

Christians murdered, thousands displaced in Nigeria

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BENUE, Nigeria (BP)—Dozens of Christians were murdered and 6,000 displaced in terrorist attacks in Nigeria's middle belt in September.

International advocates are urging the U.S. State Department to cite Nigeria for religious liberty violations.

"Armed herdsmen and terrorists have not stopped their unprovoked attacks on Christians in Benue state," Akpen Leva, chairman of the Benue State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, said Sept. 24 in a press statement. "These attacks are aimed at killing defenseless Christians and to force them out of their communities."

Multiple attacks

Those killed in a series of September attacks in Benue included "dozens" murdered in eight majority-Christian villages Sept. 23 and 21, 13 killed in two additional villages Sept. 9-10, and nine killed Sept. 1-3 in the same two villages, *Morning Star News* reported, quoting law enforcement and religious leaders. Fifteen villagers were killed Sept. 15 in Logo Local Government Area of Benue, the *Daily Post* reported.

Others were killed in smaller attacks, including three killed Sept. 18 in a Christian village in Guma County, Benue; two on Sept. 25 in Plateau State, two on Sept. 24 in Kano state, and a woman working on her farm Sept. 19 in Plateau State, *Morning Star* reported. Others were injured, kidnapped or displaced in the attacks. Homes, farms and churches were destroyed, and food was stolen.

Attackers displaced more than 6,000 from three Benue counties in September, according to Emmanuel Shior, executive secretary of the Benue State Emergency Management Agency.

“Recent attacks by herders on some Christian communities in Benue state have left 6,000 Christians displaced in Logo, Guma and Gwer West local government areas of the state,” *Morning Star* quoted Shior.

“These continuous attacks by herdsmen on Christian communities in the state have also resulted in the destruction of facilities like churches, schools, markets and health care establishments.”

Militant herdsmen, the Islamic State West Africa Province and bandits have been blamed for the murders and attacks, with animist worshipers also blamed for church attacks.

“These attacks by the herdsmen have left dozens of Christians dead and several more with gunshot injuries and machete attack wounds,” *Morning Star* quoted a text message from resident Ukan Kurugh after the Sept. 23 attack.

“Survivors of these herdsmen attacks have been taken to some hospitals, and they need urgent medical attention but lack the funds to pay for their medical bills. Some of them need urgent surgeries but they can’t afford to pay for the charges.

“Our people have suffered immensely in the hands of these marauding herdsmen.”

More than 100 worshipers were kidnapped in September from churches in northwest Nigeria, the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union reported in a press release, citing attacks Sept. 12 and 13 at two separate sites of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Niger and Kaduna states.

“There is still no breathing space for Christian communities in southern Kaduna, as terrorists, jihadists, bandits and armed herdsmen have continued to plunder and wreck Christian communities in the southern part of Kaduna state,” *Morning Star* quoted National President Awemi Maisamari Sept 22.

Calls to return Nigeria to CPC status

The U.S. State Department dropped Nigeria from its 2021 list of Countries of Particular Concern or egregious violators of religious freedoms. The Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and 21 Wilberforce are among the groups urging the return of Nigeria to the list released annually in November.

Nigeria, which has led countries in deaths of Christians by terrorists, was first included on the State Department’s list of Countries of Particular Concern in 2020, but was not retained the next year.

“As religious minorities face increasingly intense persecution for their faith in Nigeria, it is imperative that Secretary (Antony) Blinken re-designate Nigeria as a country of particular concern. Over the past year, we’ve continued to see deteriorating conditions in Nigeria as thousands of Christians have been martyred for their faith,” ERLC policy manager Hannah Daniel said.

The U.S. government “must do more to pressure the Nigerian government to take action and protect its people from these heinous acts of violence against people of faith, and the CPC designation is an essential piece of such a strategy.”

More than 2,500 Christians were killed in the first six months of 2022 in Nigeria, the advocates said in their letter, referencing a report by the International Society of Civil Liberties and Rule of Law.

The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa counted more than 4,300 Christians and 2,200 Muslims killed in “jihadist-related contexts” from Oct. 1, 2020, to Sept. 30, 2021, according to the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa.