

Christians killed in Nigeria as regional terror attacks spike

April 24, 2023

BENUE, Nigeria (BP)—More than 200 Christians have been killed in terrorist attacks in Benue and Kaduna states in Nigeria since the election season ended in March, according to news reports and statements from religious freedom advocates.

At least 74 people were killed in two separate attacks in Benue in April, including an attack on mourners at a Christian funeral that killed 46 individuals, [Reuters reported](#) April 8.

The deaths followed attacks in early March that killed 88 people, mostly women and children, in an internally displaced people camp in Benue, [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) stated.

In southern Kaduna, at least 33 people were killed in an April 15 attack, [Channels Television reported](#), following two separate attacks that killed a total of 13 people in the state, CSW said.

The April Kaduna deaths followed the killing of 17 women and children in March, also in Kaduna, according to [thisdaylive.com](#).

The villages in Benue and Kaduna are in the middle belt region of Nigeria where the majority Muslim north meets the majority Christian south, sparking violence along ethnoreligious lines.

Attacks prompt strong condemnation

The [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#)—along with CSW and the United Nations Nigeria—joined Nigerian local community groups in

strongly condemning the attacks.

“All Nigerians have the right to practice their faith and mourn their loved ones in peace and safety,” Commissioner Frederick A. Davie said April 20 of the funeral attack in Benue.

“This attack on a sacred, communal religious ceremony is atrocious and reprehensible. Armed actors in this region frequently show disdain for worshipers and government officials routinely fail to provide justice to faith communities targeted with violence.”

Many have accused the government of being slow to respond, sometimes only arriving after attacks have ended.

Kiri Kankhwende, CSW public affairs team leader, called the attacks “deeply distressing” but “not at all uncommon” in the region.

“The unaddressed insecurity has now metastasized and constitutes a threat to Nigeria’s territorial integrity, with serious implications for the region, the continent and the wider international community,” Kankhwende said April 18.

“Recent statements from the UN and the presidency are important, but concerted and concrete action is essential to ensure that the Nigerian security forces are adequately resourced to combat the threats posed by these terrorist groups, and to protect vulnerable communities.

“The international community must assist in this regard wherever possible, including by holding the federal and state governments to account, should they continue failing to fulfil their duty towards citizens.”

Call for accountability

The Nigerian government, which will change hands with the May 29 inauguration of newly elected president Bola Tinubu, must be held accountable for the violence, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted.

“These incidents serve to further escalate tensions in a region where violence exacerbates ethnoreligious divides and erodes interfaith trust, threatening Nigerians’ freedom of religion or belief,” the commission stated.

“Despite government rhetoric calling for interfaith unity, the Nigerian government has generally failed to enact meaningful policy reforms and changes to address the drivers of violence impacting religious freedom.”

Commissioner Frank Wolf urged the U.S. government “to give higher priority to religious freedom in its Nigeria policy, at the bare minimum by naming Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern and appointing a special envoy to the region.”

The commission and others have advocated for the return of Nigeria to the U.S. Department of State’s CPC list, cited for “engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief.”

The Nigerian military killed at least 54 terrorists in various operations across the northeast, northcentral and northwest regions spanning two weeks in April, the Premium Times of Nigeria reported.

Several terrorist groups are active in the area, including Boko Haram, ISWAP and militant Fulani herdsman, as well as bandits seeking ransom through kidnappings.

The military rescued 468 kidnapping victims and subdued at least 122 terrorists, bandits and other criminals in the operations. Additionally, at least 501 Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists and their families, including 60 men and 176 women, surrendered to authorities.

Nigeria is among the deadliest countries for Christians, Open Doors has said in its annual [World Watch List](#) of the 50 countries most dangerous for Christians, based on several avenues of violence including killings. Nigeria ranks sixth on the 2023 list.

[Voice of the Martyrs](#) includes Nigeria among nations hostile to Christians in the VOM 2023 prayer guide.