

Christians in Nigeria face crisis beyond the attention of the West

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Christians in Nigeria face a humanitarian crisis, but few in the West recognize the severity of the persecution Nigerians endure, Benjamin Kwashi, an Anglican archbishop from northern Nigeria, said during his recent visit to Dallas.

“We must speak on behalf of the voiceless. I have lost pastors. I have lost friends,” Kwashi told the Speak Freedom Dallas Summit at Dallas Baptist University, sponsored by the [21st Century Wilberforce Initiative](#) and [Century Wilberforce Initiative](#).

“The injustice facing Christians in northern Nigeria is unbelievable,” he said, recalling a particular occasion when Islamist militants massacred all the Christians in three villages. “No one escaped. No one helped.”

‘Massacre,’ not a ‘clash’

On rare occasions when Western media report on violence in Nigeria, they tend to frame it as “a clash” between Muslims and Christians, Kwashi said.

“It is no clash,” he said. “How can it be a clash when people are murdered in their sleep? It is a massacre.”

Boko Haram extremists have killed more than 15,000 people and displaced 2.1 million from their homes since 2011, the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative reported.

Home and church burned



Benjamin Kwashi described the persecution of Nigerian Christians when he spoke at Dallas Baptist University as part of the Speak Freedom Dallas Summit. (DBU Photo) For Kwashi, the losses began nearly three decades ago. In 1987, radicalized Muslims burned both his family's home and their church.

"Not just our church but hundreds of churches in 72 hours," he said.

On Sept. 7, 2001, militants killed 150 Christians and destroyed 300 homes and churches in Jos, the administrative capital of Nigeria's Plateau State, he said.

In the years since, Kwashi survived attempts on his life at least three times.

Wounded but propelled to serve

In 2006, when he was traveling in the United Kingdom, at least 30 Islamist militants broke into his home, demanding to see him. When his wife, Gloria, told the intruders he was out of the country, they took out their anger on her.

"They did unspeakable things to her," he said. "They left her half-dead and blinded."

Several months later, surgeons in the United States restored her sight. And

after the experience, she began to take orphaned children into her family's home.

"She was a different woman," Kwashi said in an interview. "It propelled her into another place, bringing the most vulnerable children into our home. It was as if nothing mattered to her unless she was saving and serving people—this wounded woman who had been so humiliated."

Caring for vulnerable children

Some orphans were HIV-positive. Many had severe physical or mental disabilities. Some were the orphaned children of Muslims who died violently.

The Kwashis have housed more than 50 orphans in their home. They founded a school that provides for 400 vulnerable children, giving them medical care, food, clothing, housing and an education.

"The future of Nigeria—indeed, any nation—is in its children," Kwashi said.

Listen and pray

Christians in Nigeria want their fellow Christ-followers in the West to hear their stories and understand their situation so they can pray intelligently about it, Kwashi said.

"Pray God will restrain the hands of killers," he said. "Pray for Christians as we reach out to them in love."

Earlier this year, a team from the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative traveled throughout central and northern Nigeria to hear firsthand accounts of religious persecution. The full report is available [here](#).

'The way of the cross'

Christians in Nigeria can relate to the persecuted church of the first century, Kwashi noted, although he quickly added, "Nothing we experience can compare with what Jesus went through."

"First-century Christians knew and understood what the way of the cross meant. They never diminished it or downplayed it," Kwashi said.

"God is calling us to take seriously the call of Jesus to take up a cross and follow him. ... I do not wish it upon the West. I pray nobody else has to see what we have seen. I don't want it to happen to anybody else."