We crossed into Ugakala, and managed another hour of driving before abandoning the car at Chibiya Village. It took us another 30 minutes of riding on borrowed bikes to finally arrive at Maikori Village.

## HOW THE ATTACKS HAPPENED

According to one of the eyewitnesses from Maikori Village, *"We were resting under a tree when we heard gunshots from Ungwan Sarki. We immediately mobilised to know what was happening and were told Fulani men had attacked the village. In the process of mobilising ourselves to help our brothers, we saw an influx of men on motorbikes. Over 100 motorbikes were carrying two people each, at least!"*

Another eyewitness said, *"They came in their large numbers. They were many with sophisticated weapons, and we were ready to confront them.*

*It is our village. It is our streams and rivers. It is our farms. It is our bushes. Even though they used to graze here, they don't know these places better than we do. So we were strategising how to defend ourselves when suddenly a helicopter came and started to shoot at us while the attackers were left to burn our houses!"*

An elderly woman in her 70s said, *"We thought the helicopter was there to help us, but it was not. It opened fire on us as we ran. We were running and hiding under shrubs. If this were to be a dry season, the casualty figure would have been worse than this.*

*"Up till now, we don't stay in our houses anymore. We are here because we are hungry. We stay in the bushes and not in the houses. We just came to get some corn to grind and then go back to the bushes where we were hiding. We fear they would come back."*

Multiple eyewitnesses confirmed the helicopter chased them into the bushes, shelled them, and

left the terrorists to loot their barns and burn any structure they could. This operation that lasted for two hours had two people killed and one injured. Maniya Inuwa was killed by the terrorists, while Titus Yusuf was shot and killed by the helicopter. Shadrach Joshua was also hit by the helicopter.

Every effort to see Joshua was unsuccessful, but luckily, he called me on the phone at past 8 p.m., just as I arrived in Abuja. Apparently, Joshua woke up that morning, was taken to the hospital for treatment, and later hidden in the bush, thinking perhaps the Fulanis might attack the village again.

The attack on Ungwan Sarki claimed two lives at Maikori, two lives and one injury from the helicopter's shelling, and 34 lives at Dogo Noma. The people at Dogo Noma were in a market square having a good time when two men arrived on bikes, surveyed the environment, and left. Minutes later, they were rounded up in the market. Those who tried to escape were shot down while 29 of them were

captured. To date, others cannot be accounted for.

## **KADUNA STATE GOVERNMENT'S ACCOUNT**

The Kaduna State Government was silent for four days since Sunday, the 5th of June's attacks in Dogo Noma, Maikori, and Ungwan Sarki communities. The government only decided to speak when it became apparent that Southern Kaduna was trending on Twitter and other social media platforms. The helicopter story was also spreading like wildfire.

The government, speaking through its Commissioner of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, acknowledged that there was an attack on Sunday, 5th June, but didn't explain why it took them four days to comment. The government took time to mention the names of the victims killed during the attack but denied that the helicopter shot at the villagers. It said the helicopter belonged to the Nigerian Air Force and was on the ground to engage the terrorists.

What the state government has not been able to show to the world is proof that terrorists were killed by the so-called military helicopter. It is baffling to say that an army helicopter was on the ground to repel terrorists, yet not a single terrorist was killed.

This isn't the first time victims of Fulani terrorist attacks are alleging seeing helicopters during attacks. In 2018, communities in the same Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State narrated how they saw a white helicopter landing in the bushes before the attacks. There was a video to that effect, where community members narrated their ordeals at the hands of the terrorists.

In June 2020, a captured terrorist confessed during interrogation that a specific white helicopter was supplying them with weapons for operations.

In February 2022, a specific helicopter flying at a low level shot a teenage boy in Kagoro, a community

near Kafanchan. The boy survived with an injured arm.

There is growing evidence that the terrorists are in possession of air assets of the Nigerian Air Force. The Air Force must, as a matter of urgency, clear the air with satisfactory evidence otherwise, the testimony of victims and survivors will continue to shape public discussions on terrorist attacks in Nigeria. Recently, it had never been heard that terrorists used planes or helicopters to attack their victims in Nigeria. The questions are, how are they getting access to sophisticated aircrafts and how can they fly in Nigeria's air space without the knowledge of the country's Air Force.

Two weeks before the Sunday, 5th June attack, a retired senior security officer had been told in confidence about the presence of a certain white helicopter which he said was suspicious and that it might be used for nefarious activities.

He said the white chopper was often seen landing at the Air Force Base in Kaduna. Even though he could not talk much about the ownership of the helicopter, he said going by its flight nature and timing, he suspected the chopper was being used to either provide cover, facilitate the operations of terrorists, or used to kill targeted people.

With the statement earlier released by the Kaduna State Commissioner for Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, which credits the Nigerian Air Force Base with the helicopter being a rescue helicopter, it is left for them to verify who the pilot of the helicopter was and who gave the command for the helicopter to go to the rescue of the people, an operation that ended up killing one person and injuring another.

Also, every helicopter has a visible number for easy identification. Still, this white helicopter did not fly close to the ground like other military helicopters. In Zangon Kataf, for instance, the presence of the same white helicopter signals that an attack is

imminent. This can be confirmed by local government residents, which leaves us no option but to request the Nigeria Air Force Base to do a proper investigation to identify this helicopter and its owner.

If the Nigerian Air Force Base cannot investigate, we call on the Nigeria College of Aviation Technology to do due diligence. Both NAF-Base and NCAT are in Kaduna and are all privy to information on any flight within the territory in question.

While this investigation may not go down well with the powers that be, Middle Belt Times is not out to foment trouble. We are asking every stakeholder to get to grips with themselves and do the needful. Yesterday, it was AK47 rifles. Today, it is a helicopter. We do not know what befalls our communities tomorrow, maybe nuclear weapons.



# HOW THE DREAM OF KADUNA STATE UNIVERSITY CHURCH BECAME A NIGHTMARE

By Anthonia Obokoh

**T**he completion of the church in Kaduna State University was a dream come true as the Christian community has dreamt of having a worship centre in the university since inception 17 years ago. But this dream ended on 6th June, 2022 when the university church was demolished.

The Christian Community on Campus (CCC) at Kaduna State University Church (KASU) had hoped that the state government would respect and protect the freedom of religion, including building what they described as the only chapel in the institution after 17 years of the school's existence. Instead,

the authorities ignored the underlying systemic issues and sent the Kaduna State Urban Development Agency (KASPDA) to demolish the on-going church construction in the tertiary institution.

This development drew a lot of questions to the Christian community. Some questions include, could this be sending a message that Christians can be attacked with impunity? Could this demolition at the Kaduna State University Church point a finger to identify that several Christian religious sites can also suffer damage in other tertiary institutions? Is this a fighting finger against the Christian religion



in a Muslim community? Is this leaving a thought that the future of churches in Northern Nigeria remains unclear?

Globally, campus churches are places of worship for Christians in tertiary institutions. These have supported Christians everywhere in the world to preserve their sanctity and integrity. Also, the Nigerian Constitution guarantees all citizens freedom of belief and freedom to practice religious rites.

This singling out and demolishing of the Christian campus place of worship for discriminatory treatment might have serious consequences. This is because there have been mosques built in the university, which did not draw up any eyebrows or controversy as it is usually seen as normal to see a mosque in any community in the north but setting up a church brings a lot of issues.

According to the Christian representatives, efforts to construct a place of worship for its members had been frustrated by the university authorities for several years. Adding that this was because

of plenty back-and-forth policies from the university management on the allocation of land for construction, among many other baseless excuses

The Kaduna State Urban Planning and Development Authority (KASUPDA) authorities claimed they demolish the structure because it violated extant laws. However, the CCC reports that there are about five places of worship for the Muslims but the Christians are issued no place of worship. The critical difference is that the institution has had mosques as places of worship for decades, while churches have faced obstacles in registering for places to set up a church.

Among several current challenges, extreme discrimination " policies deprive students of the right to freely and fully exercise their religious beliefs, as Christian students, unlike their Muslim counterparts, are not allowed to gather freely.

Christian students at Kaduna State University are not free to gather for meetings and prayers as

most of the time fixed for such meetings are the same set of lectures. In contrast, times are made available for Muslim students to pray and hold meetings.

Religious freedom is not only about the ability to go to chapel or churches. Still, it includes the ability to gather with other members of the faith outside the church to strengthen beliefs within a group setting. Without an adequate understanding of religious freedom, all Nigerians, including students on campus, suffer.

Sadly, no alternative was offered to the Christian communities to worship before the government implemented the demolition order. While the severity of persecution facing Christians in Northern Nigeria remains unchanged, things may worsen following the discrimination changes.



# HORROR ON CHRISTMAS DAY!

By Justina Asishana



**T**he Nigerian religious community, like in every other nation, is known for their different celebrations as deemed fit by its believers. People from differing religions often celebrate and felicitate with each other, families, and friends. Notable among such celebrations are Christmas, Easter, Sallah, Fitri, and others. However, the universally celebrated Christmas by Christians all over the world has been significantly clad with the horror of genocidal attacks in Nigeria. This past Christmas met Kaduna villages in utter horror as Agwan Aku and Agwan Pa, two close communities in Kajuru

Local Government Area in Kaduna state, were attacked within 24 hours of each other during the festive period. On the 25th of December (Christmas Day), Agwan Aku was raided by bandits and 45 persons were abducted from their homes. In response, security agents were deployed to Aku without anyone envisaging that Agwan Pa would still be hit. The community was unprepared for the bandit invasion that saw 53 residents abducted from the community the next morning. The Christmas celebrations were marred as residents fled their homes, while the unfortunate ones were taken into captivity. This event brings to mind a similar gory experience in

December 2019. Christmas Day celebrations were soured by the brutal killing of 11 Christians by ISWAP. It only shows how Christians and Christian villages in Nigeria have been violated irrespective of their location (whether they are at home or at their place of worship) or time (regular days or festive periods).

# CONCLUSION

From the kidnapping and killing of clerics to the forceful marriage of girls without parental consent, the land grabbing, the community takeovers, the terrorist attacks, the annihilation of innocent Christians to the demolition of villages, the attack on Christian communities in parts of Northern Nigeria has been described as a 'slow-motion genocide'.

It is evident there is a ruthless ethnic cleansing occurring. Painfully, the people on the ground are clear that they are 'at war'. These people have watched their family members and children killed in cold blood. They have lost their homes, lands,

and livelihood. They have cried out to successive governments that has remained silent and unresponsive to their pleas. These people have to head off into the bushes at night to sleep and keep watch in shifts. They have lost all their constitutional rights in their own homeland. They are people who are punished every day simply because of their Christian faith.

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